Instructor Interview

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In what is to follow I will outline four things that I learned while conducting an interview with Amy Moll.

1. Over the course of her experience teaching at the college level she has seen shift in her pedagogical frame of mind. The shift can be summarized as a shift from exams to projects. This approach resonates with me. As an undergrad, with little to no engagement, I was able to get A’s/B’s through a multitude of test taking strategies that include: the clever anticipation of exam questions, the deduction of concepts from the premises of exam questions, the application of multiple-choice deduction, etcetera. This is a fun game, but it does not achieve any subject specific learning.

With that, I believe a project-focused curriculum, while it would certainly aggrieve my undergraduate self, could force students to engage personally with the material in a way that is more transformative, educational, and lasting. I will try to keep this in mind as I guide my students through their semester long projects.

1. It is important as a teacher to try different things. Amy mentioned observing other teachers to see different approaches. She also mentioned a way to sneak an honest course evaluation out of her students. That is, she asks them at the end of the course to write a letter to a future student of the course.

In hindsight, this clearly feel less subversive than explicitly putting your students into the position of professor critic. This critical position (I am guessing here) will likely result in either glowing praise, which does little to improve the teacher, or aggravated diatribes, which are probably too adversarial to improve the teacher. The subtle shift in prompt got more responses out of her students.

The lesson here for me is that you do not always know how a change in approach will result in practice. Therefore, it is most important to try new things and pay attention to the shifting outcomes.

1. Amy says that what she finds rewarding about teaching is observing those lightbulb moments in her students. Less acutely, she says that teachers can alter a student’s life, socioeconomically, for the better. She mentioned that she does not always recognize this in the short term and has received letters from students years later.

What I learned from this is to trust the process. An investment of time and energy into a student or mentee is not a fleeting act. It an investment into that person’s future that can pay exponential dividends for that person’s upward mobility and well-being.

1. Some more practical tips and philosophical advice that I will focus on as a result of this meeting includer the following:
   1. Show up
   2. Give here feedback to improve her teach (what are the kids not understanding, how can she improve.)
   3. Focus on what makes students learn, not how to teach
   4. Stay flexible
   5. When grading; have a clipboard of responses because you will repeat yourself.
   6. Day one of a course is critical for student engagement.
   7. Free coffee in MCMR 207.