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Rethinking how we measure success in creative disciplines

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MESSAGE
FROM JOANNE KESELMAN, VICE-PRESIDENT (ACADEMIC) & PROVOST

WELCOME TO THE LATEST ISSUE
of TeachingLIFE, the University of Manitoba's magazine celebrating our teaching innovation and excellence.

Last fall, President David Barnard released a new strategic planning framework that will guide our work at the university over the next five years. Taking Our Place names five strategic priorities: inspiring minds through innovative and quality teaching; driving discovery and insight through excellence in research, scholarly work, and creative activities; creating pathways to Indigenous achievement; building community that creates an outstanding learning and working environment; and forging connections to foster high impact community engagement.

Our commitment to teaching and learning is most evident in the theme inspiring minds. As this issue shows, our teaching and learning activities are also reflected in each of the other four priority themes.

Mark Torchia, director of the Centre for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning, talks about the launch of our new Teaching Certificate Program, just one of the important actions underway to support inspiring minds. Our commitment to creating pathways to Indigenous achievement is evident in the work of education professor Frank Deer, who is finding new ways to support Indigenous graduate students and work with faculty to integrate Indigenous perspectives.

As a research-intensive university, driving discovery is a major focus. Our research informs our teaching and our teaching informs our research. Kris Dick and his engineering students show how they apply research knowledge in their experiential learning in Honduras. Finally, we see the outcome of forging connections as we read about a U1 student who was one of the first participants of a university outreach program.

I invite you to read these articles and more. You will again see that at the University of Manitoba teaching matters and is celebrated. I also encourage you to read the university’s Strategic Plan (umanitoba.ca/strategic-plan). We have many goals to accomplish over the next five years and as we work towards them we will continue to showcase our efforts to provide outstanding teaching and learning experiences.
INSIGHT  Education Prof. Frank Deer on his new role as director of Indigenous initiatives

FROM DESIGN TO DIFFERENCE  Engineering students help rebuild rural Honduras

THE NEW PROFESSOR  Faculty are using creativity to engage today’s students

OUTSIDE OF THE BOX  Graduate students on their research and the professors who inspire them

THE ART OF GRADING  Rethinking how we measure success in creative disciplines

THE POWER OF A GOOD TEACHER  Students laud instructors at annual reception

ALL GROWN UP  One of the first students to attend a U of M outreach program begins U1

A (BUSY) DAY IN THE LIFE  How nursing student Erin Kangas balances her studies, motherhood and a part-time job

THE TWEETS HEARD AROUND THE WORLD  Phys-ed teacher Blue Jay Bridge uses ‘screen time’ for good

CLASS OF THEIR OWN  Get schooled in the U of M’s latest course offerings

MEET A GRAD STUDENT  A candid conversation with community health sciences student Claudyne Chevrier

On the cover: Girl by School of Art graduate Jessica Evans. Oil on cardboard, 2014. Photo: Donna Jones

TeachingLIFE

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WHERE WE GO FROM HERE

BY FRANK DEER
A WINNIPEG HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER was placed on leave recently for posting questionable comments about Indigenous peoples on Facebook. It’s one of a number of incidents in recent years where schools and society have had to consider the quality of their interaction with the Canadian Indigenous experience.

As unsettling as these events appear to be for the public, they are not at all new to me. I grew up on a First Nations in Quebec called Kahnawake. It is known in Canadian consciousness for the infamous Oka crisis of 1990—when people from my community erected roadblocks on all roads and highways leading into the community (closing the Mercier Bridge and preventing direct access between Montreal and numerous communities in the South Shore area).

Kahnawake represents a rich environment of Indigenous heritage and language that has facilitated cultural revitalization and affirmation. In a climate of fervent (sometimes militant) nationalism, Kahnawake’s potential as a focal point for understanding the possibilities of Indigenous activism and cultural assertion is perhaps supported by its geographical location adjacent to a major urban centre on the southern shore of the St. Lawrence River. I only came to appreciate the importance of such location when I moved to Manitoba and began to understand how communities that are geographically remote relative to Canada’s other more populated regions can easily be forgotten in the grand scheme of things.

With francophone nationalist sentiment just a heartbeat away, the cultural and linguistic dichotomies that exist between English/French Quebecois and the Kahnienkéhaka of Kahnawake continue to provide useful examples of how our relationships are not as healthy as they can otherwise be.

But education in Canadian schools is changing. The rich diversity of ethnic, cultural and national backgrounds from around the world are becoming more apparent in today’s classrooms.

Many of these changes are in response to the fact that people who live in Canada are beginning to collectively see themselves as a transcultural society, consisting of a large and growing number of national groups. Significant amongst these national groups are the Indigenous peoples of the lands known as Canada.

For much of Canada’s history, the relationship between Indigenous peoples and settlers has not been healthy. Colonialism, post-colonial activities, and other developments that have marginalized Indigenous peoples have led us to where we are today—coexisting in a country where we don’t respect or understand each other as well as we should.

The lack of mutual respect and understanding has been rather acute in primary and secondary education. The legacy of the Canadian Government’s interaction with Indigenous peoples—marked by residential schools, government control of First Nations peoples, and denial of rights that were enjoyed by others—is one that leaves many Indigenous peoples struggling to situate themselves in contemporary society.

We need to focus on improving the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, and providing Indigenous people with the means of realizing their potential. Although there may be a vast number of responsibilities we all have in order to reach these two seemingly lofty goals, contemporary teachers may best address these by integrating Indigenous perspectives into school programming.

But establishing Indigenous perspectives and content in classrooms in Manitoba has not been a straightforward task. We face—and must overcome—several challenges. Lack of Indigenous content knowledge, fear of addressing content inappropriately as well as reticence on Indigenous issues are challenges that continue to affect the integration of Indigenous perspectives.

Yet I am hopeful that the progress we’ve realized in the area of Indigenous education and the broader exercise of creating mutually beneficial relationships amongst all who inhabit these lands will continue. The progress we’ve experienced in the area of Indigenous education has been facilitated, in part, through the efforts of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples working at the university and community level.

Many faculties and colleges of education in Canada have created space in their teacher development programs for Indigenous education. A perceived need for culturally relevant pedagogical training that facilitates the development of aptitudes and skills necessary for the delivery of Indigenous education has led to the appointment of professors and other staff with backgrounds in this area.

Many institutions have developed elective and compulsory courses to support teacher development in the area of Indigenous education. School districts and community groups have begun to appreciate the need for undergraduate teacher education and in-service professional development that provides opportunities for training in Indigenous education. This movement has informed school district programming, ministerial requirements for graduates of teacher education programs and curricular development, and priorities for faculties and colleges of education.

It is within this context of societal and institutional progress that I am happy to find myself situated. It is with the emergent wave of enthusiasm amongst many that I continue to do what I can to affect initial teacher education and Indigenous achievement. It is with an active and growing movement toward Indigenous peoples’ success and mutual learning amongst all that I work.

For this I am proud.
HELSA NGUYEN HAS A TEAR in her eye when she thinks back to her service-learning experience last year in a hurricane-ravaged region of Honduras. “A little part of my heart now belongs to Honduras and I think about it every single day,” the engineering student says. “I’m just waiting until I can go back there and do it all over again.”

Nguyen was one of 11 University of Manitoba students who traveled to the remote village of Constitucion to build systems to filter drinking water and harvest rainwater at a rural elementary school. The program (called El Pueblo Creciente or The Growing Village) has students research, design, and build alternative solutions to housing issues in impoverished areas of Honduras. The students craft their plans during the fall semester and then bring them to life during an annual trip to the developing country, in cooperation with World Vision International.

