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## Classroom Connections Video Fosters Discussion About Teaching and Learning at NPS

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**Classroom Connections Video Fosters Discussion About Teaching and Learning at NPS**

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Article By: Amanda D. Stein



The Naval Postgraduate School has long maintained a reputation of integrity and excellence in education. Our graduates go on to do great things for the community and the nation, applying their education from NPS in profound ways.

If you were to ask students what sets NPS apart from other graduate level universities, you may get a few different answers. If you ask the professors, you will most likely get one answer: the students. At NPS, the diversity of cultural, professional and military experiences create a dynamic environment that encourages students and faculty to engage in dialogue and cutting-edge research in their fields.

“You have to be instructing and creating an intellectually safe and creative space so that [students] feel free to explore the boundaries of their own knowledge, to try new things, to experiment and be able to fail,” said Graduate School of Business and Public Policy (GSBPP) Assistant Professor Keenan Yoho\*. “The classroom is not only a place where I am trying to teach them something, but it’s also a place where I think that they need to be able to practice exploring intellectually.”

As NPS continually strives to improve instruction and assessments, the emphasis is primarily on learning – refining outcomes for what students must know and how students and faculty alike can assess and validate learning. Establishing and maintaining high standards for academic programs requires reflection about the goals and purposes of instruction as well as the approaches to teaching, learning, and assessments. An important indicator of educational excellence at NPS is observable through learner engagement.

The significance of interactions between professors and students at NPS is captured in a 15-minute video titled “Classroom Connections: Teaching at the Naval Postgraduate School.” This video, produced by Faculty Development Director Ali Rodgers, features faculty commentary about our students and what it means to teach and to learn something well within the context of the different schools on campus.

“Classroom Connections articulates a current snapshot of what it means to teach something well and to learn something well. The voices of faculty featured in this video are giving language to what excellence in teaching means,” noted Rodgers. “The video establishes context for excellence in teaching and learning – one of many standards that can be used to measure continuous improvement initiatives. The video is a foundational piece that articulates what excellence in teaching and learning means here at NPS.”

A handful of professors from each of the schools within NPS were asked to share the qualities and practices they thought were required to “teach well.” Fifteen professors shared their experiences in the classroom, answering a few questions about the process of teaching and how they know when their students are learning. From across the campus, in all of their answers, Rodgers noticed common priorities and focus for instruction being implemented in ways that tailored to the school or academic discipline.

“So much of what we do in education is to learn with and from each other,” explained Rodgers. “Although a political scientist may approach their subject matter differently from a colleague in aerospace engineering, the principles and practices of good teaching are evidenced in academic programs across all schools and disciplines. Recognition of these common practices is strengthening the connections between teaching and learning campus wide.”

The importance of student involvement and engagement was noted as a critical component to a rewarding environment for both teaching and learning. Many students are senior level officers bringing first-hand experience and practical application of the content being taught by professors. The respect the faculty have for their students is genuine, noted Rodgers, and the experiences the students bring to the table enrich the interactions in the classroom.

“A lot of our students have spent time in the regions that I teach about, or have been in areas or dealt with problems that really bring these issues to life,” explained SIGS Associate Professor Mohammed Hafez\*\*. “That is really what I look for. Students who not only learn from me but I feel I learn something from them.”

The video, while capturing the tone of learning and teaching at NPS, will serve as an informational video for new faculty about the diversity of classroom dynamics across departments and schools. It will also be featured in the WASC accreditation process, demonstrating the intellectual and interpersonal considerations professors apply to adapt instruction to the needs of the students.

Part one of Classroom Connections, titled Teaching at the Naval Postgraduate School, is the first of a two-part volume that engages students and faculty in reflection about connections between teaching and learning – it is available for viewing on the [NPS Video Portal](#). Part two, from the student perspective, is expected to be available by the end of July.

Posted July 1, 2010.

\*Assistant Professor Keenan Yoho was awarded the Louis D. Liskin Award for Teaching Excellence in the Graduate School of Business and Public Policy during the Spring 2010 Awards Ceremony for his commitment to excellence in education.

\*\*Associate Professor Mohammed Hafez was awarded the Lieutenant Commander David L. Williams Outstanding Professor Award during the Spring 2010 Awards Ceremony for his dedication to teaching.