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Please send your contributions and comments to tlc@unisim.edu.sg, with the header: “Communitas Contribution”.
Dear Colleagues,

This July, the Teaching & Learning Centre (TLC) crosses the three-year mark. While work at the centre has settled into a regular pattern, all of us at TLC are constantly looking for ways to improve on what we are doing for teaching and learning at UniSIM. And this means reviewing, revamping, retiring, or even adding to our current range of online courses and workshops for associates and students.

Recently, we added SD106 Self-regulation Skills and SD108 Essential English Skills to our current range of student support modules. Also in the pipeline is the development of three new training modules, mostly for new associates. More information about the courses and training requirements will be provided in the coming months. So do keep a look out for the announcement on the associate portal.

As we continue with our efforts to refine our teaching and learning support, please feel free to give us feedback and suggestions on areas that you think could be further improved or introduced.

Moving forward, TLC will increasingly shift its focus to education research within UniSIM, and there are plans to study the efficacy of the new iStudyGuide initiative (see page 4 for more on the iStudyGuide). Additionally, our faculty will continue to work closely with associates interested in doing action research and contributing to the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) at UniSIM.

Already underway and contributing to SoTL is the Associate Faculty Champion (AFC) programme, piloted in 2012 with two associates. In this programme, associates propose and implement creative approaches for enhancing learning within their discipline (and classes), under the supervision of a TLC faculty member.

Although specifically designed for a particular course, these instructional approaches are aimed at helping students learn better and/or hone a particular skill, e.g., critical thinking. Often, the instructional method is generic enough to be adapted to the needs of other disciplines.

Come October, our 2012 AFCs – Shireen Chitran (HDSS) and Spandana Kanjula (SBIZ) – will share their projects and the outcomes from their findings. Do try to attend the session, as you are likely to draw useful ideas from the discussion.

In this issue, the conversation continues to revolve around ways to make our students’ learning experience an enjoyable one. K. Thirumaran and J. Selva Raj distill lessons from their teaching experiences; while Cedric Chew challenges us to honestly reflect on and identify our shortcomings as instructors, and to actively take steps to better ourselves as instructors.

Our Registrar, Assoc Prof Yip Woon Kwong, also offers us a peek at the meticulous planning behind-the-scenes that contributes to the provision of adequate administrative support and a congenial environment for our students.

Finally, do remember to join us for the Faculty Learning Symposium on September 20-21. We look forward to seeing you there!

With warmest regards,

Dr Selina Lim
Editor
“What is your role as Registrar at UniSIM?”

I’ve been asked this question many times since I joined UniSIM in 2008. However, before I list the various roles I perform as a Registrar at UniSIM, here’s the definition of “Registrar” from the Cambridge Dictionaries Online. The Registrar is described as follows: “At some colleges, an official in charge of exams, keeping records, and new students”.

This definition only defines a part of my portfolio at UniSIM. Essentially, my main role as the Registrar covers all aspects of the administration that facilitate the academic journey of a student from admission to graduation and beyond, including the cultivation of strong relationships with our alumni.

Within my portfolio are three Offices – namely the Office of Admissions, Office of Academic Services, and Office of Student and Alumni Relations – which take charge of nine departments between them. These departments handle the many processes that stand between the two milestones of admission and graduation. Some of the processes are repetitive from semester to semester – for example, course registration for students – while others may need to be put in place as a result of changes in curriculum, policies (at both institutional and/or national levels) and procedures.

The functions of the three Offices are as follows:

**The Office of Admissions** administers matters pertaining to the promotion of the university’s undergraduate programmes, student recruitment activities, admission of new students, and management of the scholarships, sponsorships and financial aid.

**The Office of Academic Services** provides academic-related services to faculty, teaching associates and students in the areas of course registration, course materials management, class
scheduling, assignment and examinations, student records, curriculum administration, and appointment of teaching associates.

**The Office of Student and Alumni Relations** acts as a “bridge” between UniSIM students, alumni and schools/administrative departments and serves as the first point-of-contact for students and alumni. It also provides a range of student support and services aimed at building relations with our alumni. The establishment of alumni relations and their affinity with the University is important because our alumni body is one of the pillars that represent what the University stands for. As stakeholders of the University, our alumni will increasingly play important roles to propel their alma mater to greater heights and in strengthening the character of the University.

Because our students are typically working professionals and adult learners, UniSIM adopts a unique flexible and multi-modal teaching and learning approach so that they are able to study at their own pace, place and space. This requires the administrative units to meticulously plan and manage the processes of course registration, procurement and allocation of resources, scheduling of classes and examinations, and distribution of study materials to students before the commencement of each semester. Our challenge lies in the very tight turnaround time of two months – between the end-of-semester examinations and the start of the next semester – within which the administrative departments need to ensure that all the necessary preparations are made. Added to the complex matrix of inter-related administrative processes are the rapid changes to existing programme offerings and the introduction of new ones.

To ensure that things run smoothly, I conduct regular meetings with my three directors and nine department managers to deliberate on how the repetitive processes in each semester can be improved or enhanced. We also brainstorm strategies to effectively deal with the necessary follow-up due to changes in curriculum or academic and administrative policies. The primary goal of the Registrar’s Office is to achieve greater customer satisfaction in the delivery of administrative support to more than 13,000 students during their academic journey in UniSIM, and to the four Schools in the delivery of their respective courses/programmes.