“The students and parents trusted us to provide accessible safe and clean water, which was a dauntingly huge responsibility for a group of undergraduates to hold,” says Nguyen. “For this reason, the design process was quite the grueling and meticulous process. I found myself getting sentimentally attached to our design plans.”

In 1998, Hurricane Mitch damaged or destroyed more than 83,000 homes in this region; 70 per cent of crops, and transportation infrastructure were also destroyed. And then in 2009, flooding further deteriorated the road network. Today, more than 60 per cent of locals live in poverty and roughly half of rural residents live in what’s considered extreme poverty.

For the 2014 project, the group devised a system to collect rainwater for irrigation in the school garden, which was also connected to a sustainable filtration system for hand-washing and drinking. They installed a see-saw, cleaned and patched up the school and educated the students on health, sanitation and first aid.

Kris Dick, biosystems engineering professor, leads the initiative, which is now in its third year. They’ve tackled several projects, including the construction of a home using a novel roofing system, a latrine and a gray water system for gardening.
As their work progressed in Honduras, Dick realized that what they were doing there would be a great opportunity for undergraduate students. In addition, their experiences have helped raise their self-awareness, given them a sense of responsibility, and heightened their pride of completion and ownership of what they had accomplished. "It's not the goal of the program to turn all participants into development workers. Regardless of whether they ever work in a developing region again, they can develop a broader sense of the interaction of their technical skills within a social context," he says.

Students applying for this experience are not necessarily engineers, because some of the issues they face in Honduras can be social or health concerns. The group has also included architecture and nursing students.

Dick notes: "This annual project has an impact in the Honduran community. Even though we are there for a short time, our students seem to make real connections with our project community, especially with the host families our students live with."

The appreciation for the importance of their work and the impact on the lives of the community isn’t lost on the student volunteers. "This wasn’t about us as engineers showing off what we could do, but how we’re going to make something that would bring innovation to the community and spark ideas of something potentially replicable," says Nguyen. "To know that I was part of creating an irrigation system that could be replicable and integrated into the everyday living of the residents of Consonlaca, and to know that it could help in even a small way to develop new practices and new ideas to the neighbouring farmers—that is a feeling that sitting in a university classroom could never give me."

As a matter of fact, Nguyen is hoping to return soon to Consonlaca, this time as part of the leadership team. "The moment we put down a shovel or a pickaxe, the children would jump at the opportunity to help us fix up the school themselves. They showed us so much unconditional love and treated us like their best friends all week long," she says. "The project has left such a lasting impact on me that I am hoping that I will be able to continue my education and pursue a master’s degree with a focus on sustainable water management."

Nguyen and the other students didn’t go to the region as part of a course or employment opportunity. They went on their own volition and mostly at their own expense, choosing to spend their spring break improving the quality of life for villagers. The students pay their airfare and Dick relies on fundraising and grants to cover other costs. While the students don’t get a grade on their work, they do have their efforts acknowledged in their co-curricular records, something that definitely will help them in seeking future employment, Nguyen says. "This isn’t an academic exercise," she explains. "We aren’t going down there for a holiday. This is a practical application of what we learn in our classrooms and labs. When I’m down there, I ask myself, How can I use my skills to solve these construction and design problems? I find that I’m drawing on my creativity and intuition, and the sense of accomplishment I get when it’s all done is a good feeling knowing that I’ve made a difference."

Dick gained an appreciation for working with impoverished communities early in his career when he was in Sierra Leone. He was a design engineer leading construction projects in villages in the West Africa country through the international volunteer organization, CUSO. He saw firsthand how engineering skills could be applied in real-world situations, in areas that were in desperate need of assistance. So, when he entered academia and began teaching at the University of Manitoba, he considered meaningful ways in which students could put their newly-acquired skills to use.

Dick explains: “The Growing Village concept originally started when I was doing research with a graduate student on the construction of low-cost housing using locally available materials. We discussed the possibility of doing this work in a developing region. At that time, I had a Honduran summer student who was working with me, and one day I asked him if we could do the work in his home country. He replied, ‘Absolutely!’ and we immediately began making plans for the three of us to travel there.”
THE NEW PROFESSOR

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO BE A TOP EDUCATOR IN 2015?

BY SARAH RICHARDS
We’ve all had at least one in our academic lives. You know, that professor who does nothing more than recite a textbook at the front of class.

One student snoozes with a puddle of saliva on his desk; another chews on a pen. They’re all slack-mouthed, motionless, staring off to the void—the very antithesis of engaged students. Meanwhile, the professor drones on.

But the unengaging educator faces certain extinction. Keeping students interested and involved so that they learn has always been a challenge that comes with the profession. Now, however, new factors have been added to that task. Smartphones and a slew of other personal electronic devices can make teachers feel as if they’re competing for ever-shrinking attention spans. Cathy Rocke, an assistant professor in the Faculty of Social Work, says the latter is an ongoing issue in larger classes with several dozen students. “Everybody has their laptops and their cellphones and iPads and whatever,” says Rocke.

Students may even wonder why they’re bothering to take out loans to pay for school when the Internet offers knowledge … for free. “I think what is changing is students perhaps are seeing us as less as the holders of the knowledge,” says Mark Torchia, the director of the Centre for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning, or CATL.

Amidst all these changes, however, one thing is clear: this dynamic environment is being confronted with creativity by University of Manitoba faculty.

Torchia admits that simply instructing post-secondary students on basic information that can now be found online is no longer enough to get them engaged. “Anyone of my students can look up what I’m teaching them easily,” says Torchia. “It’s how can I take what’s my experience and engage that expertise in the learning experience. It’s how I can use my expertise to tell them about something that’s not obvious to them by simply checking Wikipedia. It’s engaging them at a different and higher level.”

For some faculty, especially those new to teaching in higher education, this insight may not be immediately evident. This is in part why last year the CATL began collaborating with the Office of the Vice-President (Academic) and Provost to further develop the skills and confidence of pre-tenured educators. The novel 24 to 36-month program, called the Teaching and Learning Certificate, is aimed at probationary faculty and designed “to build competencies and enhance teaching effectiveness,” says Torchia. Participants are nominated by their deans. “The people nominated are showing a particular focus on teaching, and people see them as potential leaders as teachers,” he says.

Last summer, 18 faculty members were chosen. Training begins with a four-day intensive, summer institute and continues with workshops, mentoring and in-class evaluations over a two-year period. Torchia is hoping to move 100 teachers through the program in five years and that those who complete the program will pass their knowledge on to others.

“We’re not trying to promote one particular methodology,” cautions Torchia. “There are all kinds of ways to teach and all kinds of things that work in different situations. We’re trying to help new faculty feel comfortable taking the chance on trying something different that might actually fit better with their own style and personality and philosophy of teaching, rather than limiting them to how they have seen others teach.”

Giving teachers that space to take risks and try new things, which Torchia admits is not easy in an era of tight budgets and rigid learning requirements, can nevertheless reap rewards.

Associate professor Ian Hudson has been known to use candies to teach wealth disparity in his political economy class, as well as a fantasy hockey league to help students grasp pro sports finances in an economics of sports class he taught. For the latter, Hudson set aside his first two classes of the session. After dividing the class into 10 team ownership groups, students then chose players for their teams. The various teams’ financial situations were reflective of actual NHL teams, meaning students on the Jets struggled to compete against wealthier teams like the Maple Leafs. “The students seemed to enjoy it,” says Hudson. “It’s an icebreaker; they got to sit together and got to know each other.”

Hudson then used a hockey video game set on zero-player mode—a setting in which the computer plays off different teams against each other without human involvement—to determine league results. By the end of the ‘hockey season,’ which lasted a mere three months in ECON2520, students had revenue and expenditure figures for each team.

