

Melanie A. Partlow

EDUCATION and AFFILIATION

- MS in Mathematics, 1998, University of West Florida
- BS in Mathematics, 1992, Radford University
- Certification in Secondary Mathematics Education, 1992, Radford University
- Member of Pi Mu Epsilon

EMPLOYMENT

- Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College, Tifton, Georgia
Assistant Professor of Mathematics, August 1998 – present
- Brunner Middle, Ft Walton Beach High, Gulf Breeze High, Florida
Part-Time Temporary Instructor, August 1992 – June 1995

SELECTED PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES and PROGRAMS DEVELOPED

- 2007 – 2010 Director of Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) focused on improving performance in Math at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College (ABAC)
- 2007– 2010 Member of the Faculty Development Team campus-wide faculty development to extend the ideas of the QEP across the campus
 - 2010 New self-paced computer course designed to: 1) help students exit Learning Support courses in one semester as opposed to two, and 2) help students with low Compass scores to exit Math 0097 on the first attempt
- 2009 – 2010 Develop Course Portfolios for all math classes at ABAC using practice tests, class videos, handouts, and lecture notes for student and tutor use
 - 2009 SACS Lead Evaluator for the QEP at Jacksonville College, TX
 - 2008 SACS Lead Evaluator for the QEP at Northwest-Shoals Community College, AL
- 2006 – 2008 Development Team for the Expert Learning Support Instructor program designed to focus on alternative teaching techniques, the psychology of education, learning styles, multiple intelligences, effective communication, and creating a learner centered environment
- 2004 – 2006 Development Team and Lead Writer for the Quality Enhancement Plan
- 2003 – 2004 USG Mathematics Consortium, P-16 Project development of the curriculum for elementary, middle and high school.
 - 2003 EPAAC Committee Evaluation of P-16 Curriculum
 - 2002, 2004 Science Fair Judge
- 2002 – 2010 Regional Director of Science Olympiad, Event Host 1999 - 2001
- 2000 – 2001 Board of Regents eCore web course co-designer for “Precalculus”

SELECTED PROFESSIONAL CONFERENCES and PRESENTATIONS

- 2009 STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) Regional Conference, Tifton, GA
**Presenter – Millennial Students
- 2009 STEM State Conference, Atlanta, GA
- 2009 Lilly Conference: The Millennial Student in Greensboro, NC
- 2009 “Understanding the Millennial Student” with Christy Price, Tifton, GA
- 2008 DiSC training with Betty Ryfun to improve relationship through the understanding of personality and communication styles, Tifton, GA

- 2008 Barbara Bonham two day workshop titled, "TIPS: Techniques for Improving Performance and Success in Mathematics" in Tifton, GA
- 2008 NADE (National Association for Developmental Education) in Boston, MA
- 2007 NCAT (National Center for Appropriate Technology) redesign workshop using MyMathLab at the University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa
- 2007 Supplemental Instruction Institute at Kansas City, MO
- 2007 Digital Innovation Group, Using iPod Technology in the Classroom, Milledgeville, GA
- 2007 "How to Lead" with Glenn Shepard, Tifton, GA
- 2002 – 2005 Georgia NADE Conference
- and 2007 **Presenter – Math Anxiety, Study Skills, Math Ability: Heredity vs. Environment, Mathematics and the Positive Attitude, Expert Learning Support Program: Weaving relationships between instructor, student, and tutor.

TEACHING RESPONSIBILITIES

- Beginning Algebra (Math 0097) and Intermediate Algebra (Math 0099): These learning support courses teach the fundamentals needed in College Algebra. Both are required of a student scoring below an established cut-off score on the Compass placement exam. The first course shows emphasis on the fundamentals of basic algebra while the second course focuses on additional algebra topics including real number operations on algebraic expressions, algebraic fractions, exponents and radicals, and graphing equations and inequalities. This course is required by approximately fifty percent of the entering freshmen class.

Journals are used in this class to keep students positively focused and thinking about what they do in math class and why they do it. Many students are in Learning Support not because of inability, but because of anxiety and lack of fundamentals. Journals take various forms: responding to a short story or quote, reviewing success strategies and writing on one strategy per day, reviewing study skills and writing about which skills are used and which skills should be used, writing mathematical definitions so they make sense to the individual student, writing a plan of attack (POA) for each section, reading different life stories and discussing what made them successes and how they could have failed. Students are expected to create long term and short term goals as well as a plan to achieve them. When teaching the African American Male Experience (AAME) Learning Community, we used the eight leadership skills of Nelson Mandela as journals to engage the students in success thinking.

