Ideas for Ending a Course Effectively

First-Year Faculty Seminar
October 15/16, 2020

Mike Pinter

mike.pinter@belmont.edu

Acknowledgment

Dr. Pete Giordano, Professor of Psychology at Belmont University, assisted in the development of this presentation.

Teaching Center Office Hour

for first-year and second-year faculty only

Tuesdays 11:00-12:00

https://belmontu.zoom.us/j/9499622042?pwd=K0VSVXNMS0dRL1k4MkNTMElhcnAvQT09

Interested in an individual consultation/conversation/chat?

Next week timeslots:

Monday 11:00-12:00 and 2:00-3:00

Tuesday 2:00-3:00

Friday 2:00-3:00

Retreat Opportunity for First-Year Faculty

Monday, November 30

9:00 a.m. – 12:00 noon via zoom

Facilitated by Judy Skeen

Circle of Trust format (associated with Parker Palmer)

An opportunity for guided reflection on your first semester at Belmont

Dispositions

Randy Bass suggested that in our efforts to educate the whole person, *the development of various dispositions may in fact be the "hard skills" central to the endeavor*:

- learning to learn
- critical thinking
- Creativity
- Curiosity
- Resilience
- Empathy
- Humility
- ethical judgment

*Rethinking Effective
Student Learning Experiences*
Patrick Terenzini
https://tomprof.stanford.edu/posting/1818

Fifty years of higher education research indicate that educationally effective student experiences:

- Involve encounters with challenging ideas or people.
- Require students' active engagement with the challenge
- Occur in supportive environments.
- Encourage active, real-world learning.
- Involve other people
- Invite or promote reflection

Connecting Beginning and Ending

- Syllabus as a "promise" (Bain, 2004)
  - Starting a course with its promise
  - Wrap to the ending of the course

- Course ending: a promise for the future
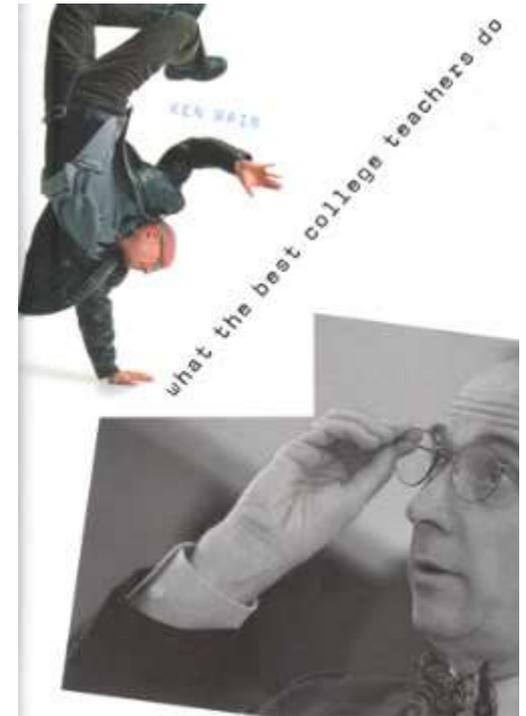
Characteristics of Good Course Endings
Lutsky (2010)

- Retains attention and interest

- Has integrity

- Conveys a lasting sense of meaning, purpose and accomplishment

- Provides closure

- Directs attention forward to new productive activity
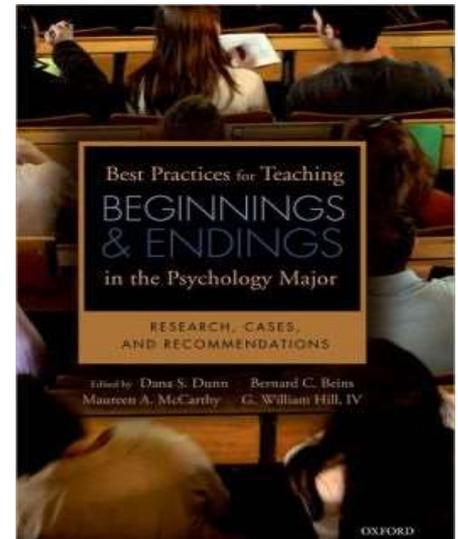
Ending a Course and Emotions
Lowman (1995)