“What I then ask students to do is use the material that they’ve learned in the class to evaluate the success or failure of the league,” says Hudson. “What tends to happen is the league doesn’t make a great deal of money, and the reason that happens is the same reason that professional sports teams in general have trouble making money in an open market environment—which is that teams tend to pay more for players than they should if they were just going to be profitable about the whole thing.”

In his political economy class, Hudson hands out licorice Goodies based on Canada’s family income distribution. He assigns the pellets values based on their colour: green Goodies are worth the most, while pink Goodies are worth the least. Students can then trade Goodies to build up wealth. The only problem being, of course, that some students start off with more Goodies than others.

“The lesson is supposed to be about how fairness in society is compromised when there is a lack of equality and opportunity,” explains Hudson, who adds the exercise was frustrating for those who started at a disadvantage and were unable to improve their standing. “They do understand the lesson at the end.”
Niall Harney, one of Hudson’s former students, says the exercise also demonstrated how people can become selfish when trying to improve their position in a market. He noticed that he entered most, if not all, of his trade negotiations with a deal that did not benefit the opposing party.

Harney says he enjoyed the unique experience, despite being used to—and equally appreciative of—traditional class lectures. “It was definitely more engaging,” says Harney. “It’s a fun way to spend class time that you don’t usually get to do.”

CULT OF SOCIAL WORK associate professor Judy Hughes also believes in making things tangible for her class, especially in a discipline where there is a gap between the classroom, where theory and research is discussed, and the field, where students work directly with clients. “The challenge is to find ways to help students to integrate classroom theory with hands-on practice experience,” says Hughes.

For her Field Focus Family Violence class, Hughes and Prof. Rocke have experimented with using actors to portray women interacting with social workers. Actor and U of M alumna Meghan Andres created scripts for three short plays based on interviews Hughes conducted with women involved in Manitoba’s family law and child welfare systems. Andres and theatre program coordinator Bill Kerr then performed the roles of client and social worker in front of Hughes’ students. Students were given the opportunity to stop the action to ask questions and suggest better ways for the ‘social worker’ to deal with the situation.

“It was interesting,” says Hughes. “Cathy and I were in the classroom and we were really worried about whether students would be engaged. And then almost right away, they were like: Stop, you need to do this.”

Thanks to a $6,600 Teaching and Learning Enhancement Fund grant, Hughes and Rocke are now working on a video version of the plays to use in classrooms next fall. They’re writing an accompanying workbook as well. “Making that leap to practice I think is what we’re always trying to do,” says Hughes. “Students are reading articles or textbooks… but how do you get students to see the relevance of what to them is sometimes dry theory? This also allows us to get students better ready to go into the field.”

A similar philosophy guides the work of Rob Lawson, an instructional designer at the U of M who adapts traditional classroom courses to online versions. Enrolment in online courses at the U of M has increased by 42 per cent since the 2009 academic year—meaning Lawson is a busy man. Over the past three years, he has redesigned or created from scratch two dozen courses for a number of different faculties.

When it comes to designing the courses, Lawson aims for much more than just an online version of a robotic professor. He incorporates a more learner-centred approach that emphasizes extensive interaction among students, instructors and content; he also tries to introduce more inquiry-based learning that involves creativity and problem-solving. “I think it’s much more engaging for students if they’re a part of the learning process,” says Lawson. “Coming out of lectures, there have been studies that students really only retain five per cent of what they’ve learned; whereas when they engage in collaborative problem-solving and discussions, they can retain up to 50 per cent of the material.”

When Lawson sat down with classics professor Dina Guth to redesign a course on Roman history, one of their goals was to make a course traditionally focused on assessing student knowledge more interactive with increased emphasis on analysis among students. This, Lawson says, can improve learning outcomes. Consequently, they ended up dropping assignments that involved short or multiple-choice answers—methods that assess low levels of learning—and adding a project in which students created blogs about individual Roman emperors. Students then assessed each other’s blogs for elements like language, style, content and image use.

“The challenge is to find ways to help students to integrate classroom theory with hands-on practice experience.”

“By having the peer review analysis of their fellow students, we really tried to emphasize learning, analysis and evaluation,” says Lawson.

He is also tracking an ongoing evolution in how students are accessing the U of M’s online courses. An increasing number are accessing these courses through their tablets and smartphones, giving added emphasis to the trend of mobile education.

“For example, a couple of years ago, within the space of one month, we noticed we had over 6,000 hits on our learning management system from students using mobile devices,” says Lawson, whose research on adapting an online course to mobile devices won an award at the e-Learning Korea conference last year. “I think that eventually, mobile devices are going to really outnumber laptops and fixed PCs. That will become their primary mode of access.”

A reality the dull professor from your past could never have imagined, no doubt.
Meet four graduate students whose research findings are teaching the world something novel and changing it for the better. Inspired by their supervising professors, they’re using ancient bones to better understand a modern-day killer (stress); working with NASA to explore the link between soil and the globe’s wacky weather; reinventing cancer-detecting technology to shrink life-saving—but bulky—equipment to the size of a backpack; and successfully tackling Ebola head on (with antibodies from a tobacco plant—who knew?)

STORIES & PHOTOS BY KATIE CHALMERS-BROOKS
HEN ANALYZING HUMAN remains dating back to Medieval times Amy Scott thinks about the person who once was. “You piece together these stories,” says Scott, 30. “There is so much we can learn from the past.”

The anthropology PhD student studies ancient, human bones unearthed at construction sites in Denmark, searching for signs of stress. Her investigative work is providing a clearer picture of health through the centuries and improving scientists’ understanding of how humans react to stress today.

She likens the skeleton to a record-keeper. When we’re stressed, our body releases steroids into our biological system, and this release over the long-term causes damage and leaves its mark on our bones. Scott has linked the physical signs of stress—such as lesions and growth stunting—to stressors like malnutrition and disease. “You can start to picture what their lives would have been like and I think it’s just incredible that you can ascertain that kind of detail by looking at a skeleton. By the end of the analysis, I can almost see the person they would have been.”

Scott’s been fascinated by history since she was a kid yet grew up wanting to be anything and everything. “I remember a really terrifying moment in high school when [I had] to figure it out,” she says.

The daughter of a nurse and a bank manager, Scott eventually discovered her passion for ancient artifacts. “I gave it a try and thought, ‘Hey, this is what I want to do,’ as bizarre as it is.”

Scott jokes: “It’s as exciting as the Indiana Jones adventures—but a lot more book work.”

She hopes to advance our knowledge of the body’s underlying stress mechanism and how it alters the skeleton, specifically, where stress strikes first and how that can be tracked archaeologically. She is most excited about her efforts to pioneer a new method for chemically detecting stress in archaeological bones using ancient proteins—an idea she developed early on in her research. She’ll be among the first in the world to do so. “I just wanted to take it a step further,” says Scott, who received the prestigious Vanier Canada Graduate Scholarship in 2012.

She credits her supervising anthropology professor, Robert Hoppa, for encouraging her to dig deeper. “He taught me to trust my instincts, to trust my ideas and follow them through.”
measurements at such an intense level in our flood-prone province. His complex technique—which considers the soil type and vegetation, along with the impact of weather—tells emergency personnel where to focus their efforts. He also collaborated with NASA in preparation for their launch of a satellite earlier this year that serves a similar moisture-measuring function. They believe secrets found in soil may improve their understanding of climate change and weather fluctuations worldwide.

Growing up in Nigeria, Ojo had a small plot of land for crops and vegetables that his family would visit every Saturday. “That was my favorite day of the week,” he says. Fascinated by all-things natural, Ojo credits his undergraduate work in his home country for inspiring him to more aggressively pursue this field. His plant experiments would routinely get washed away by rain, making him realize that scientists could benefit from a better understanding of the effects of weather on agriculture. He says, “That is what developed a passion in me.”

