

# Thriving in Academe

## Becoming a Master Teacher

Faculty must move beyond content and get to know their students.

BY SUSAN AMBROSE AND MICHAEL BRIDGES, CARNEGIE MELLON UNIVERSITY

Although many faculty have not been trained as teachers, we can all acquire new skills and improve as teachers.

Research shows that the development of mastery or expertise in any domain takes at least 10 years. Experts possess a great deal of knowledge, have logged many hours of persistent practice in their field, and have received adequate guidance and feedback. Teaching is no different; it requires knowledge, sustained dedication, and support to move toward and realize expertise.

To become master teachers, faculty members need a knowledge base not only in their content area, but also in a variety of other areas. Here we focus on one aspect of that knowledge base—understanding students in multiple ways that represent the complex human beings they are. Drawing from

research in cognitive science, social psychology, and education, we can learn more about how students develop intellectually, socially, and emotionally, as well as begin to understand our students through the lens of the culture and history in which they were raised.

Our focus, then, is on three areas that have not received as much attention with faculty as they deserve: the psychosocial development of students; the integration of cognitive theory into teaching practice; and the impact of the political, social, and economic status of the 1980s and 1990s on current college students (termed the Millennials). This knowledge can greatly impact the way we teach and design courses.



### MEET THE AUTHORS

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## Tales from Real Life

### SEARCHING FOR ANSWERS

A few years ago, a number of faculty colleagues shared with us their concerns about their students' attitudes and behaviors. So we contacted all faculty to see if there was enough interest to warrant a series of meetings to explore these concerns. We received replies from 100 faculty members, all of them anxious to participate.

At the start of each meeting, we asked colleagues to identify troublesome behaviors, distinguishing issues that have been problematic yet consistent over the past one or two decades from issues that have arisen or seem more pronounced over the past four years. The response was a set of laments that resonated with everyone in the room: students today possess weaker vocabulary and math skills; have inadequate research skills; are more demanding and yet take less responsibility; don't take notes in class; skip homework assignments; come to class late or leave early; and are less interested in exploration and more interested in "just wanting the answer."

As the groups reflected on the commonalities across disciplines and student rank (i.e., freshman through senior), colleagues noted that today's students do seem different from past generations in many ways, yet there are some fundamental problematic issues that remain constant. "Help us understand and deal with both sets of issues," our colleagues pleaded.

Our answer? Get to know your students—not just their classroom behavior, but their motivations, interests, and cultural backgrounds.

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