

Teaching Reflection

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This reflection is just as difficult to write as the reflections for the “virtual semesters” of 2020-2021. Much of the academic year feels like a blur. Returning to in-person instruction after 18 months of virtual work was nerve-racking and stressful for students, faculty, and staff. Like many of my colleagues, I limited my hours on campus to the bare minimum, maintaining my availability to students virtually through Zoom, Teams, and the department Discord server. It took months to regain a level of comfort in a room full of people. While I tried to soldier on, I’m certain that my unease must have negatively impacted my performance in teaching. I’m fairly amazed that my student evaluations were as good as they were at the time.

My teaching experience was vastly improved through teaching WAYS 103 in both Fall 2021 and Spring 2022. The Fall 2021 class was an amazing group of students. They were prepared, eager to learn, and ready to talk. It was glorious. They were a gregarious bunch and they dove into the course with terrific enthusiasm. The spring class was a little more reserved but no less illuminating to work with. It was delightful to step outside my usual academic audience and share “my world” of computing with students who aren’t necessarily technical types.

Computer Science’s enrollments were hit hard by the pandemic and our classes were very small this year. Small class sizes have an up-side for the instructor and the students, since I can give each student much more time. However, the down-side is the scrutiny that low enrollment invites from administration. We hope that enrollments will recover as more students return to school or decide to begin college.

We are in the process of rebuilding what used to be a strong Computer Science community. The tight-knit community of students, faculty, and alumni took some serious damage during the pandemic. In this first year back to campus, students spent little time working in the department lab, the hub of our community. Students took much less advantage of my office hours than before, even once I returned to my “open door” policy from before the pandemic. I didn’t feel well connected with many of my students and felt at a loss to know how to address that issue. I hope that time will help.

As much as I try to insulate students from events and circumstances outside the classroom, this simply isn’t always possible. There were two very stressful situations during this year, one that began in the fall and the other in the spring. In the fall, the university undertook a process of academic realignment. This process created much stress and took much time and effort from faculty. While realignment wasn’t directly connected to teaching, the effect it had on me and the other Computer Science faculty must have affected our teaching. I worked extensively with Dean Gretchen Galbraith, and in April 2022, our programs were removed from probationary status.

In February 2022, I suffered the loss of my mother. I did my best to push forward and keep doing the work, but I know that my success was mixed at best. I am always grateful for the support of my colleagues, and that was a time when the feeling was amplified.