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Lately, I have moved away from the traditional, uni-directional, teacher-to-student flow of information in lectures. I place a premium on getting information out of my students' heads rather than just putting it in. Certainly, I have great content to share from the world of physiology, pharmacology, biochemistry, and neuroscience, with many examples to help the material inhabit the students' daily lives. But what is invigorating for me as a teacher is to see the information applied by the students as they make their own reasoned predictions.

In order to help my teaching to grow, I'm an avid consumer of education-related seminars at HKU, and of the teaching and learning academic literature. I have applied retrieval practice, frequent low stakes testing, and audience response systems in distinctive ways in my classes. I enjoy course design, the scholarship of teaching and learning, learning-related data analysis, writing, and faculty-to-faculty pedagogy outreach just as much as the in-person classroom experience.

I've been fortunate to end up in HKU's Common Core Curriculum. It has been a great fit for my ability in finding depth, breadth, and accessibility in scientific content, and receptive to my pitching of unique and multidisciplinary course ideas. I have been able to deliver material in a way that fulfills both majors with a lot of incoming biology background, and non-majors with no prior background. This is a delicate balance, but it has been borne out in my classes that students of all backgrounds can indeed grasp relatively complex biology, if encouraged to adopt a logical approach. Having the opportunity to tackle both the lectures and tutorials ensures a great alignment of content and increased communication with students, which then carries over into large lectures with a sense of familiarity, and more important, accountability on the students' behalf.

I benefitted greatly from the wonderful teachers that I have had in my past, for content, process, application, and inspiration. Elements of each of them continue to live on in my classroom approaches today. A wide group of collaborators from all across HKU make my job stimulating and fulfilling.



STUDENTS' WORDS OF APPRECIATION

My first experience with Dr Gavin Porter was during CCST9046 The Science of The Mind-Body-Health Relationship. Gavin's classes were always one of my favorites – with his expertise in physiology and pharmacology, he never failed to make biology interesting for science majors and non-science majors alike. His instruction is interactive and lively, and he always reaches out to students with no background in science by way of creative examples, analogies, and illustrations. He manages to capture the interest of students from different backgrounds, giving everybody something new from outside of their major. Gavin brings together a strong team of instructors with different fields of expertise, and discusses not only solid science, but also its impacts on the society, the ethics involved, and the humanity of it all. Throughout class, Gavin encourages us to apply the science we learn in critically approaching issues that we encounter in daily life, an ability that the Common Core Curriculum is designed to cultivate. My class with Gavin was as great an example of a Common Core Curriculum as the University could have developed for the series.

What makes Gavin a great teacher and mentor is not only his excellence in instruction, but also his care for the learning experience and development of students. Knowing that students without a background in science may feel nervous in his class, he always talks in a way that dismisses their worry and encourages questions as often as possible. Gavin delivers all the tutorial sessions himself and remembers the names of every single student in class. He keeps track of our progress and gives prompt, detailed, and personalised suggestions after each assessment to help us improve. Unsurprisingly, Gavin's courses are very popular, and his CCST9046 class is one of the best rated by students.

Gavin's devotion to education and mentorship is not limited to the classroom. Upon learning that I was planning to pursue PhD studies in the US after graduating from HKU, Gavin shared his experiences during graduate school application and gave me invaluable insights into the necessary preparations I needed to make. He helped me tremendously with my application documents. Gavin has been an amazing mentor and I feel very fortunate to have studied from him.

WANG Zhongmin
BSc 2016

Dr Porter has been the lecturer for two of my Common Core courses, namely, CCST9052 Coffee, Cigarettes, and Alcohol and CCGL9053 Suicide: Risks, Research, and Realities, and there're good reasons that I went back for a second course taught by him.

Having been an arts student through and through, I'd always been held back by relatively science-heavy Common Core courses. Dr Porter's teaching style and method, however, rid me of the unnecessary fear by breaking complex biology down into basic building blocks, organising them in an escalating manner, going over crucial key points, and applying easy-to-understand yet rather appropriate metaphors throughout his teaching. More importantly, Dr Porter managed to deliver all this in an interactive and fun way. Course content aside, the assessments are also designed to guide us to the proposed learning outcomes step by step, with Dr Porter providing timely and constructive feedback along the way.

Jackie XU Qianyue
BA, current student

Dr Porter is always responsible and thoughtful inside and outside the classroom. He not only taught the fundamental knowledge we were supposed to know in a certain area but also delivered it in an interesting way by linking the theoretical to daily practice, which was well aligned with the mission of the Common Core. He led us to retrieve the materials we learned in the last lecture at the beginning of the class and summarised the whole class with a special section called 'Take-home Messages'. This set an example for us to transform those fundamental concepts into practical implementation.

In addition to the class, Dr Porter is approachable all the time and can provide us with a timely response, and he is so dedicated that sometimes he could list a number of articles related to our topic, even if our topic was still at a trial stage.

I would like to take this great opportunity to express my thanks to Dr Porter for his great devotion into teaching and the inspiration he had brought to us, for which he definitely deserves the most outstanding teacher in HKU.

Andy GAO Mingyuan
BEng, current student

Dr Porter is not only the first teacher in HKU who remembered my name, but also the reason why Wednesday became my favorite weekday. Although I am not a Science student, I was very lucky that I got to take Dr Porter's two Common Core courses in the past year. He is the kind of teacher who knows exactly what his students need and how to help them make the most of his courses.

I took Dr Porter's CCST9052 Coffee, Cigarettes, and Alcohol course in Year One. It took me much courage to select a CCST course since I was not good at and not interested in science-related study. However, he interpreted these seemingly scary contents into interesting and inspiring knowledge which are easy and delightful for me to absorb. And he did not stop there. He is always innovating. Last semester, he helped to open a new course called Suicide: Risks, Research, and Realities. Seeing suicide from different perspectives really provoked my own thinking towards this issue. He also mentored us in person and provided us with a lot of insights and visions. Many students I know who have taken his class almost universally gush over their learning experience.

Valen YANG Chenyu
BBA(Acc&Fin), current student