Given the characteristics of our adult students who have to juggle their studies with work and family commitments, the attainment of this goal is not an easy one. Nevertheless, my colleagues are always seeking opportunities to innovate or fine-tune our internal processes to meet the expectations of our stakeholders.

All of us at UniSIM are involved in the mission to provide tertiary education to working professionals and adult learners through a uniquely designed learning experience that equip them with skills and knowledge for a better future. Our contributions in this mission, be it in the area of academic teaching or in the slew of support services, bring with it the satisfaction that we are playing an important part in the education of determined learners who will eventually contribute towards the advancement of Singapore and the region at large.

A graphical representation of offices under the Registrar.
In July, students enrolled in 50 courses across all four schools will be provided with an iStudyGuide (or interactive study guide) as part of their course materials.

The iStudyGuide is one of UniSIM’s most recent initiatives to support flexible learning, enabling our students to learn anytime, anywhere. With the iStudyGuide, students and associates can download and read study materials on-the-go using their mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets.

The iStudyGuide is essentially an electronic publication, with multimedia features and links to additional resources that enhance student learning. It aggregates all learning materials associated with a course – e.g., chunked lesson recordings, formative assessments, lecture slides – in one place.

Similar to an eBook that you buy online, the iStudyGuide allows the reader to annotate, highlight, and share notes and queries about the material with the instructor, fellow classmates, or study group.

The iStudyGuide is readable on both Android and iOS devices, and can also be downloaded onto the desktop or laptop. All that’s required is the right browser to read the materials. (For more information on the appropriate browser for your device, click onto http://www.unisim.edu.sg/mobile/iStudyGuide.html)

In the semesters to come, UniSIM will progressively add to the current core of iStudyGuides, with the eventual aim of providing iStudyGuides for all courses. TLC will also be conducting studies to look at how best to further improve on and enhance the design, learning elements, and instructional possibilities with the iStudyGuide.

Your views are important to us. Those of you who have been assigned to teach a course with an iStudyGuide in July 2013, do check out the iStudyGuide and feel free to give us your feedback on how it might be improved. A short survey has also been incorporated at the end of the iStudyGuide to collect your feedback.

You may also want to drop us an email at tlc@unisim.edu.sg on how you have used the iStudyGuides in your teaching, and how your students have creatively tapped on the potential of the iStudyGuides to learn better.

We look forward to hearing from you!
Workshop On Copyright Matters

TLC is organising a workshop on copyright, which will address some of the common questions that have been raised on the use of materials in course development, uploading of readings and multimedia materials to MyUnisim Blackboard, as well as the airing of videos and music in the face-to-face seminar sessions.

The workshop – “Permissible use of materials: Intellectual property rights, copyrights, and copycats” – will be held on 6 July 2013, between 2 pm and 4 pm. (Do note that 6 July is also the day of the Welcome session-cum-lunch for new and existing associates.) The two-hour session will be facilitated by Associate Professor Darren Koh, Head for the Master of Taxation programme with the School of Business.

Student Support

TLC is organising a full-day event for students on 20 July 2013. The full-day event, conducted by TLC faculty, will focus on essential skills for academic success at UniSIM.

During the morning session (9 am to 12 pm), students will learn about time management and good study habits and skills. The afternoon session (1 pm to 4 pm) will focus on the basics of academic writing, including organisation of ideas, structure of essay, and soundness of argument.

TLC held a similar student event on January 19 that saw 169 attending “Successful Learning at UniSIM,” and 300 turning up for “Introduction to Academic Writing.”

Do inform your students of this event, as they will likely benefit from the tips shared during the two sessions.

Faculty Learning Symposium

Solve real world problems with your students. Make learning authentic and relevant by bringing everyday issues and encounters into your seminar discussions.

This year, the Faculty Learning Symposium (FLS) will revolve around the theme, “Making Learning Authentic.” You will hear from keynote speakers who will share their experiences in designing, delivering, and researching authentic learning experiences. The two-day event will be held on September 20-21, so mark your calendars.

Pre-FLS workshops, held on September 20, will be conducted by our international keynote speaker, Professor Jan Herrington of Murdoch University. More details about the programme will be available in August.

Family Day

TLC will be holding the annual Family Day in November. So keep a look-out for the details in our email in October.
Out Of The Box

The Lessons Steve Jobs Taught Us

On 6th October 2011, at the age of 56, Steve Paul Jobs, CEO of Apple, passed away from pancreatic cancer. Throughout the whole world, Apple-fanatics poured in their tributes to one of the world’s most innovative thinker.

“The world has lost a visionary,” President Barack Obama said. “And there may be no greater tribute to Steve’s success than the fact that much of the world learned of his passing on a device he invented.”

Not since Lady Diana’s death, has the world been shaken by a person’s demise. To technology freaks and geeks, he is a demigod.

When Apple floated its IPO, it created 300 millionaires, more than any company in history. Apple is the most admired company in United States from 2008 to 2010. In 2010, Apple’s market capitalisation exceeded that of Microsoft. In 2011, it exceeded that of Exxon, making it the world’s Number One.