Note: While journaling is not used as heavily in other math course, there is still the POA and "Caveman Says" technique used throughout. Caveman sayings are alternate definitions in simplistic language to help students understand difficult concepts. We discuss what makes a problem difficult or tricky and how we can avoid common mistakes in the future by being aware of how and why we make them.

- College Algebra (Math 1111): This course is a functional approach to algebra that incorporates the use of appropriate technology. Emphasis is placed on the study of linear, quadratic, piece-wise defined, rational, polynomial, exponential and logarithmic functions, their graphs, and applications. Fifty to seventy-five percent of the students who attend ABAC will take this course.
- Trigonometry (Math 1112): This course is a study of the trigonometric functions and their inverses. It also includes the study of complex numbers and the polar coordinate system. Students who are required to continue to calculus or physics will take this course.

Because this topic is more like a second language than a continuation of algebra, I make a special effort to connect trig topics to topics covered in algebra. Although the book may teach one topic two different ways, we will discuss similarities and how one method for solving can work for both topics. There are four basic skills a student will need to be successful in trig and we use them almost every day throughout the semester. Many of the topics covered in trig can be related to these four things and since repetition is the key to learning a language, repetition is employed to master trig.

- Pre-Calculus (Math 1113): This course is designed to prepare students for calculus, physics, and related technical subjects. Topics in this course include those covered in College Algebra and trigonometry. It is an intensive study of algebraic and transcendental functions and analytic geometry. Only stronger students should take this course.

This is probably my favorite class because it is fast-paced and covers all the tricky problems not seen in Math 1111 and Math 1112. I enjoy pointing out the common mistakes and subtle differences that make this class truly pre-calculus instead of simply a combination of College Algebra and trigonometry. This class employs POA's and Caveman Sayings on a daily basis to help students remember how to solve difficult problems.

- Calculus I (Math 2053) and Calculus II (Math 2054): This is a first and second course in the techniques and theory of calculus. First course topics include: limits, continuity, differentiation and integration, applications of the derivative and the integral. Second course topics include further study of applications of derivatives and integrals, transcendental functions, polar coordinates, conic sections, infinite series.
- Linear Algebra (Math 2208): This is a study of systems in linear equations, matrices, determinant, linear transformations, vector spaces, least squares, and eigenvectors and eigenvalues. This course is only taken by eight to ten students each spring. These students are engineering, mathematics, and computer science majors.
- Math for Elementary Teachers I (Math 3161) and II (Math 3162): This is a joint program with Valdosta State University. This course sequence is an in-depth study of the concepts and processes underlying the P-5 school mathematics curriculum, with special emphasis on numeration, number systems, estimation, algebraic thinking, and computational algorithms. The second course has special emphasis on measurement and geometry. In both courses the problem solving and historical context serve as unifying strands. This sequence is only taken by perspective elementary school teachers as they prepare to take the National Teaching Exam (NTE) and receive their teaching credentials.

Journals are also used in these courses to help new teachers think about why they did or did not understand a topic and how they will help their students better understand it. The math autobiography is used as a journal entry to start teachers thinking about how their lives were influenced during grade school. I ask the question, "How will you positively influence your students and not pass on your math phobias?"

COMMITMENT to TEACHING and LEARNING

I believe that to make successful students, we must help students be successful people. To be successful, students need two things: knowledge base in the subject area and knowledge base in success strategies. This process occurs when faculty take on the servant role and are willing to treat students as individuals. Let me clarify: not a servant with a master to do as commanded, but a servant at heart, to be of assistance and consider the needs of another; and not an individual assignment for each student, which is impractical unless a computer is used to constantly assess and alter instruction, but taking into consideration the individuals needs and problems of each student. Students come to our institutions with different knowledge levels, different strengths, and different fears. Students perform better when faculty get to know the student and work with them to overcome personal problems that might arise. From time to time students try to take advantage of situations, but faculty should not become jaded.

