



# White Board

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Center for Effective Undergraduate Teaching (864) 388-8426

## What Kind of Career Advice Should We Give Our Students?

MY SECOND COUSIN will soon graduate with a degree in graphic design. Yet his heart isn't in his major—it's in stand-up comedy. He first majored in communications, found that "boring," contemplated a theatre major, and finally settled on graphic design. His parents supported the graphic design choice. It seems like an employable option.

He arrived at college very knowledgeable about comedians. He'd read biographies and autobiographies, listened many times over to the routines of his favorites, and could talk at length about what made a particular comedian great. All through college he's worked on his routines, writing new ones, and revising the old ones. In conversations and emails, he plays with language and works hard to make you laugh.

Comedy is his passion, and he's become pretty good at stand up. He no longer uses notes or freezes in front of an audience. He's found his way to a kind of cerebral humor that is funny for the way it flies from one unexpected image to the next. His jokes don't always engender big laughs because they take time to figure out, and his delivery is sometimes too fast for his content. He hasn't arrived, but he certainly has potential.

But as I sit across the table from him in a funky restaurant, I hear myself talking about the perils of following this dream. "You're

going to have to find a day job and keep it." "You're probably going to be poor for a long time." "You need to have your head on straight—stand-up comedy is done in the presence of alcohol, for sure, and perhaps drugs as well." "Yes, you need to be in a big city, but it expensive to live there. Try for a city with good public transportation." During my steady stream of advice, he's enormously polite, listening intently, and nodding appropriately, but does he really understand how hard it's going to be?

I drive home after seeing his latest routine delivered to an audience of about 20 people (mostly other would-be comedians) in a dark, dingy lounge with an unpleasant odor. As I'm driving, I think about teachers as mentors, guides, and coaches. And I wonder how much responsibility we have to offer guidance and how we find our way to good advice. Are all passions worth pursuing? Will my cousin make it big? Will he even make a living at it? Will he have to give up his dream and settle for something other than what he loves?

It's hard to know what advice to offer when someone's pursuing a passion that's fraught with risk. But I've also looked into the faces of lots of students in college with no passion at all. I advised them in my office: "What would you like to do?" "Accounting." "It's a one word answer. "Why?" "I can get a good job." "But will you like doing accounting every day of your life?" "I don't know. I guess I'll have to wait and see." Should I try to shake out that complacency? Wait-and-see attitudes don't usually deliver lives lived with excitement and purpose.

Then there were those students whose motivation was not for what they loved, but what they thought they wanted—job security, good benefits, and a decent salary. Daily we encounter people who made the choice to go with these types of secure jobs. Very often they're

bored, do their job poorly, and work with no sense of purpose or joy. Didn't they need a teacher who challenged that motivation and helped them uncover alternatives?

We stand with students at those times and places when they make decisions that set the course of their lives. We once were in their shoes, and many of us can remember a teacher who shared advice and insights that helped us see the path ahead more clearly. Usually we can see a bit farther down the road than our students or maybe we've been down a road that looks a lot like the one ahead of them. Do we tell them what we see? Do they need reminders that what we're trying to get them to learn is something they need to know? Should we keep after them to use what they've learned and to practice their skills to the point of exhaustion? Should we tell them to follow their dreams, even those that require great effort and lots of luck?

*Maryellen Weimer, PhD; Teaching Professor Blog; "What Kind of Career Advice Should We Give Our Students?"; Faculty Focus; December 4, 2013; [ <http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/teaching-professor-blog/what-kind-of-career-advice-should-we-give-our-students/> ]; January 6, 2013.*

### CAMPUS VIEW



University Opens - Jan 2  
Classes Begin - Jan 13  
Martin Luther King Day - Jan 20  
Faculty Informational Meeting - Jan 22

### WHITE BOARD

2013-2014 Publication Dates  
First Monday of the Month

September 2	March 3
October 7	April 7
November 4	May 5
December 2	June 2
January 6	July 7
February 3	August 4

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## Start-up Anxiety: Professor Shares His Fears as a New Semester Begins

IT IS 6:00 A.M., Tuesday, August 28. My first day of class is this Thursday. It's the end of summer, and once again, I am nervous about teaching. I just woke up from a bad dream. I was standing in front of a new class, totally unprepared. I think I had my clothes on, but there was nothing—I mean nothing—in my head.

Now I'm wide awake and trying to think through what I will do on the first day—actually, the first couple of days. My head has my stomach going. Or is it the other way around? Will I forget all I've learned about teaching, my content, and everything else that holds a class together? The 40 students who have signed up for the class will be expecting me to teach. If I do not come up with something interesting or demanding or commanding, they will drift away—either mentally or physically—and I will have failed.