Boldness, passion for technology and design, and the ability to inspire others made Jobs’ creation possible. From virtually nothing, the personal computer became the fastest growing industry in history. In one decade, Apple reached $1 billion in sales. However, Jobs’ path was not a bed of roses. He suffered many setbacks on the way to fame.

Here are some lessons we can glean from the man himself.

Have a vision early
During his 10th grade at Homestead High in Cupertino, Jobs told his then-girlfriend, Chris-Ann Brennan, that he was going to be a millionaire.

At Apple, he envisioned a computer with a television, a typewriter keyboard and a disk for storage. Computers will be as common and useful as telephones. Every person can afford at least one. At Pixar, his vision was to tell stories and to make the world’s first animated feature film.

In your early stages of your business, craft convincing vision and mission statements. This will serve as a useful guide for your later ventures.

Do business early
As a kid, Jobs bought a stereo receiver at a garage sale, fixed it and resold at a profit. As a youth, he bought underpriced parts at a fleamart and resold to his boss at an electronic store where he worked part-time for a profit.

He built an illegal device to make free long distance calls. He called Ritz Hotel in London to make reservations and called the Pope at the Vatican pretending to be Henry Kissinger.

He sold another one to the Berkeley College where Wozniak was attending. Wozniak and Jobs produced a game, Breakout, for Atari, in only four nights.

When you start business early, you have the energy to fulfill your dreams while having the time to correct your mistakes.

Passion, Not Money
The key driver of a business must be passion, not profits. When Jobs returned to Apple, he was more interested in getting Apple back on track than in getting richer.

In the words of the man, “I was worth over a million dollars when I was 23 and over 10 million when I was 24 and over a 100 million when I was 25 and it wasn’t important because I never did it for the money”

Upon returning to Apple, Jobs terminated unprofitable projects like Newton, Cyberdog and OpenDoc.

If you do what you love and time passes so quickly, that is passion.

Look for the right partner
A 16 year-old Jobs was introduced to 21 year-old Wozniak and they began attending meetings a Homebrew Computer Club.

Jobs was working as a technician in Atari which offered him $100 for every chip that was reduced. Jobs had little knowledge of circuit board design and so he made a deal with Wozniak to split the money between them. Wozniak reduced 50 chips in a design so tight that it was impossible to produce at the assembly line.

While Jobs was a persuasive salesman with a gift of the gab, Wozniak was a computer genius. The Apple I personal computer kit was personally hand-built by Wozniak.

Teamwork is essential. Choose the right partner and team members who can complement you.

Believe in your dreams
When Jobs and Wozniak started Apple, many laughed at them. They said they were too young and inexperienced to run a business. They had no money, no experience, and nowhere to work from. But the two men had a dream and relentlessly pursued it. They followed their hearts, ruled by their passion of ideas.
Jobs always wanted to position Apple at the forefront of information technology by foreseeing and setting trends in innovation and style.

Conceive. Believe. And Achieve.

Cast wild ideas
Jobs’ dream was to avail computers to the common people. Before 1975, the computer was enormous, expensive, and a complicated machinery used by the government, military and the universities. Jobs vision was to produce small computers – small enough to be placed at the desk, attractive, easy to use and affordable. Users can use it to type letters, do calculations and play games.

When Jobs saw an Alto computer in Xerox, where users move a pointer and click to get different documents or a menu, he envisioned that every computer in the world would work this way one day.

Creativity is the root of invention. Brainstorm and discover innovative ideas.

Not where you start but where you end.
Steve Jobs was born out-of-wedlock on February 24, 1955, to two graduate students – Abdul-fattah Jandali, a Syrian Muslim, and Joanne Simpson, of University of Wisconsin, Madison. He was adopted by a working-class couple. His adoptive father, Paul Jobs, was a high-school dropout working as a machinist and the mother, Clara, a part-time payroll clerk.

Have a compelling vision of the end of your journey and believe in it.

Ask and it will be given
At one of Explorer Club's session, Jobs saw holographics – a method of producing 3-dimensional photographs using laser beams. Jobs was so passionate that he was given a private tour. When he got home, Jobs searched the phone book and persuaded Bill Hewlett, founder of Hewlett Packard, for some spare holographic parts so that he could build his own. Not only did Hewlett have a long conversation with Jobs, he also gave Jobs some parts and a summer job.

Jobs convinced engineers at Intel to donate expensive computer DRAM chips. Together with Wozniak, they built the computer.

After Tin Toy won an Academy Award, he persuaded Disney Corporation to fund and distribute three full-length Pixar movies, a gigantic feat since Pixar was losing so much money. Four years later, Pixar produced Toy Story. It was so successful that Jobs took Pixar public. Although it was still losing money, Jobs became a billionaire.

If you ask, the most adverse answer you can get is a “No”.

Continue life-long learning
After Jobs dropped out of college, he still attended classes that interest him without getting any credit from them. One class Jobs attended was the calligraphy class that influenced multiple fonts in Apple computers. “If I had never dropped in on that single course in college, the Mac would have never had multiple typefaces or proportionally space fonts.”

The minute you stop learning is the minute you stop growing.

Tough times don’t last; tough people do
At college, Jobs didn’t have a dorm room, so he slept on the floor in his friends’ room. He returned Coke bottles for the five cents deposits in order to buy food. Every Sunday, he walked 7 miles across town to get a meal at the Hare Krishna temple.