I am always trying to find new ways to spark the students' interest and engage them in learning. I am also trying to learn from my peers, asking what methods or strategies they use to engage students. My research of effective teaching methods led the administration to place me on the development team for the QEP and then my servant's heart led them to place me as director. The focus of our QEP is improving student performance through three main roads: improving teaching techniques, improving learning techniques, and improving tutoring techniques. With the assistance of our Faculty Learning Community (the QEP leadership team), I have researched our department needs and appropriate teaching techniques and designed a specialized program for the mathematics department at ABAC. With our Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL), we then presented a modified version to the ABAC campus. With Joy Godin, our CTL director, and the QEP leadership team, I have developed an Expert Instructor program and Expert Student program and an Expert Tutor program. Topics presented in the programs include, but are not limited to: assessment techniques, educational psychology, effective communication, employing technology, learning styles, multiple intelligences, and building a learner-centered environment. I have researched seminars and speakers to present on these topics, or have gone to seminars and conferences and brought the materials back to present to our department. Because these seminars focus on understanding and communicating better with all people, the department works better with students and as a team. Other faculty who have engaged in our seminars mention the same results. While there are two years left in the implementation of the QEP, the initial results show an improvement in pass rates and retention rates for Math 0097/0099, Beginning and Intermediate Algebra, and Math 1111, College Algebra.

EFFECTIVE TEACHING STRATEGIES

As a teaching strategy, I have tried to include various teaching styles into my daily lesson. For the auditory learner, I sing the quadratic formula, use POAs (Plans of Attack) to connect ideas and strategies from section to section, and use 'Caveman Says' as a means of writing the definition in a way that makes sense to the student. Caveman sayings also allow me to see how the student conceptualizes topics so errors can be corrected well before the test. I use analogies and cute sayings to help students remember definitions or strategies. For the visual learner, I use color to show certain manipulations (Ex: always subtract using red, or inside the function is blue while outside the function is black), the POA shows students how sometimes the difference between sections is one step, and I draw pictures whenever possible. When dealing with square

roots, we discuss 'going out on a date' and show how the number is at home (in the radical) or out (of the radical) on a date. It also allows us to discuss the root as how many need to be in your group before mom lets you out. This particular description appeals to the tactile learner as they are moving items in and out of the house. For the tactile or kinesthetic learner, I continually ask for feedback, requiring them to answer in class (they can pass or ask for help on occasion), asking if they would like to work on the board, work a quick problem before they leave, or work in groups (I assign) so every student has a chance to participate. During group work, I ask the A students to take the tutor role and asks questions to guide the other students through the solving process.

During the semester I use many forms of feedback and assessment. Students are given a class-work grade for problems worked as a group or for answering in class. Some assessment is as informal as answering out, the one minute survey (write one thing you understood and one thing you did not understand), and writing the homework on the board, while other is more formal. Homework is collected and graded for correct work and answers, chapter tests are given throughout the semester and final exams are given during exam week. As students answer out in class, we discuss common mistakes and misunderstandings as we learn. Everyone is allowed to respond (if they choose to) and this allows us to catch common mistakes or learn from other's misunderstandings. The one minute survey also gives students a chance to ask for more explanation if they did not understand the topic that day.

At the beginning of each class questions are entertained concerning homework problems or previous topics. If needed, there is a brief review of the topic before starting on new material. Quizzes are used to assess one topic or method, they are usually quick and short. Depending on how students perform on the quiz, more time is spent on certain topics or a worksheet may be given to be completed with a tutor in ABAC's Academic Assistance Center (AAC). Homework is collected and graded before a test. Students can use the graded homework to check their work for accuracy. Tests are used to assess all the material in one chapter and when students perform poorly on a test, they are encouraged to rework it with a tutor from the AAC. Exams are used to assess understanding in one semester. There are assessment questions embedded in the final exam so faculty can check student understanding of the course objectives. I use these assessment questions to determine which topics students understand and which they do not. Then each semester I go back determine how I can better explain topics students miss. As part of the QEP, the math faculty gather to discuss alternative teaching strategies. This allows us to help each other and improve the department as a whole.

Over the last three years I have taught pilot courses that are four credit-hour, five contact-hour learning support classes. The fifth hour is spent in the computer lab working on homework. This allows students to work, with their instructor in the room, so they can ask questions one-on-one. There is homework required from the text, but using My Math Lab allows students to receive instant feedback and the use the help feature. Also, for the last two years I have been filming each class using helloworld®, an internet video system that allows students to view the class as a live broadcast or as an archived video. Many students have discussed the benefits of this technology as it allows them to view the class anywhere with an internet connection as many times as they like. It has also allowed the tutors to view the class (or a portion) so they can be more effective tutors.

OUT-of-CLASS INTERACTION WITH STUDENTS

I believe in an open door policy. I am on campus from 8am until 5:30pm and, unless I am in class, in a meeting, or tutoring in the AAC, my door is open. I hold weekly recitations and students are encouraged to attend these review sessions for lesson overviews, more in-depth discussions, homework answers, and calculator assistance. They are also encouraged to come by the AAC during my assigned hours there. If they prefer one-on-one tutoring, students can come by my office or drop me an email to set up a specific time. We have had special review sessions in a classroom, in a lab, in the library, in the AAC, or in my home at the dining room table. When students want to learn and are willing to put in the extra time, I am willing to take on the servant role and meet them halfway. While it is not an every day occurrence or even an every semester occurrence, sometimes student tutoring needs do not fit into the 9-to-5 format.