But it was his supervisor, soil science professor and department head Paul Bullock, who made his journey the best it could be. Ojo says the professor shows genuine interest in his students and has a knack for making the complex, simple. “This has been such an invaluable experience for me.”

“MY U OF M EXPERIENCE HAS BEEN VERY POSITIVE. THE NATURE OF MY RESEARCH HAS ENABLED ME TO HAVE CONSTANT INTERACTION WITH MANY PARTNERS FROM ALL LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT, OTHER ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS AND INDUSTRY.”
OR CAMERON KAYE, advancing cancer research is a mission close to his heart.

His mom was diagnosed with thyroid cancer over a decade ago; the deadly disease was unresponsive to conventional treatment, spread to her lungs and took her life in the summer of 2013. Kaye felt frustrated that modern medicine hadn’t progressed to the point that doctors were equipped to save her.

“They shrugged their shoulders,” says Kaye, 31, who studies biomedical engineering. “I always went into medicine thinking that maybe I could make some sort of contribution. To see if we could find something that would help my mom—that was in the back of my mind.”

The biomedical engineering MD/PhD student will graduate both as an engineer and doctor. He will be able to not only treat cancer patients with leading-edge equipment but also design the technology behind it.

“I like the challenge and I love learning new things, and this program has definitely offered me those,” he says.

Kaye works under Joe LoVetri, head of electrical and computer engineering, and is collaborating with other engineering and physics students—supervised by professors Stephen Pistorius and Can-Ming Hu—to do human trials of new microwave imaging systems to detect breast tumours that would complement the conventional mammogram.

This technology, which could be scaled to the size of a backpack, offers a safer option for detection than the mammogram since it uses low-power microwaves instead of X-rays. It is also less expensive, more comfortable for the patient, and more mobile. These characteristics make it ideal for use in remote areas of the North or in developing countries that don’t have efficient health-care systems. “For women in communities that lack the resources for proper breast screening programs, we could catch things before they get too advanced,” says Kaye, a recipient of a 2013 Vanier Canada Graduate Scholarship.

To get to the human trials stage is a rewarding feat, he notes. “It’s nice to see our work being applied, to have a real-world application. You can see it progressing to the next stage.”

It was LoVetri who encouraged Kaye to merge medicine with engineering. “He showed me his lab and it was very cool stuff,” Kaye recalls. “I had never heard of microwave imaging in any biomedical context at that point. I realized right away it was something not a lot of people were working on and it was cutting-edge.”

Kaye was among the first students to pursue a PhD in biomedical engineering at the university. His accomplishments always made his mom proud, he says. “She encouraged me to do whatever made me happy.”
He did this research as part of his PhD under medical microbiology associate professor Gary Kobinger. During the summer of 2014—with all eyes on West Africa—the group announced an even more effective cocktail of antibodies than their headline-grabbing mixture from two years earlier. They demonstrated that their lab’s monkeys could be saved up to five days after infection, even if they were already severely ill. Doses of the life-saving treatment, derived from the tobacco plant and dubbed ZMapp™, have since been shipped to the hard-hit region overseas and used to help save infected patients. “There is still more work to be done,” Wong says. When he tells people he routinely works with a live Ebola virus, he never quite knows how they’ll react. “It goes one of two ways: some people think it’s really cool and some stay away from me.”

His research, though rewarding, by its nature can be a tedious process. He explains, “You just have to keep going and keep at it.”

Wong says Kobinger instilled in him “the unrelenting desire and drive to improve, to not rest on your laurels despite past successes.”

As a result, Wong says he is not only a better scientist, but a better person. Since graduating last year, Wong secured a position in Beijing, China, working with the group who is leading the Chinese response to Ebola in West Africa. “I believe that I can be a valuable asset.”

ATCHING THE FICTIONAL fight against an Ebola-like virus in the popular 1995 movie Outbreak piqued Gary Wong’s interest. Immediately, he identified with the individuals sparring on the front line with infectious diseases rather than those running in the other direction. “I thought this is really cool. I want to look more into it,” recalls Wong, 31.

Fast-forward several years and Wong played a key role in the effort to curb the spread of Ebola in the recent West Africa outbreak. The unassuming scientist was among the U of M contingent working with Canada’s National Microbiology Laboratory that found a treatment for people infected with the deadly disease. “There is a feeling of satisfaction that we were able to positively impact the outbreak and we were able to save some lives,” says Wong.

He recalls the moment he realized the antibodies he was testing in a Winnipeg lab could save the lives of monkeys infected with Ebola. “It was kind of like, ‘Wow, this works. We might have something significant on our hands,’” says Wong, who grew up in Vancouver.

"THERE IS A FEELING OF SATISFACTION THAT WE WERE ABLE TO POSITIVELY IMPACT THE OUTBREAK AND WE WERE ABLE TO SAVE SOME LIVES.... IT WAS KIND OF LIKE, ‘WOW, THIS WORKS. WE MIGHT HAVE SOMETHING SIGNIFICANT ON OUR HANDS.'"
THE ART OF GRADING

BY SARAH RICHARDS

RETHINKING HOW WE MEASURE SUCCESS IN CREATIVE DISCIPLINES
I

F YOU QUIZ PEOPLE ABOUT The Starry Night, chances are they’ll tell you one of several things: it’s one of the most famous paintings in the world, and Vincent Van Gogh’s most prominent. They’ll tell you about the textured brush strokes that seem to turn the dark blue sky into a swirling river, and how the scattered stars radiate like miniature suns. They might even throw in that part about the ear.

What they’re less likely to know, however, is that like the vast majority of his paintings, The Starry Night never sold until after Van Gogh’s death. During his lifetime, the Dutch painter only managed to sell a single painting.

Van Gogh’s story—and there are many others like it—is a telling example of the difficulty that comes with judging an artist’s work. It’s a continual struggle for those who teach the subject. “It’s always challenging to grade a creative piece,” says Leigh Bridges, an assistant professor who teaches graphic design and fine arts classes at the School of Art. “It’s something that individually and also as a department, we are always reviewing and thinking about.”

Several years ago, School of Art leaders began an overhaul of the institution’s approach to grading and class outlines. Prior to this, little uniformity existed in these areas, a reality not altogether different from faculty members’ own experiences as students decades earlier.

“When I went to university, it was certainly that way,” says assistant professor Elizabeth Roy, who obtained her MFA at the Cranbrook Academy of Art near Detroit, MI. “You had no idea how you got that mark and were afraid to ask. For me, that was always such a hard thing; I wanted to improve, but I didn’t know where I was falling short.”

School of Art director Paul Hess had a similar experience when he studied at the University of Guelph and the Nova Scotia College of Art & Design in the 1970s. He still wonders whether the reason many instructors back then did not offer clear instruction was because they were driven by a desire to prioritize their own work and careers.

“We had faculty that protected that information because it’s kind of Oedipal,” says Hess, referring to the Greek mythological character who takes power by unknowingly killing his father and wedding his mother. “You know, when you give that information to somebody they’ll come and kill you. They’ll take over your job, they’ll take over your career, they’ll be better than you will be.”

“My practice is interdisciplinary and I am usually drawn to working with (and/or appropriating) everyday materials such as webcams, cell phones, cardboard, and formats associated with degraded or low-end appearances. My influences include the aesthetics of government campaigns, sports culture, mass media and tabloid internet.” —Jessica Evans, who graduated last year with a Bachelor of Fine Arts Honours.
Back then, Hess says he and his fellow students were already discussing the value of fine arts instruction and of what that should consist. Fast-forward to Hess’s arrival in Winnipeg in 2008 and it was clear to him that the School of Art needed to be using course outlines that included outcomes—basically, a list of skills students would learn upon completion of a class—and standard evaluation criteria so that teachers could grade in a constant, transparent manner.