On April 1, 1976, at the age of 29, he cofounded Apple Computer with his close friend, Wozniak. Jobs sold his van for $1,000 and Wozniak sold his calculator for $250.

Unable to afford to rent a space, they used Jobs’ father’s garage. He got a post office box and an answering machine to give an impression of a proper office. To tide over, Jobs took a job where he dressed as characters from Alice in Wonderland and welcomed customers to the mall. Four years later, he was worth more than $200 million dollars. By thirty, he lost his job at Apple.

The successful person perseveres and surmounts many difficulties.

To err is human
Jobs had a daughter, Lisa, out of wedlock with Chrisann Brennan. He denied paternity for many years, claiming that he was sterile. He said, “I’ve done a lot of things I’m not proud of, such as getting my girlfriend pregnant when I was 23 and the way I handled that.”

It was a major mistake before he turned to Buddhism.

At NeXT, Jobs created a perfect computer with groundbreaking media capabilities. However, the steep price of $6,500 attracted few customers. At Pixar, he created a computer capable of creating 3-D images of a patient’s body that costs $135,000, and it failed to sell.

Mistakes are life’s best teachers. Learn from it.

Make lemonade out of lemons
Pixar and NeXT was losing a combined $60 million a year. Jobs closed the hardware and sales division of NeXT and turned it into a software company. He sold the computer division of Pixar. In 1983, he lured John Sculley from Pepsi-Cola to be Apple’s CEO, only to be ousted by Sculley two years later. In 2004, he was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and it began a life of challenges and pain for him.

Innovations are born out of adversity. In adversity lies the seed of opportunity.

Michael Lum YM, B.Acc. M.Com, is a Master Trainer, licensed American Board of NLP Trainer, an Associate Certified Coach with ICF and a laughter yoga instructor. He teaches Business Skills, Strategy, Business Negotiation and Starting a Business in the School of Business.

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List of Award Winners

With Prof. Cheong (from left to right):

- Mr Satish Kumar Khattar
- Ms Sia Jia Hui
- Dr Anitha Devi Pillai
- Mr Lam Kuet Keng Steven
- Mr Tan Han Kee
- Mr Guee Chai Koong Andy
- Dr Sasikumar Ponnalagu
- Mr Jeyaraj Selva Raj
- Dr Tony Halim
- Ms Chay Yuet Lye Darrell
- Mr Soh Wee Lian
- Mr Chew Koo-Mun Cedric
- Mr Lee Chin Chee
- Ms Devi Haridas
“T.E.A.M. can stand for: Together, Everyone Achieves More!

As tutors, our role is to inspire our students to enjoy and continue learning post graduation.

We help to hone students’ critical thinking and life skills.

We achieve when our students develop to their fullest potential.

Cedric Chew Koo Mun
School of Business

“I am a rewarding experience teaching computer programming all these years. The satisfaction of training students, with no prior knowledge of programming, to love programming and be competent programmers is what motivates me to excel in my teaching.”

Tan Han Kee
School of Science & Technology

“Light of understanding brightened their eyes and smiles crinkled their faces. Their nods and laughter confirmed that they have understood and this is my greatest satisfaction. My encouragement to all my past, present and future students: ‘Tribulations are short-lived. You will soon achieve your dreams.’ Persevere.”

Darrell Chay Yuet Lye
School of Arts & Social Sciences

“Academically, I am certainly not the most capable. But I like to depend on my core strength which is to inject sufficient enthusiasm, so that my students can say ‘I came to class because I WANTED to’.”

Satish Kumar Khattar
School of Human Development & Social Sciences
In Conversation With... Assoc Prof Neelam Aggarwal

As an academic member of a university which sets high premium on good teaching, and founding Director the Teaching and Learning Centre, I have often been asked what constitutes good teaching. We all recognise that we live in a dynamic world where technology pervades all environments especially those related to the communication, creation, and acquisition of knowledge. Along with the ubiquitous integration of technology into the educational system, there is an increasing emphasis on lifelong learning, student-centred curriculum, and increased interactive learning. New standards are being defined and new pedagogical concepts are regularly being discussed. But the fundamentals of good teaching remain the same even as there is an imperative need to adapt to changing times.

Unisim has an ongoing commitment to continuously strengthen learning support for our adult learners and enhance our teaching capabilities. When the Teaching and Learning Centre (TLC) was set up in July 2010, my predominant feeling was one of excitement at being involved in establishing a new department in a young institution that offers a unique form of quality education.

TLC seeks to promote good teaching at Unisim by providing and facilitating a range of training and development initiatives. Associates need support in areas such as orienting to the flexible context at Unisim, marking assignments, providing feedback to students, navigating the relevant procedures, and developing professional networks. More importantly, associates require ongoing support to keep up with an increasingly technological workplace, better integrate technology into the instructional experience, and creative ways to assess student learning in a variety of instructional delivery modes.

With Unisim moving forward with its e-learning initiatives, TLC is on hand to provide the required support through training that will equip instructors with the necessary pedagogical knowledge and skills for developing and handling online courses and virtual classroom environments.