Of course I have tutored students in my class but, I have tutored students who used to be in my class, students who are my advisee, and students who have never been in my class. I have tutored students both high school and college who attended my church or lived in my community and may have never been to ABAC. Some just needed help to get through a difficult topic or semester. None of this was paid tutoring and the tutoring did not always take place on campus. If you ask me why I would do this to students who are not ‘mine’, I would quote Sir James Barrie. “Those who bring sunshine in the lives of others cannot keep it from themselves.” I believe we are successful to the degree that we can help others be successful. Not successful in a class or with a subject, but in life – everyday life.

TEACHING METHODOLOGY

My preferred teaching method is interactive discussion. I use Socratic questioning, discussion, and group work, mixed with the traditional demonstration and lecture. Class participation allows students to help each other, to observe others struggle, and to realize that they are not alone. The more involved students are in class and with each other, the greater the probability of true understanding. I strive to keep my students focused and on task by calling on individual students and asking for the next step. I learn names quickly this way and get to know who is shy and who is not. Everyone is given an opportunity to work a step; by not knowing who will be called on next, the entire class stays involved.

Technology is a wonderful tool when used responsibly. The MyMathLab component has been a useful tool to give students extra help. It allows them to help each other and proceed at their own pace or get more individualized help from me. The Compass Confidence Building Software, used by the AAC, prepares students to take the Compass by allowing them to practice on problems similar to the ones on the actual test. When students are familiar with the testing format, they are less anxious about taking the Compass. I volunteered to teach Math 0097 and 0099 in a four-credit-hour, five-contact-hour setting, where one day a week is spent in the computer lab. Towards the end of the semester, lab days are spent working on the Confidence Building Software. While students work in the lab, I walk around the room answering questions or helping as they answer each other’s questions. During recitations, AAC workshops, and other special class meetings, I teach students how to use their calculators and understand their results. These same calculator instructions are accessible on the helloworld[®] website, which ‘talks’ students through the steps and shows the results on the calculator.

helloworld[®] is a wonderful tool to video classes, review sessions, recitations and instructions. Students can view and/or review topics they may have forgotten or missed during class by viewing archived videos. Thanks to helloworld[®], I was able to review factoring with my college algebra class, without losing valuable class time, by simply referring the students to the Math 0097/0099 archived videos. They can watch it at their convenience and review it as many times as necessary. I am proud to have a part in the writing and implementation of the AT&T Grant, which brought 25 helloworld[®] accounts and new computers to our campus. Filming creates a different kind of instructor in that faculty become more aware of what they say, how they say it, and how they prepare and plan for class. helloworld[®] has been, and will continue to be, a wonderful tool for transforming teachers and teaching.

Along with the helloworld[®] technology, the math department working through the QEP, has researched other computer-based courseware. The department is planning a hybrid course in the fall of 2010 where the class size doubles, but the faculty load remains the same. This could help the financial strain while helping students receive individual instruction in our learning support courses. I was instrumental in organizing several presentations to preview products by Alecks, iLearn, and Hawkes. As a member of the QEP leadership team, I visited other campuses to learn how MyMathLab can be used as an instructional tool. More presentations are planned for the future and I hope to be teaching the hybrid course next fall, which will consist of two class days and three lab days. While this is not an online course, such as eCore, it is computer-based and may lead to more online courses in our future. I had the pleasure of developing and teaching the first eCore Pre-Calculus course. I believe online is not for every course or every student, but it does have its place. With the addition of helloworld[®] video capabilities, I believe an impersonal online course can become personal.

Whether I am in the classroom, the AAC, or a meeting working with others on the implementation of the QEP, I am always focused on student learning and faculty improvement. As the QEP Director, I am able to affect change on campus and in the lives of the students by researching and creating workshops for students, faculty, and staff. As an educator, I am able to influence others by mentoring the AAC tutors and continuing to research and grow as an instructor. The QEP is a wonderful document which benefits our students by focusing on the effectiveness of our faculty and staff. One of my favorite quotes is from Norman Vincent Peale who wrote "You should never entertain or express an idea unless you wish it to take form in your life. It is a well established fact that there is a strong tendency for outward manifestations to match inner thought patterns." I believe I live that quote. My goal is to stay positive and keep growing so that I can improve the lives of everyone I meet, not only by teaching math skills to students, but by sharing life skills with people. The 5-2 principle says that Jesus fed the multitudes with five loaves and two fish, and if we will do our best with what God gives us, He will multiply the rest.