- Anxiety about the final exam or other final activity

- Disappointment in performance

- Frustration with or fondness for the instructor

- Happiness that the course is ending

- Sadness about missing relationships that have developed

- "people have a powerful memory for endings"
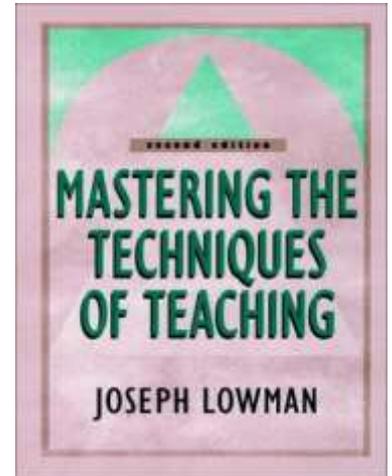
Pragmatic Considerations
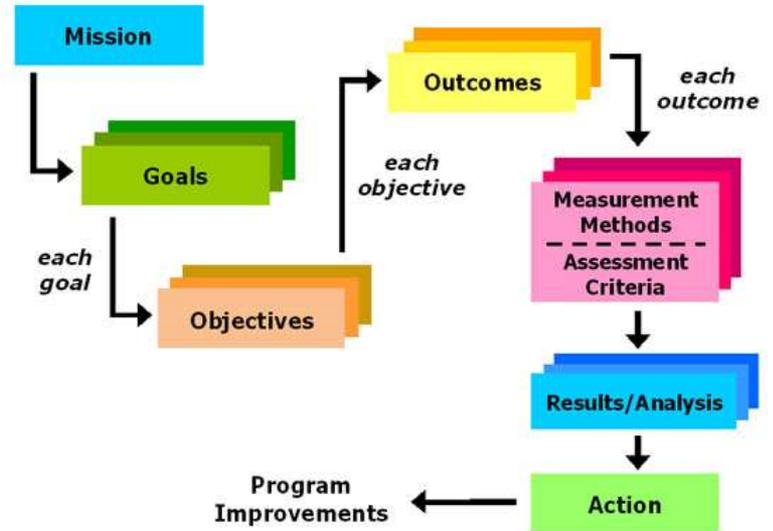

Required External Assessments

- ▪ Department
- ▪ University
- ▪ Accrediting Body

End-of-Semester Academic Calendar

- Unique features of Fall 2020
  - Debate at Belmont
  - Election Day
  - No Thanksgiving Break before finals

Other Challenges

- Team-taught courses

- Learning Community courses

- Difficult class – ready for it to end

- Fatigue from online/hyflex/zoom

- Instructor illness or emergency at the end of the course

Course End Opportunities

- Broad connections across the entire course

- Connections to voting/elections, the pandemic, public protests

- "Cumulative" observations

- Student learning reflections

- A final "mindset" emphasis
  - "fixed" versus "growth" (Dweck, 2007)

- Important student feedback for future framing of the course

End-of-Course Reflection Prompts

- What item from your work during the course most effectively demonstrates an accomplishment for you in this course? Give some reasons why.

- Describe one or two things about the course that were most helpful to your learning.

- Explain a specific connection or two that you've made between your work for this course and some part of your life outside of this course:
  - other academic courses,
  - personal,
  - spiritual, or
  - any other dimension of your life.

- Describe and briefly comment on an experience of "struggle" for you initially that eventually led to "deep learning" because you persisted

- Has your perception of mathematics and its place in your world changed as a result of this course? Has the course impacted your views about any of the following: education and learning, critical thinking, yourself?

What I hope you remember from Abnormal Psychology

- **intentionally create a good social support network for yourself**
- (the corollary: be part of social support for others)
- create time and space for your own mental health
- spread psychological health!

Ending YOUR Fall 2020 Course

- Consider a specific course you are teaching this semester.

- What can you do to structure the course ending in ways that enhance student learning?

A Take-Home Final Exam Question

At the beginning of the course, I suggested "seeing the unseen" as a metaphor for an intended course outcome for you.

Develop a several paragraph response that explores "seeing the unseen" as you have observed it develop during the course.

Alternatively, offer your own metaphor for the course and provide support for that metaphor.

A Take-Home Final Exam Question

There are several places during the course where we encountered <u>difficulties</u>, <u>uncertainties</u> or <u>impossibilities</u> within mathematics.

Comment on **at least four** such problems or concepts; include what we seem to know and what limitations are encountered. What do you see as implications, broadly speaking, that follow from the limitations of mathematics?

Some additional Take-Home Final Exam Prompts

- Take a photograph of something in your surroundings (or use a photo you have previously taken) that captures, at least partially, the "essence" of our course. Describe how or why you associate the photo with the course.

- Imagine that Gödel and Mandelbrot were together for a conversation about their major contributions to mathematics. Describe the highlights of their conversation.

- Choose one of the following short readings and develop a several paragraph response. Briefly develop some connections from the reading to our course and, if you wish, to your overall academic experience at Belmont. In your response, you may choose to agree or disagree with the primary points expressed by the author.
  - (i) Read the section entitled "Intellectual Virtues," pp. 196-201 in *The Second Mountain: The Quest for a Moral Life* by David Brooks.
  - (ii) Read the "Conclusion" chapter, pp. 517-524, in *Leonardo Da Vinci* by Walter Isaacson.