Eventually, he and associate director Mary Ann Steggles began what Steggles jokingly calls their “war” on the course outline. (Hess says he’s not sure he’d call it a war, preferring instead to describe it as a slow, determined effort to provide a useful framework for students and faculty.) Also in their sights: creating a grading guide known as a rubric that would provide specific information on how a project is to be evaluated and marked.

As part of the process, Hess asked faculty members to think about their methods for grading student work. Steggles, meanwhile, surveyed evaluation criteria and outlines at the U of M and other universities. Later on, the U of M’s Centre for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning stepped in and offered workshops on grading and building outlines.

The results? Teachers now have an outline template where they can plug in information about their course, as well as a standard rubric. Steggles says roughly 80 per cent of the faculty involved in studio courses now use the rubrics, which can be customized; she and Hess would like the remainder who do not yet use them to also jump on board.

Roy, who has been teaching for 25 years, says the rubrics have allowed her students to grasp a project’s full potential. “It’s written, it’s seen, it’s discussed,” says Roy. “I’m a facilitator, right? It’s not me just standing there, telling them. I don’t want them to think I have all the power.”

Faculty are now also being asked to submit course outlines and rubrics well in advance of the semester. “I’m the one that reviews every course outline for every course this school teaches,” says Steggles. During these reviews, she tries to catch everything from scheduling conflicts to problematic or vague language that could cause issues later on—words like ‘labour’ or ‘work.’

“The old word ‘effort,’” says Steggles with a laugh that mixes in a sigh. “If you’ve got a lot of professors in the same room, they’ll tell you that in the courses they’re teaching, they’ve had at least one student that came up to them and said: ‘But I worked so hard, I deserve a really good grade.’”

Another potentially problematic word? Participation, which admit-
tedly can be a key element in practice-based learning like the arts. Steggles cautions that if teachers include participation as a component of a grade, they must be meticulous in how they track and define the word. Does it involve attendance? Asking questions during class?

In many ways, language is the dominating challenge when dealing with these complex issues. Take, for instance, the idea of artistic risk. Most artists tend to develop a sense of risk as their studies progress, and it can be an important aspect to be considered when judging art, depending on the context. “I think that the best work comes and results from taking risks and also allowing oneself to make mistakes and to make bad work,” says Bridges.

But can a rubric successfully incorporate this highly subjective concept? Yes, as is obvious in the school’s studio rubric: an A+ is defined in part as works that “challenge the current boundaries of the field”—in other words, ones that take risks. On the other hand, for an A, works must only show an “awareness of the current boundaries of the field,” among other things.

“I think that the best work comes and results from taking risks …”

If friends and family knew that Ryan Amadore spent the past winter living in a crate in an unheated garage in Northern Ontario, they’d be concerned. Luckily for them, this version doesn’t mind being frozen; he is, after all, made of wax.

Open Studio: A Phase in Six Years of my Art Education (above) is a mixed media artwork created by Amadore for his 2014 master’s thesis. Amadore got the idea to create a life-size reproduction of his graduate studio space—with a wax model of himself in it—when his graduating committee asked where he saw himself in his work. “I thought it would be cheeky and fun to put myself in the work,” says Amadore. “There was a lot going through my head when I did the piece; I guess the romantic motive of the figure at the window. I was thinking a lot about how art relates to self-reflection and just the whole experience of art school, where you’re constantly making stuff and being critiqued about what you make... Meanwhile, you’re hopefully getting closer to who you are.”

Amadore ended up using a variety of techniques, including mold-making, casting and air-brushing. He even used his own hair on the model’s head. “Ultimately, it was my aim to put forth a sincere representation of my art school experience and at the same time through the subjectivity of art, question it,” says Amadore.

Since graduating, Amadore has relocated to the town of Kapuskasing, Ont., where he continues to make art. Open Studio is stored there in his in-laws’ garage.
“Family ties are a significant influence on my aesthetic practice. I manipulate family images to give new life to forgotten memories, and use continuities between past and present to provide structure. I work in the uncanny space that connects the viewer to a familial history other than their own.”

—Kendra Okrusko, who graduated last year with a Bachelor of Fine Arts Honours

FEATURE

These rubrics may provide guidance to students and teachers on grading ... but there is still room for personalization in the process. “We have rubrics that engage the known expectations of the project,” explains Hess. “So you can scale it, you can use the ‘X’ ‘Y’ coordinates to establish that geography.”

INDEED, SOME FLEXIBILITY can be important when grading arts like music. Take, for instance, the words a person sings when performing a song. There are correct and incorrect ways to pronounce a word, but every singer adds his or her own character to how they pronounce, say, a vowel.

“I try to make sure that the way that I mark in my diction classes, where they do a lot of singing, is not just about their vocal prowess,” explains Laura Loewen, an associate professor of collaborative piano and a vocal coach at the Desautels Faculty of Music. “Because they’re all at different stages for that, and I can’t mark somebody lower because they happen not to have this beautiful voice that somebody else does. In those classes, I’m looking more at the acquisition of skills that help them understand the language, and will help them to sing with expressivity and communication.”

This, however, is a far cry from what Hess calls the “mystical” approach to teaching and grading art, one in which instructors rely on their own subjective criteria. This approach can be problematic; students receive insufficient, confusing or misleading guidance on the parameters of assignments. Rightly or wrongly, a student may end up appealing a grade because she or he believes the project was not adequately explained by a teacher.

“I think an appeal is often based on a lot on miscommunication” between the instructor, assignment and student, says Hess.

Universities and their faculty need outlines and rubrics that carefully communicate all elements of a successful course and assignments, says Hess, and they should encourage students to question. “In an art school, I think what we want is for people to be very willing to take risks, understand the context, framework, history, use of various disciplines, various materials and processes, and then to sort of see if they can identify elements within their own sensibility that can connect to these things... as they begin to try to create meaningful experiences with what will ultimately be called their art,” says Hess. “How does a course outline template fit into that? It tries to provide a framework for structuring that interconnection of knowledge, memory, experience, reaction, communication and so on.”

“In an art school, I think what we want is for people to be very willing to take risks ...”

- Alisha Sandhu, who graduated last year with a Bachelor of Fine Arts Honours

INSEPTA HYBRIDA. Series #4. Medium: digital print. 61 x 76.2 cm
The power of a good teacher

H on. James Allum, then Minister of Education and Advanced Learning, set the scene at last year’s Students Teacher Recognition Reception when he described teaching as, “a calling … to enrich lives, just like those that have come before us enriched our lives.” Validation of this sentiment followed from each of the U of M students invited to reflect on a teacher who made all the difference.