At TLC, we do this by regularly organising events at which faculty come together and share their perspectives and teaching strategies. Warm relationships are constantly established and strengthened, opening avenues for the exchange of ideas and experiences related to the learning process. In fact, getting to know other faculty members and sharing experience, good practices, and ideas about teaching is often described as one of the primary benefits of participation in such activities. TLC serves as a convener to foster collegial dialogue and collaboration, building capabilities and competence all around.

So what do we mean by good teaching? Briefly, here are some characteristics I would seek to promote:

- At the core is the content expertise: teachers must know their subject well and must continue to build their understanding of the subject and stay updated. This means that good teachers must necessarily be intellectually curious and passionate about their subjects.
- Build the context: help students see relevance of the subject through topical examples and those which they can identify with.
- Good teachers are aware of new and effective teaching practices and are willing to adopt them. Pedagogical underpinnings should be valued and reiterated when using technology tools to support students’ learning.
- Be aware of ways in which technology can be used for effective teaching, and hone your ability to teach via different modes: f2f, online lectures, recorded lectures.
- Make appropriate use of social media and communication tools to foster the creation of a thriving classroom community.
- Planning and organisation are important in any workplace and teaching is no exception. For a good teacher, this goes beyond adhering to the schedule. If anything, it means a certain adaptability to allow students to understand a difficult concept.
- Help students to improve, not just by pointing out weaknesses but by providing constructive feedback to demonstrate how they could have done better.
- Communicate with clarity and also with sensitivity.
- Enthusiasm and passion are infectious: if you display these, your students are bound to be bitten by the same happy bug.
- Possess a sense of humour and the maturity to know when to use it: studies suggest that the use of humour in the classroom reduces tension, improves classroom dynamics, increases enjoyment and student-teacher rapport, and facilitates learning.

I value the opportunities I have had to interact with associates and to be able to provide positive support to their articulated needs and concerns. The wonderful part is that such interaction has provided my colleagues and myself frequent opportunities for reflection and review, enabling us to make improvements even as it has helped to develop our own understanding and practice.

It is my hope that the structured support provided by Unisim will enhance the teaching-learning experience, provide our associates with a sense of belonging to an academic community and, above all, enable all associates to feel valued and motivated.
As instructors, do we play an important role in our students’ holistic development? Do we possess the potential to be better instructors? Are you dissatisfied with your current teaching experience and outcomes today?

If you answered ‘Yes’ to the above three questions, this article will resonate with you.

In the July 2012 issue of Communitas, I shared with you ideas about achieving learning outcomes using an A.B.C. approach. A.B.C. in a collaborative learning setting involves (1) Actively participating in our students’ learning (2) Bringing value to them and, lastly, (3) Caring for them.

I shared ideas on how to influence students to adopt good teaching behaviours in the January 2013 issue.

In this edition, I am revisiting the core purpose of our role as instructors, and what we need to do to be better instructors.

I’d like to share with you what I gained from attending the National Achievers Congress on May 13. Those who attended the Congress would likely have different interpretations and learning experiences. Below is my list, after listening to 20 leading speakers over three days.

**Review your goals, enhance your skills**
As instructors, our main purpose is to communicate ideas. But what exactly are we communicating to our students? Are we only communicating our specialised technical knowledge, or are we, in the process, also inspiring students to embark on a lifelong learning journey?

Some educators have said that in this modern day and age, educators play the role as a life coach as well. Many of us are 15 to 30 years older than most of our students. Would our students benefit from our views on lifelong learning, life skills, and advice we share on how to do well at both studies and work? Is there a higher purpose to what we do?

Mrs Vanessa Tan, Beauty Queen and Founder of Vanessaism Inc. shared the importance of aligning oneself to our higher purpose. She observed, “I am not successful because of my achievements, I am successful because I am aligned. I am doing work aligned to my higher purpose. Alignment brings me joy.”

Good teaching encompasses a package of skills. To hone the required skills, we should take time to reflect on the range skills that we need to further develop – for example, facilitation skills. Mr Jerome Tan, CEO of Executive Directions, suggested that if we are not comfortable with our current set of skills, we should educate ourselves and start doing things differently.

Having an attitude to constantly upgrade and improve our skills and, in the words of Mrs Vanessa, “striving to be uncomfortable in our own comfort zone,” will serve us well.

Good instructors have a constant thirst to learn and grow. Weaker ones will often find excuses, while others may think they already know a lot and don’t need to learn more.

At the heart of it is you. You alone are best positioned to know what skills you’re lacking, and to actively seek opportunities to acquire the necessary skills to teach better. So we should read and research more, gain more expertise in areas such as facilitation skills or how to liven things up in class, etc. We can access websites on teaching resources, organise get-togethers with fellow tutors to share ideas, build relationships, etc. With a zest to constantly improve, we can learn, grow and strengthen our contribution to the world.

**Focus on opportunities, not obstacles**
At UniSIM, we are all dealt with the same distribution of students. Some of our students are habitually late in submitting assignments and are a bad influence in our classes. This causes some instructors to complain and label them as “problem students”

Perhaps, we should think further for a moment: Are these students really **problems**, or **symptoms of problems**? Are these challenging teaching situations **problems** or **opportunities** for us to grow and be the best instructors we can be?

One of the speakers, Mr Keith Cunningham, a foremost authority on Business Mastery, noted that “not having good health and riches are usually symptoms of deeper problems.” Rather, the person’s bad eating habits or lack of motivation to save for the rainy day, for example, could be the root cause of the problems.

