

Book Review of “The Missing Course: Everything They Never Taught You About College Teaching”

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BOOK REVIEW

THE MISSING COURSE: EVERYTHING THEY NEVER TAUGHT YOU ABOUT COLLEGE TEACHING

REVIEWED BY

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Gooblar, David (2019). *The Missing Course: Everything They Never Taught You About College Teaching*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press. Pages: 227. Price: 39.73 CAD (hardcover).

In my classes I try to explain to second year computing students that their technical skills are only one part of what they need to succeed. Many jobs are like that, requiring both discipline or field specific skills and transferable or soft skills. In *The Missing Course: Everything They Never Taught You About College Teaching* (2019) David Gooblar explains that for postsecondary professors teaching is not a soft skill, it is a second discipline we should be engaging in the same way we engage with our primary discipline.

The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning is not a new discipline. However, it is often neglected in graduate studies, relegated to the individual's professional development rather than being a core part of the curriculum. *The Missing Course* (2019) is Gooblar's attempt to provide a concise and practical overview of teaching and learning with the objective of helping college and university instructors improve their classroom teaching. It is a valuable book for everyone who teaches or plans to teach in postsecondary from full professors to new graduate students.

David Gooblar is the Associate Director of the Centre for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning at Temple University. He formerly taught rhetoric at the University of Iowa and is well known for his column in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* on pedagogy. He has been teaching how to teach for almost a decade.

The Missing Course opens with an explanation that Gooblar wrote this book to fill a gap he saw in PhD

programs, putting out excellent subject experts, but not preparing them for teaching in the classroom. He wants this book to help postsecondary teachers start seeing teaching as their second discipline.

Gooblar's first key argument is that the role of the teacher is to create the environment and conditions for students to learn and "revise their previous understandings" (p. 14). He explains that you cannot force learning, so instead you create a learning environment for the students. He puts forward that an explicitly constructivist view supports student learning best, and gives an overview of active learning and the scholarship behind it, examining practical ways of implementing active learning in the classroom including syllabus examples and examples for those who teach lecture heavy subjects such as the sciences.

For active learning to work students must buy into it, and Gooblar discusses how in traditional classes this is done through grades, creating extrinsic rewards and punishments. He puts forward that extrinsic rewards are short term motivation, and what we want to encourage is lifelong learning, so short-term motivation is not enough. Gooblar explains that students learn best when they are interested in the material, and the bulk of the second chapter is spent laying out ways to generate and keep interest, specifically around giving students some control and ownership of the course.

The bulk of the book is around what student-centered courses and teaching are. Gooblar's argument is

that the best ways to aid learning are through creating intentional difficulties, utilizing formative assessment, and ensuring students understand the purpose of the readings and assignments. He suggests utilizing peer review in the classroom and recommends some methods of limiting academic dishonesty. This is all centered around his statement that “we teach students, not just subjects” (p. 106), by which he means that we need to ensure that the course design works for the actual students who are in your class. This includes building community in the classroom, knowing what students are learning from your class and where they are lost, and making sure that accessibility is not an afterthought. Threads that are woven through the entire book are compassion, respect, and responsibility. He advocates for using assessment as a teaching tool, using formative assessment and not just summative. He provides examples of feedback and assessment that can be educative. Gooblar also discusses instructor behavior and how the modeling of academic habits and processes benefit students.

The context students live within impacts their learning. Because of this, Gooblar explains that creating an inclusive classroom is important for student learning. He states that “it’s important to treat students with respect and speak to them... as the scholars you hope they will become” (p. 182). He goes on to examine the role implicit biases play in teaching and discusses when it is important to bring up politics in the classroom, noting as well how teaching is training citizens.

Gooblar concludes his *The Missing Course* with a chapter on how to assess and change your teaching and courses, both during the semester and after it. The thread of revision runs through the whole book, from helping students revise themselves, to revising their work, to revising how you think of students, to revising your teaching, and finishing with revising how you learn from your own class.

Gooblar provides a strong introduction to the scholarship of teaching and learning, and he is explicit that that is what it is, an introduction. It works well as a handbook for people starting out in teaching and provides concrete examples of what he means. The one thing missing is a chapter on next steps. Where should the new academic look for current research, what is the trail of breadcrumbs to lead from the introduction to the discipline’s body of knowledge? Gooblar does mention a few works in his introduction, but revisiting the topic at the end would have made for an appropriate closing of his

book. Instead, readers must rely on the endnotes as a resource for where to look next.

The Missing Course succeeds in its purpose of providing a broad introduction for academics on how to teach. It works well for those well into their career wanting to improve their teaching as well as for those looking ahead to beginning theirs. It is a practical guide that opens the door to the scholarship of teaching and learning and can be used either alone or as the introduction to a much broader conversation. It does not discuss the more theoretical aspects of learning and teaching, but instead is focused on providing tools that can be utilized immediately, and it is a welcome addition to the field.