STUDENTS LAUD U OF M INSTRUCTORS AT ANNUAL RECEPTION

“After a long day of work, probably out in the field, she came home and sat in on a conference call with me, from the other side of the province, answering every question I had about the biotechnology program…. She may not even know this but her passion for research inspired me … and is one of the main reasons why I am now pursuing post-graduate studies in plant science.”
—Agricultural and Food Sciences student Danica Swaenepoel, about Prof. Anita Brûlé-Babel

“Gary has a way about him that just makes students want to learn. He has a down-to-earth personality and he never tries to make his students feel like he is superior to them. Instead, he chooses to teach from experience in practical, hands-on ways…. He [also] keeps a book of all his ideas on him at all times and he’s probably got it with him now. He often shares these ideas with his students and encourages them to pursue any one of them. All he asks? If you become successful with one of them, that he hear about it so he can share in your excitement.”
—School of Agriculture student Kayla Antonowich, about senior instructor Gary Martens

“I entered your classroom with embarrassingly bare-boned skills in German and a mild interest in a country I had visited in the previous summer. Over the following two years, you taught me that German studies extends beyond ridiculously long words and tasty schnitzel…. [You] instilled a possibly obsessive interest in me of German studies and Germany, its culture, its language.”
—Faculty of Arts student Alexander Pawlowsky, about instructor Karen James

“I had just joined the program and talked to our student advisor Brenda Miller and she told me I should look into summer research with the department. Having literally no knowledge of geophysics and not knowing where to start, she told me to go knock on the door down the hall and sure enough there was Dr. Ferguson. And I think it was the next day he had a list of 10 different summer projects that I could choose from—and it was a great summer.”
—Clayton H. Riddell Faculty of Earth, Environment, and Resources student Timothy Hayward, about Prof. Ian Ferguson

“He inspired me to believe in myself, even when I wasn’t so confident in my abilities yet.”
—College of Dentistry’s Vanessa Hunzinger, about Prof. Frank Hechter

“His lessons were well planned; there was not a single minute wasted in that class. And we all came out of there going, ‘Can you believe what we just learned?’ So, thank you from all of us Home Ec students.”
—Faculty of Education student Shirley Ewanchuk, about Prof. Orest Cap

“He encouraged me to be more open to new adventures. And he helped me to develop practical skills, which I could use outside the classroom. And in the end, I really have Dr. Clark to thank for introducing me to the diverse and interesting world of water resources engineering, which I am glad to say I am a part of today.”
—Faculty of Engineering student Kevin Sagan, about Assistant Prof. Sean Clark

“It was an amazing experience to learn about foods from around the world. I honestly think she’s tasted every food all over the planet.”
—Faculty of Human Ecology student Michelle Stevens, about Prof. Connie Magalhaes

“Professor Osborne did not merely teach me the letter of the law, and stop there. He taught me how to approach the law. He taught me how to properly read the law. He taught me to ask the questions that would lead to the right answers.”
—Faculty of Law student Liam Black, about Prof. Phillip Osborne

“John, thanks for opening my eyes to what chemistry is all about, and for giving me the skills that I need as a student as well as a researcher. And, thanks for humouring me when I would show up in your office all the time with my new ideas and, of course, my problems. As anyone doing research knows, those are way too common.”
—Faculty of Science student Rebecca Sherbo, about Assistant Prof. John Sorensen
ONE OF THE FIRST KIDS TO TAKE PART IN A U OF M OUTREACH PROGRAM IN WINNIPEG’S INNER CITY TAKES HIS FIRST STEPS ON CAMPUS AS A UNIVERSITY STUDENT

BY MELNI GHATTORA
PETE-JOHN HOMENIUK sits at the corner table of a coffee shop in University Centre, his backpack at his feet. The soundtrack of campus life buzzes around him, but it’s muted by earbuds playing a Metalcore track.

The University 1 student might look like an ordinary teenager. But to those who know him, he is “extraordinary.”

Francis Amara, the founder of a science outreach program for kids in Winnipeg’s inner city, is one of Homeniuk’s most vocal supporters. “I remember when I first met PJ: he was a bright and curious kid,” says Amara, a professor of biochemistry and medical genetics in the College of Medicine. “He really took an interest in the activities and I could see even then he was an extraordinary kid.”

The unassuming 18-year-old is soft-spoken and polite. He describes himself as an introvert but once you get him chatting he’s an open book. Homeniuk lights up when he shares his dream of one day pursuing a medical degree. “Ever since I was little, I’ve always wanted to be a doctor and help people,” he says.

His introduction to the University of Manitoba came early on—in sixth grade—when he joined Amara’s afterschool program, Science Buddies. Amara’s vision was to work closely with the inner-city community and its disadvantaged youth, with the hope of engaging them in science at young age. He would pack his lab, made up of coolers and containers, into his minivan and head over to Niji Mahkwa School to meet 30 or so students to talk about science for half an hour. This initiative grew into what is now the Biomedical Youth Program, run out of the Faculty of Health Sciences. Its summer science camp invites participants into Bannatyne campus labs to do hands-on activities; last year, 120 kids took part.

In the past eight years Amara has stayed close by, just a phone call or email away, and watched Homeniuk face—and overcome—some of life’s toughest challenges.

He’s the eldest of two; his younger sister is nine and they both live with their mom Tammy, a single parent. Homeniuk’s mother has been in wheelchair for as long as he can remember. She has Friedreich’s ataxia, a rare inherited neuromuscular disease that mainly affects the nervous system and the heart. “They said my mom was supposed to die when she had my sister—that’s why my sister was named Faith. I’ve always known eventually the disease will kill her and that’s always made me think, ‘What will happen to my sister?’”

Growing up in the North End, Homeniuk would see gangs, drugs and alcohol abuse. He says getting caught up in the bad influences around him was not an option. “Some days I’m like, ‘Man I could be out doing this, and I could be a bad kid and kind of have that freedom’… But then I think, ‘Well that won’t get me anywhere in life. I want to do more so I can support my family’.”

Day-to-day life can be trying at times, Homeniuk admits. He wakes up early to catch a bus to university, using the hour-long ride to read course notes; he attends classes and squeezes in study time between lectures; at the end of the day he heads home to carry out household chores and prepare dinner for his mom and sister.

Despite his hurdles, Homeniuk keeps a positive outlook and finds healthy and creative ways to have fun. “I like to play hockey so I try and go to the rink whenever I can. I play guitar, drums and piano; playing helps relieve the stress of homework and school,” says the self-taught musician.

He played hockey for six years and wants to be a sports medicine physician with the NHL. “I always wanted to play professional hockey but I couldn’t do that because of money issues so I thought, ‘What would be the next best thing?’”

Homeniuk wants success for himself and also doesn’t want to disappoint the people in his life who have helped him on his journey. He has a big group of supporters in his corner. He counts his mom, Amara and his best friend among them. “My mom because she raised me and really wants me to do well. Francis because he’s put so much time and effort into me, making sure I stay on track. My best friend because we’re always pushing each other to do better in life. That’s why he’s working to become a chef and why I’m doing this,” he says.

Homeniuk recognizes the meaningful impact of a mentor. He too wants to help mentor kids just like him. Amara’s guidance has spanned almost a decade. “Francis always messages or emails to make sure I’m studying and doing well in school,” Homeniuk says. “He watches out for me and considers me like a son. The fact that I know I have that mentor, father figure—it helps me out.”

Homeniuk recognizes the meaningful impact of a mentor. He too wants to help mentor kids just like him.
A (busy) day in the life

T 35, Erin Kangas quit her full-time fundraising job and went back to school to become a nurse. Today, the third-year student successfully juggles her university classes, coursework and work practicum with the day surgery unit at St. Boniface Hospital; family life with husband Ryan, a high school phys-ed teacher, son Jacob, 8, and step-kids Camryn, 14, and Holden, 11; and a part-time waitressing job. Through it all, she's managed to maintain a 4.11 GPA.

8:30 AM I thought: I can quit my job and a two-income family can go down to a one-income family—plus a part-time Boston Pizza wage—for four years. It does put a huge limit on our family life and it puts pressure on Ryan. So those were all things I was aware of but the bottom line was: as you get older, the idea of four years doesn’t seem very long.

9:08 AM I like helping people. I think I have enough compassion that I don’t need to know someone to care about them. I learned in my past rotation, from my instructor, that a good nurse nurses the patient and doesn’t nurse the books. That’s the kind of nurse I want to be.

9:22 AM Clinical practice starts on Thursday, and our group received a list of surgeries that we need to familiarize ourselves with. I would actually be super excited to see a carpal tunnel surgery. It would be weird to look into someone’s wrist.