In the same vein, could we, as instructors, be the problem? If so, can we make our lessons more interesting, keep our students engaged and motivated to learn, and help them to attain the required knowledge and achieve good grades?
Mr Robert Riopel, a world-class success coach highlighted the importance of self-leadership – that is, the ability to influence our own communication, emotions and behaviours.

Playing the victim, blaming students, justifying our actions, or complaining away will only move us further from our goals. Perhaps, we should ask ourselves: “How can I be a better tutor or instructor?”

Use stories to connect with your students
Mr Peter Sage, international serial entrepreneur, reinforced my belief in the importance of working smarter. Do not sell the product first. Sell your story, educate, and then offer customers your solution. He demonstrated his “story, then solutions” approach using cupcakes as an example.

Mr Sage told us not to use this script: “I have the most tasty cupcakes….do buy from me….” Instead, say, “Most people work so hard these days that they do not have time to enjoy life and simple pleasures. Smart, successful people reward themselves daily in small doses. Widely available artisan Heaven On Earth cupcakes are beautiful and tasteful. They are absolutely the best rewards you can give yourself or your loved ones. Reward yourself with a few today!”

Mr Sage’s story resonates with me. I do not start my first lesson by teaching theories. I spend a lot of time establishing connections with my students and to sell them the importance and relevance of lifelong learning. I screen short, motivational videos, and share stories like the 90 year-old man attending primary school and how my previous batches of smart students acquire knowledge not just about the subject I teach, but also life in general.

I make sure the links between the theories and what they can use in their jobs are clear and explicit. I sell relevant stories ahead of the theories. Throughout my three weekend lessons, I constantly show my students how the topics they learn in class is real and relevant to what they encounter in their work and everyday lives. So can you.

When you try this strategy, you will be amazed at how the so-called “student problems” melt away. Your students want to learn – with you as the catalyst, stoking their passion for learning. It is much easier for them to absorb the material, be motivated and put in more effort. Sell relevant stories first. Student engagement levels will be raised. Grades will improve.

Always Encourage
Learning involves growth, challenges, and change. Anyone will experience discomfort. This is why you need to always encourage your students. Sir Richard Branson, Founder of the Virgin Group shared a gem. “When you recognise, praise or encourage someone, you will get the best from that person. Criticise less.”

Mr Richard Tan, CEO of Success Resources and organiser of the NAC 2013, reinforced this point. “When you respect, encourage and adore your spouse when the person is down, the person has the energy and courage to slay dragons and conquer the world.”

His advice can also be used with your approach to students. If you leave out words like “adore” and replace “spouse” with the word “students,” you will find your students having more confidence and energy to study and do well in the subjects you teach because you encourage them more.

Personal effort is required to achieve desired results
Keith Cunningham of Business Mastery shared an interesting quote: “Ordinary things, consistently done, produce extraordinary results.”

Now, think of extraordinary successful products like Gillette shavers, SKII skincare products, etc. My takeaway is that a consistent “constantly improving” approach will lead to great outcomes. As instructors, how much better off would we be if we adopt the same philosophy? We must put more effort to achieve the results we want.

Mr Cunningham noted that too often, we fall in love with our outcomes. In the case of associates, it may be a renewal of our teaching contracts and good student evaluation scores. Actually, we need to master the basics first and be well-versed in the tools and skills we need. Only then can we achieve the outcomes we desire.

Everything we do requires effort on our part – whether it’s to do with staying healthy, maintaining a good relationship with our spouse and co-workers, etc. But the rewards are plentiful too, if we make the extra effort. To do this, we need to honestly ask ourselves, “How can I continue to grow?”

The journey of lifelong learning, self-discovery and mastery we take with our students is filled with challenges. Yet, it is always meaningful and rewarding. I hope to have inspired you to keep on improving your gift of teaching.

Cedric Chew teaches Business Strategy at UniSIM’s School of Business. He received a Teaching Merit Award in Feb 2012 and a Teaching Excellence award in 2013. In this article, he shares a few teaching tips to inspire instructors to keep on improving their gift of teaching. You can consider adopting some of his suggestions. Cedric can be reached at cedricchew002@unisim.edu.sg
“Learning is one’s true wealth,” said Thiruvalluvar, a great Tamil poet 2,000 years ago.

Teaching and learning are closely related, and it is difficult to imagine teaching without learning, or learning without teaching. That is why it is said that the teaching profession is noble, and the teacher a guide, friend and philosopher to his students.

Many teachers who taught me while I was young have proved the above to be true – and they were the ones who inspired me to become a teacher. Teaching could be subject-centred, or pupil-centred. I strongly believe that the pupil-centred approach is the best way to ensure a conducive environment, and leads to a learning experience that is both beneficial for students and satisfying for the teacher.

I have been an Associate Faculty with the Tamil Language and Literature programme at the School of Arts and Social Sciences for the past seven years. My students come from various age groups – from the very young, to the middle-aged, and even senior citizens. All of them are working adults in various fields. Most of my students are Tamil language teachers who want to upgrade themselves in their profession. Others who already hold a bachelor’s degrees in other disciplines from universities in Tamil Nadu aspire to graduate with a bachelor’s degree in Tamil Language and Literature so that they can become Tamil language teachers in Singapore in the future.