I have often said to my friends who don't teach that the week before fall classes begin is a tough time for me. The students are coming back and the campus is abuzz. They are moving into the residence halls, meeting new people, and getting reading to start a new year. They are all revved up. It's like a party—actually, in many places, it is a party just before classes, and then the work of the semester starts.

As for what my job is, let me share the options I find myself considering:

- Have them like me
- Have them think I like them
- Have them think I am funny
- Have them think I know what I am doing so they will learn
- Have them fear me because I know what will be on the exams and they do not
- Not bother myself about what they think at all and just lecture

Emotions aside, I think my real job at the start of a class is to help the students relax so they can learn and see if I can get them to buy into how I approach the class. They have chosen to take it. For a few, it is required; but for three-quarters, it's an elective. Perhaps they've opted to take it because they've heard good things about the course. Maybe they're smitten by the title "Introduction to Environmental Studies & Agriscience." More likely, they have heard that I feed them or that I don't give exams. They will find out that the course requires them to work. Right off the bat, they'll be writing about

the assigned readings and the connections they see between those readings and their experiences.

Here is the kicker: It is the end of a wonderful summer for me. I have been doing some research and writing and spending time with my family. I haven't been thinking about my knowledge of the big topics that we tackle in this course—energy, water, population growth, and environmental protection—or about creativity and how cooperation beats competition in learning. I'm even more concerned (afraid is probably more accurate) that I've lost my touch with groups—I won't be able to get these new groups of students to interact constructively.

I'm not doing very well with this at home. This week I've heard myself yelling at my kids. And I see how ineffective that approach is. Maybe I have lost my touch—maybe I can't teach in a friendly way anymore. Maybe I'll have to lock into just plain lectures and act like a sergeant of knowledge.

I want my classes to be fun—places where students receive good information and real insights that slide down easily. I want my students to grow and see how learning can be connected to things they already know. I want them to be creative and find a piece of themselves in the readings I have selected. Is there a textbook that tells teachers how to do this?

The scariest part for me, despite my best intentions, is that I am not an extrovert. I can't just tell myself that I'm ready, that I'm looking forward to class, that I can do this, that it will be easy, and that everything I need to know will come to me the moment class begins. I am way too cautious and too much of an introvert to feel that way two days out. So I wake up early and try to ease my twisted stomach by jotting down some planning notes for the first couple of days. At this point I can't see beyond them, and so I turn to writing about my pre-semester anxieties in the hope that I might sleep better. It doesn't help, but it does rev me up some more. So maybe I am getting ready. Maybe I can make it happen. I've got two days left to worry and wonder.

*Peter Kakela, PhD; Teaching and Learning; Start-up Anxiety: Professor Shares His Fears as a New Semester Begins; Faculty Focus; December 54, 2013; [ <http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/teaching-and-learning/start-up-anxiety-professor-shares-his-fears-a-a-new-semester-begins/> ]; January 6, 2013.*

## Apps for News: NPR, BBC, and TED



OK, I ADMIT IT, I am a news junkie, but I am careful about where I get my fix. For news, I typically turn to National Public Radio (NPR) and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). For technology-related topics, I go to TED. I frequently watch the traditional network news but when I am on the move and away from a television, these three are my go-to apps for staying current.

All are very easy to use and completely free whether you are an Apple person or an Android person. NPR is accessible on any any mobile device. BBC News has apps for Apple and Android users in the iTunes store and Google Play respectively. TED serves both types of users as well, iTunes and Google Play.

Using any of the three apps involve selecting a story and tapping the play screen or swiping to acquire more information about various stories. Information from all three sources usually find their way into my Technology and Society class and frequently, into my Computer and Emerging Technologies class. I cannot say enough about the quality of the stories—the detailed information provided, the balanced approach, and the usefulness of what is shared.

**Summary:** Having a credible source of information provides a leg up for those of us looking to connect the content we present to students in our classroom. NPR, BBC, and TED allow educators to present a real-world perspective that is a bit more objective than what's found elsewhere. There is a lot of bias in news stories and some of what is presented as news represents nothing more than opinions that polarize. I am not saying that the three news services listed above are always 100 percent bias-free but they are among the best for providing reliable/trustworthy information.

*Dave Yearwood, PhD; App of the Week; Apps for News: NPR, BBC, and TED; Faculty Focus; October 25, 2013; [ <http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/app-of-the-week/apps-for-news-npr-bbc-and-ted/> ]; January 6, 2013.*