Write a letter to your students

In-class comprehensive exam "reference sheet"
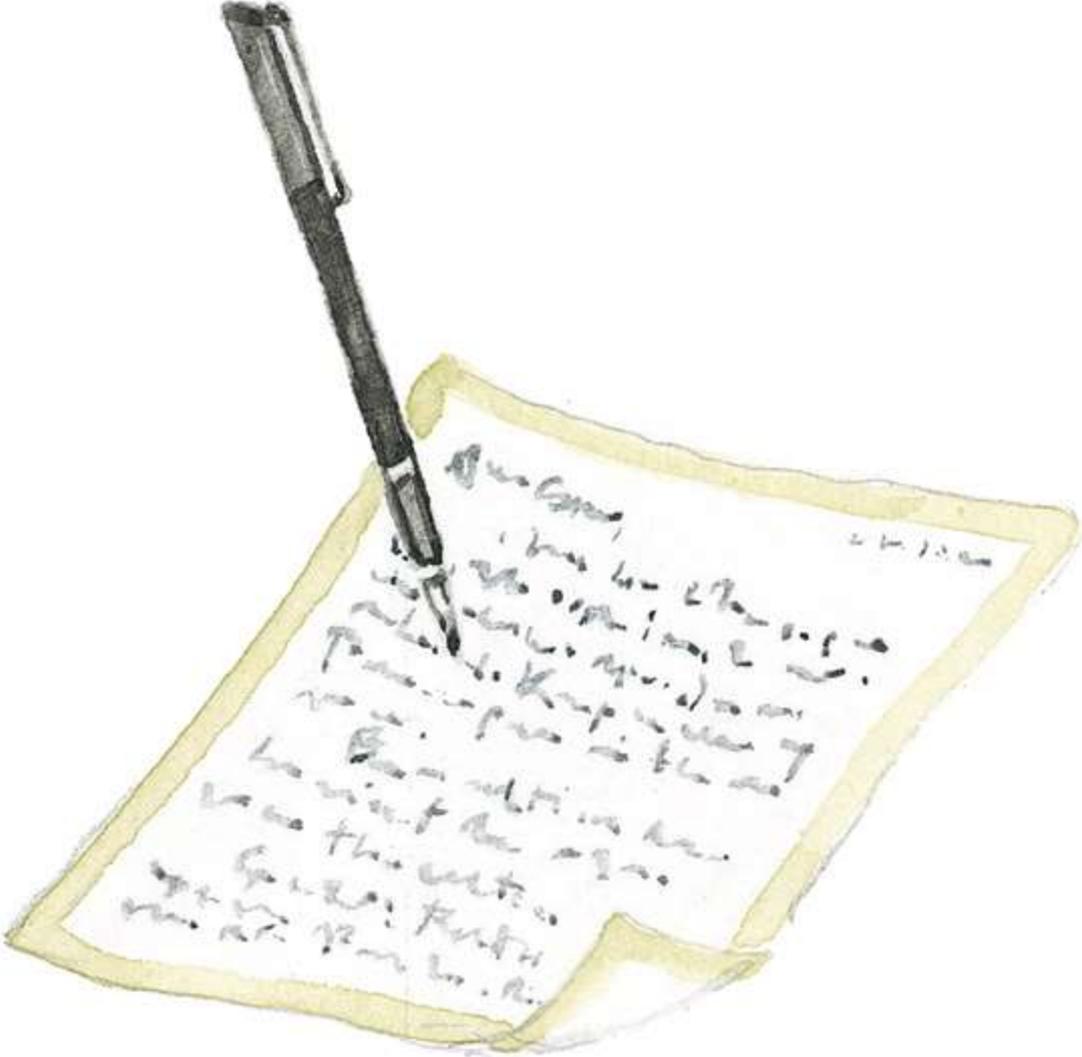
Assessment of Effectiveness

- Consider student work in connection with Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

- Use student work to help with revising ILOs for the next iteration of the course

You can't fix at the end of the semester what you bungled at the beginning.
Tom Angelo (Lilly 2013)

An Opportunity for SoTL

Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

- Note changes you implement for ending a course

- Track and Compare overall course outcomes
  - For your students
  - For you

- Note impact on overall course design

Some Conclusions

- Be intentional about course endings

- Close the loop from beginning to end

- Start small and experiment

- Start this semester!

Resources

- Bain, Ken (2004). *What the Best College Teachers Do*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

- Darby, F., and Lang, J. (2019). *Small teaching online: Applying learning science in online classes*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

- Duffy, D. K., & Jones, J. W. (1995). *Teaching within the rhythms of the semester*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

- Dweck, Carol. (2007). *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*. New York: Ballantine.

- Lang, James (2016). *Small teaching: Everyday lessons from the science of learning.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

- Lowman, J. (1995). *Mastering the techniques of teaching (2nd ed.)*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

- Lutsky, N. (2010). Teaching psychology's endings: The simple gifts of a reflective close. In D. S. Dunn, B. C. Beins, M. A. McCarthy, & G. W. Hill (Eds.), *Best practices for teaching beginnings and endings in the psychology major* (pp. 331-345). New York: Oxford University Press.

- Walvoord, B., and Anderson, V. (2010). *Effective grading: A tool for learning and assessment in college (2nd ed.)*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.