All students pay the course fees from their own pockets. After spending the whole day working in their offices or schools, they come to the evening classes at UniSIM from different parts of Singapore. Taking into consideration their desire to learn despite the numerous problems they face, I try my best to make my lessons beneficial to all my students and their classroom experience an enjoyable one.

A teacher’s depth of knowledge in the subject he teaches and his professional skills are very important. Equally important is the teacher’s care and concern for his students’ welfare. We all know that various media techniques are used today to make learning a fulfilling experience. However, I believe that the teacher plays a very important role in the classroom, as machines cannot replace the warm, human relationship between the teacher and the students.

This human aspect is necessary not only in understanding and empathising with the student’s plight, but also in lending them a helping hand. I strongly believe that it is this relationship between the teacher and students that makes classroom teaching a success, as it helps allay the students’ anxiety and increases their level of concentration. It also helps me (the instructor) understand my students’ mentality, interests and concerns, and ensures a measure of success in the teaching and learning process.

When teaching my students, I always keep in mind the following points to make my students’ learning meaningful:

- Stating complex ideas to be learned in simple terms
- Giving examples that draw on what students already know, so that they are able to understand the complex concepts and theories.
- Asking meaningful questions so that students become familiar with complex things.
- Reacting in a positive manner to questions from students that express their interests and concerns. (Teaching will be more effective when it occurs as the result of the learners’ questions.)
- Listening to the students express their difficulties allows me to address their concerns.
- Inspiring the students’ confidence in their learning. (If the students were to lose confidence in their learning, all the efforts of the teacher would be meaningless.)
- Providing various perspectives through the use of a variety of materials. (I teach Tamil Language and Literature, so there is an ample scope to look at my subject from various aspects.)
- Changing the teaching strategy to suit the ability and the previous knowledge of the students. (Doing so helps arouse the students’ interest in the subject, which is important. Otherwise they will find the lessons dull and monotonous.)
- Using a dynamic and lively teaching approach makes for a meaningful learning experience and an enjoyable classroom environment.

In this short article, I have shared my experiences as a teacher thriving to grow towards excellence. I started teaching with joy and great hope, and it is with the same spirit that I continue teaching today. The new experiences I gain everyday in my teaching gives me a lot of satisfaction. And I believe this has gone a long way to providing a conducive learning environment that allows my students to better develop their knowledge and skills.

K. Thirumaran was the 2012 Teaching Excellence Award recipient for the School of Arts and Social Sciences. He also received the Teaching Merit Award in 2011.
In teaching, we are often caught up with new pedagogies and technology and forget that often, past experiences and know-how help shape the future. Adopting trendy and often untested teaching methods and fetishizing technological gadgets and tools as each new one appears, in many cases, will result in unfortunate results.

In what follows, I articulate my thoughts after nearly four decades of teaching. This reflection, I hope will stimulate an active discussion to those who want to share the joy of their learning and teaching.

New practices often create a pull to recast educational practices. However, as instructors, we could cast a critical eye at the underlying principles driving these changes. In some cases, these changes might be ‘old (and bad) wine in new bottles’.

In the current trend of higher education, there is a growing fashion of keeping database of taught classes in the form of video recordings. The reason usually given is that students can review what they might have missed. These are very good intentions. However, it places the teacher on a pedestal as the sole purveyor of content. By replaying the video, the student repeats a process which, in many cases, he did not understand, from the same source.

An outline of the teaching lesson, as was done in the past, would have been sufficient to enable the student to use that valuable time to search and learn from other sources. We may need to take a step back to relook and thoroughly understand tested and well-worn teaching techniques.

Next, instructors certainly desire to improve their courses. Often, improvement equates to more and detailed content. In an engineering course that I conduct, students are impeded in understanding new concepts because they are filled with wrong ideas accumulated over the years. What we probably need to do is help them unlearn without being disingenuous.

We all think we know as to what constitutes “boiling” in a liquid. It a basic concept and most misunderstood and wrongly conceptualised. We learn it as the introduction of energy though heating, which is not wrong but “half-true”. The idea of “boiling” as a “phase change” opens up a whole new world in the understanding of Thermofluids. But what is required of the student is a tremendous feat – to unlearn, discard and relearn ideas. The teacher has to step back with their students, and make corrections to “half-baked” ideas as illustrated in this example.

Finally, students have the deep-seated idea that the more they acquire though visuals and attending classes, the better will be their performance in the exams. They often forget that the mode of communication in exams is still through writing and diagrammatic conceptualisations, all handwritten and drawn. They need to learn the art of writing legibly and conceive their ideas through practice and repetition.

In composing an examination answer, there is no outline or strategy supplementing the answer. An essay or calculation regime spews out, magically. The art of systematically crafting and communicating ideas through a carefully thought outline, or writing down the formulae and calculations in exam answers through legible handwriting, adds to the students’ success at the exams. It will be well worth the time for students to step back and examine the fundamentals of their communication skills so as to move forward to greater heights in their exams.
Learning Journey

Associates share their takeaways from the on-camera presentation workshop.