9:59 AM We’re medicating the pseudo patient before making a dressing change on their wound because it can be really painful. Giving them a narcotic will relax them and kill the pain a little. I looked in the drug monograph to make sure that we’re giving the amount of fentanyl that the doctor ordered over the right amount of time so it’s not going to be harmful.

10:13 AM Typically Baxter pumps have three lines. In the Intensive Care Unit they had like, five of these machines and they had 15 to 20 lines going into them. And it’s all different drugs, different fluids, different everything. So as a nurse you have to make sure that nothing is getting crossed, nothing is getting mixed up, that it’s all the right drug, that everything’s going at the right rate.
I don’t want to get wrapped up in thinking of everyone as ‘the patient’. That’s the kind of nurse I want to be: where they feel like they’re being treated as an individual and not just ‘the patient’. And they’re listened to and getting what they feel they need. It’s about trying to find a balance between what the medical community thinks they need and what patients think they need.

You go to the hospital and sometimes they have little tutorials about how to use needles or something like that. And sometimes the way the older nurses talk is ‘The nurse will do this, she will do’…. And there’s guys standing right there. It’s almost like a reverse sexism assumption that all nurses are women. But there are definitely more and more guys in it now.

Was I scared to go back to school? No, I really honestly wasn’t. I was excited to finally immerse myself into something new and challenging. I’ve never been a do-the-same-thing-over-and-over kind of person.

I start out each semester with Ryan and we say, ‘It’s going to be hard but in 13 weeks it’ll be done.’ So I know that in 13 weeks I’m going to be off and I’ll have lots of time to spend with my family.

I’ve done a few wound dressing changes. I did a real intense one at St. B a few weeks ago. Some are really complicated. Some of them can get pretty deep. Our instructor suggested we go buy playdough to create a wound that we can use at home to practice.

There is so much to remember. It’s actually really scary to walk into the hospital as a student, because you don’t want to make mistakes. But you know you have to learn and so you want to be confident. It can be intimidating.
11:16 AM You put pressure on yourself. I want to do well. There’s definitely a difference between a professional program and a Bachelor of Arts. It’s live action and there is so much work to do all the time. It’s way more like a job.

11:31 AM I think that everybody deserves the proper care, which is maybe why I don’t know what area of nursing I want to go into. I mean, it almost doesn’t even really matter.

2:09 PM I always wanted to stay fit to look fit, but since I’ve been in nursing I’m realizing that your health depends so much on your physical fitness as you get older. I don’t want to be a decrepit old person just because I decided I didn’t want to exercise because I was too lazy.

2:59 PM This is the time when I go home and know that I have so much to do, including making dinner for the kids. But I just want to have a nap or watch Dr. Phil.

4:46 PM I’m the one in school but it’s a family effort. Jacob sometimes doesn’t get the attention he needs because I have to study or Ryan doesn’t get the attention he needs because I’m at work and he’s at home alone with the kids, again. It’s a team effort.

5:04 PM The kids are old enough that they’ll remember what it’s like to see a parent work hard and study, sitting at the kitchen table with a textbook and their head buried in papers and flash cards. When they get older, and they have to put effort into their education, they will have a role model.

25 Spring 2015
When I took my first degree, in psychology, there was not even the Internet. I started at 19 and finished at 23. For me, it was hard to get used to the online component to courses because it added a whole other realm of responsibility.

They’re kind of like Boston Pizza grandmas. They’re here every Tuesday before bingo. They’re just so sweet. Eventually you start to recognize the regular customers.

I think we’re good parents. We don’t accept attitude and don’t let the kids live on social media and video games.

I think I keep up pretty good. [My classmate, Jessie Smith, 20] got a couple of extra laps on me, but I hold on okay…. The opening of the Active Living Centre will be amazing for everybody.

Right now, we’re talking specifically about fractures. What are the different types of fractures? How do you access a fracture for its severity and location and complications—like if it’s severed arteries or anything like that? (Instructor Linda Townsend) has good energy.

When I took my first degree, in psychology, there was not even the Internet. I started at 19 and finished at 23. For me, it was hard to get used to the online component to courses because it added a whole other realm of responsibility.
The tweets heard around the world

TURNS OUT ‘SCREEN TIME’ FOR KIDS ISN’T ALL BAD

BY SHAMONA HARNETT
Middle School Gym Teacher Blue Jay Bridge

created one of his favorite lesson plans with a practical stranger located more than 1,200 kilometres away.

All the Winnipegger and University of Manitoba alum needed to complete the task: any one of his mobile devices, a Twitter account and some tech savvy. Before Bridge knew it, he and his online collaborator—gym teacher Matt Pomeroy from Madison, Wis.—had engineered a multimedia teaching unit centered around the agility ladder, a traditional piece of fitness equipment used to help athletes improve foot coordination.

The pair met on Twitter and didn’t know each other outside of cyberspace. But their connection, rooted in a passion for promoting fitness, bonded the teachers.

“[Matt created] … agility ladder exercises. I did about 25 or so different agility ladder exercises. Then, in a Google document, we started kind of compiling our exercises together,” says the Henry G. Izatt Middle School teacher, noting the Google app they used to pen their ideas allowed the pair to track each other’s work as it was happening.

The project ended up a grand success—complete with more than 50 agility ladder drills illustrated on posters. The posters (created by some of the school’s students) contained codes that gym students could scan with their smart phones to link to video demonstrations of each drill, says Bridge. He and Pomeroy posted the final work on Twitter so that gym teachers around the world could use the project in their own classes.

“So, it really doesn’t matter that I’m from Winnipeg and you’re from Wisconsin and someone’s from wherever … We just share because at the end of the day, we’re all the same. We’re all phys-ed teachers and we all want the same thing for our students,” says Bridge, who earned his education degree at the U of M.

His ultimate goal: to get kids excited about physical activity—in and out of gym class. And he’s achieving it.

He’s made a name for himself with phys-ed teachers around the globe, including the creators of website ThePhysicalEducator.com. Editors of the site voted Bridge one of the world’s top three physical educators on Twitter.

“That’s a funny thing about this social media—is that it brings everybody into a common place of sharing,” says Bridge, 38, who grew up in St. Norbert and Fort Garry with his brother and mother. “She was fantastic and us having activity was always a priority in our house, even though there wasn’t generally lots of money.”

Playing Pac-Man and watching VHS tapes as a child in the 1980s may have been an early indicator of Bridge’s current fascination with technology. In addition to his Twitter accounts (he has two; one for his students and one that he uses to collaborate with other gym teachers around the world), Bridge uses several apps in class. They include a skill analysis app that helps students examine their own body movements during sports; a music app that helps him set up interval training by playing music in timed segments; and a nutrition app that helps his students calculate the calories in fast food restaurant meals.

People often ask him what his gym classes look like.

“I think they have a thought in their mind that there must be iPods … lying all over the place. That isn’t really the case. We still are a phys-ed class. The vast majority of our time is being active,” says the father of three, noting that he uses technology in his class only if it helps his students better grasp the curriculum. “There would be times where I don’t want to just shoehorn technology in just for the sake of shoehorning it in…. I want it to enhance learning that’s currently happening.”

U of M kinesiologist Dean Kriellaars, who once taught Bridge, says his former student has a knack for using technology in a way that counts.

“Just like any tool, the tool has to be used well to be effective,” says Kriellaars, an assistant professor in the department of physical therapy.

Kriellaars says technology has become more accessible than ever considering that six years ago, a body motion analysis system would have cost about $10,000.

“Now it’s in your iPhone or iPad—giving video feedback of a movement or behavior in seconds.”

Kriellaars says it takes a certain kind of teacher to be able to use iPods, iPads, Twitter and other technology in the classroom well. Bridge is one of those teachers.