Attending the workshop on Delivering Effective and Engaging On-camera Presentation, conducted by Ms. Maura Fogarty, was one of my most exhilarating experiences. The workshop was very well organised. Among the topics covered were: key principles of on-camera presentations, talking to your audience, using body language to engage your audience, structuring focused 5-minute mini-lectures, using slides that enhance your message and storytelling as a presentation tool. Indeed, Maura gave a smooth and excellent delivery – her voice, poise and eye contact left participants with a very favorable impression.

At the start of the workshop, the attendees asked Maura to elaborate on some of the common challenges a novice would face when preparing to do an on-camera presentation. Maura responded very well, with appropriate use of examples and illustrations for answering their questions. Maura also provided four tips on what should be done and how it is done for effective engagement on-camera presentations.

Following the workshop, I was asked to submit an on-camera mini-lecture on the subject of Cardiovascular Bioengineering for a personalised feedback session with Maura. I began by preparing five-minute video scripts, and then distilled these key ideas into bullet points. Doing the video recording was, I felt, a very good experience to familiarise myself with the preparation that goes into delivering an effective on-camera presentation. Having the key ideas in bullet points also helped trigger my memory as to what would follow – and the words just flowed. In fact, I didn’t even pause to think about what I needed to say!

Overall, I really enjoyed the workshop. I initially found the thought of doing the on-camera presentation a little intimidating, despite having taught the students at SIM University for a number of years. So, this on-camera presentation workshop was a really useful experience for me. In particular, the five-minute recording exercise was good at breaking down my initial reluctance to start doing an on-camera recording. I’m now more enthusiastic and motivated to get myself going with the chunk lecture recordings, and to put to good use the tips and techniques I picked up at the workshop.

I would like to thank Maura for making the on-camera presentation training an enjoyable and engaging experience for me.

Maura provided a step-by-step approach to guide us on how to deliver an effective presentation with a WOW factor. The techniques provided were straightforward yet practical that we could start applying them straight away. I was particularly impressed by Maura’s skill of infusing storytelling into the presentation, to connect with the audience and bring the presentation to life.

As people tend to forget most presentations within 48 hours, her “Tell Them” rule, I felt, was indeed useful on how to make the presentation memorable by telling the audience the introduction, main theme, three key points and the conclusion. Given a small assignment to present and have my presentation video recorded on camera, the one-on-one feedback session I received later from Maura was really beneficial. Maura gave a strong and positive encouragement to a beginner presenter like me.

It was a pleasure to attend her workshop which was professional, comprehensive, informative, dramatic and fun!
In January, I embarked on a project to explore the argument that students in a flipped classroom setting tend to perform better academically, and derive a higher level of satisfaction in their learning. This study took place in PSY107 Introduction to Psychology, which had eight groups in the January 2013 semester. Using an experimental design, four of the groups were taught using the student-driven flipped classroom technique, while the other four were designated the control group, where instructors were asked to do conduct their classes in their usual manner.

Under the flipped classroom structure, students are usually asked to view pre-recorded lectures prior to their face-to-face sessions. Class time would then be utilised for active learning through discussions, presentations and activities. However, studies have shown that students do not watch the pre-recorded lectures and often find it difficult to keep up with the pace of such activities.

Together with A/P Klaus Templer, Head of Programme for Psychology, and Ms Yeo Eun-Young, we decided that students in the experimental group would be asked to do a number of pre-class activities, so as to ensure that they watch the pre-recorded lectures prior to class. Additionally, we asked all eight instructors to administer in-class quizzes. At the end of the semester, we also conducted a survey of all students in the experimental and control groups.

Our preliminary findings show that students who viewed the pre-recorded lectures were more prepared and engaged in class. Students in the experimental group also fared better in the in-class formative quizzes. Additionally, the four instructors for the experimental group reported spending a shorter time explaining key concepts as their students came to class with baseline knowledge of the topics to be discussed. As a result, they were able to hold more in-depth discussions with their students.

We were a little surprised to find that students in the experimental group experienced more negative affects like distress and nervousness. This could be due to the extra tasks the students were asked to complete prior to class, to ensure that they watch the pre-recorded lectures in advance of class.

Another key takeaway: flipped classroom is not simply about pre-recorded lectures. It is the engagement and participation of students in collaborative activities that enhances their learning and understanding. Students learn best “by doing” rather than “by listening,” and this will form the basis of my approach to teaching in the future.

### Traditional versus Flipped Classrooms

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional Classroom Structure</th>
<th>Flipped Classroom Structure</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instructors are content experts</td>
<td>Emphasises peer-to-peer and collaborative learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructors disseminate knowledge</td>
<td>Instructors facilitate learning through group work and discussions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students are empty vessels to be filled with the required knowledge</td>
<td>Students complete tasks in class and build their understanding of the topic area in the process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students bring work home to complete</td>
<td>Students review and study the required materials at home</td>
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### Academic Calendar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Events</th>
<th>Dates</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Period (Classes)</td>
<td>22 July to 27 October</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self Revision</td>
<td>28 October to 10 November</td>
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<tr>
<td>Examinations</td>
<td>11 to 24 November</td>
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<tr>
<td>Semester Break</td>
<td>25 November to 19 January</td>
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<tr>
<td>Release of Course Results</td>
<td>19 December</td>
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MARK YOUR CALENDARS

**SEPTEMBER 21**
Faculty Learning Symposium

**NOVEMBER 9**
Family Day

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