“I certainly support (Bridge’s) approach to it,” says Kriellaars, an exercise physiologist who uses technology in much of his research.

He does not recommend that every gym teacher jump on the technology bandwagon since doing so can take too much time and cut into quality learning.

What makes Bridge more than capable of using social media and apps the right way? It, in part, has to do with Bridge’s understanding of technology combined with his creative teaching style and genuine passion for the subject he teaches. “Being able to go over the curriculum and beyond. It’s not just presenting information in front of people, it’s engaging them and instilling ownership of that information. The magic of that,” says Kriellaars, who is widely known as one of Canada’s most vocal physical literacy advocates.

“When you have somebody who is dedicated and they are doing things … in an interesting way, that care message carries over to the kids.”

Henry G. Izatt student Matt Murphy, 14, says he’s learned more from Bridge’s gym classes than most others. “[Bridge’s classes] are more involved, I think. He does more teaching than other people have done in the past, as far as gym teachers,” says Murphy.

The Grade 9 student says the video motion analysis app that his teacher uses in class has helped him improve his basketball form. “We can play it back in slow motion,” says Murphy. “It certainly helped me become a better player.”

TeachingLIFE 28
If having tainted in the title of a course piques your interest, then law professor Michelle Gallant’s description of the topics covered will make it irresistible. The real-life events covered in class sounds like the plot line of a Hollywood crime drama. “It’s a course about dirty money moving around the globe,” says Gallant. “Where does it hide? What does it do, how do you move it, how do you find it?”

Since the events of Sept. 11, 2001, Canada, the U.S., and the world have formed a global impetus to track dirty money (the kind that funds terrorism as much as the kind that an entitled few shady insiders scuttled away after the 2008 market crash). These lawmakers have also sought to reclaim the fruits of criminal activity, and find a better way to counter large-scale tax evasion schemes. Students in Gallant’s course study these topics both internationally and domestically. They learn about the goings on—be it banking or other “interesting financial fun things” as Gallant describes them—in the major financial centres like New York, London, Liechtenstein and Switzerland and explore the challenges of governing these activities.

How money moves around the globe is rooted, in part, in culture. In many countries a pervasive fear of banks or their absence could mean money regularly crosses borders, in hand, from country-to-country. Gallant and her students look at how this might play out in Canada, where an international traveller loaded with cash would set off alarm bells at customs. The human rights dimension of these situations is also put under the spotlight.

While Gallant’s students cast their nets of inquiry out into the world to understand tainted finance and how different countries deal with it—good, bad or otherwise—she says she also reels the discussion back to what is happening locally, to show how Manitoba fits into the big picture.

Don’t dismiss a film genre that predates the Second World War as some wacky artifact of a bygone era. The screwball comedies of the ’30s and ’40s might appear to be lighthearted portraits of the pursuit of happiness but the themes they tackled—marriage, gender equality, the need to bridge cultural divides and social classes—are some of the same ones movies, and society, grapple with to this day.

What’s different, and what professor Faye McIntyre hopes her students find interesting, is how these ideas were portrayed on film seven-plus decades ago. Take marriage, for example.

“It’s a genre that really does put the fun in marriage,” says McIntyre. “You’re not going to see that nowadays. We’re so cynical about marriage. We don’t believe in romance anymore. But this is a film genre that makes marriage look like the best that you could possibly achieve in life and it’s just so refreshing. The couples are together by virtue of their capacity for fun. What more could you ask of life, really?”

Screwball comedies also represent a unique effort to put the male and female leads on par—uncommon for other American films of the era and not really seen since, says McIntyre. Silver screen legends Katharine Hepburn and Irene Dunne helped popularize the genre. “As soon as the ’50s hit, that was gone,” she says. “You still hear that today, that there are so few good roles for women, that they have less power on the screen than men do. And I think that’s true of the contemporary popular film.”

Students also get to see how battles of the sexes and sexual tension unfolded on screen in an era of strict censorship. Unlike the modern sex comedy, which employs vulgarity or blatantly depicts such scenarios, screwballs had to couch these frictions in dialogue; it was truly a war of words. The net effect is not lost on today’s viewer, however. McIntyre recalls how polarized her class was after watching the Spencer Tracy, Katharine Hepburn film Adam’s Rib (1949). “They really took sides about who was right and who was wrong,” says McIntyre. “I was pleasantly shocked ... that it still had so much to say to them about modern sexual relations.”

By Jeremy Brooks
COMMUNITY HEALTH SCIENCES STUDENT CLAUDYNE CHEVRIER, 31, ON GLOBAL HEALTH, THE PLAGHT OF SEX WORKERS IN WINNIPEG—AND THE MEANING BEHIND THAT TATTOO

Where are you from?
I’m from Montreal. I moved here three years ago for my PhD so I feel like I have my ‘Winnipegger card’.

Do you miss anything about Montreal?
I miss everything about Montreal.

Did anything strike you as weird about Winnipeg?
Maybe the weirdest thing is how it grows on you in the weirdest way. Now I love Winnipeg and I get angry when people make jokes about Winnipeg. I’m like, ‘What!? You can’t. You don’t even know.’ It’s funny.

What brought you here?
I moved here because I wanted to work with Rob Lorway, who is one of my advisors. My other advisory is Jamie [Blanchard].

You have a tattoo of a circle on your wrist. Can you tell us about that?
I actually got it in Winnipeg. Two years ago now, maybe. It’s stick and poke, so it’s imperfect.

What is ‘stick and poke’?
It’s done just with a needle. The reason it’s stick and poke is that I wanted it to be imperfect. That’s the significance for me. Imperfection is perfect. And I needed it on my wrist so I see it every day.

In a nutshell, what do you study?
I do a lot of things in global health. But for my [research] project, I am doing an ethnography of sex workers in Winnipeg; so I work on access to social services and health services for sex workers in this city. That’s the short answer. But then there’s always questions when I say this to people.

What is the best part of your job?
My research project. I changed it maybe a year and half ago so it would better reflect my values and the work that I do; I’m also an activist.

What sort of activism are you involved with?
I’m a sex workers rights activist.... In Manitoba, our humble goal is to challenge the ideas of the sex trade, especially the idea that it’s only sexual exploitation and that it is inherently violent, which is normally the only thing you hear. It’s more complicated than that.... I definitely believe in a harm-reduction perspective. Let’s give sex workers the resources they need without judging them.

What do you parents do?
My dad was a helicopter pilot. Well, he’s alive, but he retired from that and eventually he started selling helicopters, which sounds like a lie. But it’s a thing. And my mom is a nurse. So the health part comes from that a little bit. My parents are very adventurous people. They are awesome. They are much cooler than I will ever be. It’s very hard to live with. My parents, for their retirement … were in Vancouver for 10 years and they bought a sailboat and they sailed a boat down to Mexico. And that’s what they do for six months a year.

How do you compete with that? They are winning.

Have you received any good advice from your advisors?
Yes, I receive all sort of good advice, although I don’t think I take all of it. What I like about Jamie [Blanchard]… [is that he’s] very pragmatic. He understands complex ideas and I’m an over-thinker. It’s kind of my superpower, for better and for worse; it’s what I do. And he’s very good at seeing how that makes sense in the real world. And I love that. My other advisor, Rob [Lorway], helped me out a lot when I was doing my master’s—and one of the things he told me that I repeat constantly to people who are writing is, ‘This is not the work of your life. It’s just words on paper. Just do it. Just do it.’ I love that. It’s true. Because you get stuck. Just do it. Just write words on paper. You will re-work it a million times but just do it.

As told to Sean Moore
“Ultimately, it was my aim to put forth a sincere representation of my art school experience and at the same time, through the subjectivity of art, question it.”

—Ryan Amadore, a recent graduate from the School of Art.
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