DOCUMENTATION of SUCCESS

1. I vary my teaching styles to consider the multiple intelligences and learning styles. For example, when I simplify a radical, I explain it as: for a number (or variable) to get out of the house (radical) they need a date and then they go out as one couple. By using this

example, I have appealed to the linguistic, auditory, visual, spatial, interpersonal and intrapersonal learners.

Evidence from student evaluations

- *Math 97, 2003 She makes the class interesting and very understandable. She gave several ways of working each problem to help with the different learning abilities of the students.*
- *Math 97, 2003 Her teaching style really helps with the different learning abilities of the students.*
- *Math 97, 2006 I liked that Ms Partlow taught us psychology skills along with the math. It made it easier to get through the course. She explained things in a simple broken down way so that everyone could understand.*
- *Math 99, 2003 The instructor requires you to think. We learned various ways to study algebra.*
- *Math 99, 2005 I like the use of color and stories to keep my attention and show me the steps. The way she taught helped me understand and retain how to solve problems.*
- *Math 2054, 2007 The best teacher I've ever had. She is willing to help you any time and any where. She really cares about the students here at ABAC. Great math teacher. She explains the material different ways if you don't understand it the first time. A+ teacher.*
- *Math 99, 2008 She is the kind of teacher that makes students want to learn. She comes up with different techniques that help her students learn different rules. It was very effective.*

2. I employ effective communication to relate care and concern for student learning.

I have taken a course entitled, "Teacher Effectiveness Training: How teachers can bring out the best in their students." At the DiSC[®] training I learned how different personality types understand and misunderstand each other; I also learned how to accommodate differences in communication as a result of personality types. During my research as the QEP Director, I read numerous books about relationships and communicating, which include: How to Win Friends and Influence People, People Smart, People Skills, Please Understand Me, and Multiple Intelligences.

Evidence from student evaluations

- *Math 97, 2008 I don't like math, but she had a unique way of teaching it that was fun and informative. She allowed us to get involved in the class with groups and calling on students.*
- *Math 1113, 2004 I enjoyed the humor the instructor brought to the classroom. It demonstrated the passion that she had for the material and her deep caring for the student.*
- *Math 1113, 2004 She really includes you in the discussion. No one is left out. She took a considerable amount of time helping me and others in the class.*
- *Math 2053, 2004 She connects with each and every student. This math class was one of the few that I enjoyed coming to everyday. How she made calculus fun, I will never understand. I will definitely recommend her to other students.*
- *Math 1113, 2004 She did an exemplary job of making such a frustrating subject material fun and interesting while also challenging her students to the utmost. Wonderful at simplifying matters for the betterment of her student's education.*

- *Math 0097, 2007 I enjoyed the creativeness that she puts into her teaching. She relates all of her math to personal problems in life.*

3. I teach students to organize their math process, to redefine topics, and to make a connection between concepts.

The use of ‘caveman says’, when giving alternate definitions, allows students to redefine math terms by putting them in their own language. In this way, signed numbers become money, reduction of fractions become armies crossing lines to fight, and negative powers become infiltrators who need to be moved across enemy lines. I make special efforts to use the POA to show the progression within a chapter and from section to section.

Evidence from student evaluations

- *Math 99, 2006 Ms Melanie made Algebra fun. I was never bored. She always related what she was teaching to something I already knew. She made math practical.*
- *Math 99, 2008 She broke things down in the simplest form and reviewed until I understood. The math journals were very helpful to keep things focused on positive attitudes. I enjoyed her use of “Caveman says” as a way to explain material in simple terms. I enjoyed her use of songs and stories to help students remember formulas. She shows us where we make mistakes and shows us organizational techniques to help our math be clearer and easier to follow the work. Because of her teaching, math is becoming easier.*
- *Math 0097, 2007 She works well with us and tries to understand what we are lacking. A wonderful teacher.*

4. I incorporate study skills and success strategies into my course.

I have read many books including: Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, A Few Keys to All Success, Winning at Math, The Master Key Workbook, Relaxation and Stress Reduction Workbook, You Can If You Think You Can, and others. Students need to understand how vital persistence, visualization, stress reduction, and goal setting are to personal success. I believe if we focus on training students to use successful techniques, they will naturally become successful students. In the book, A Few Keys to All Success, the author discusses how every door to success has two keys, one key for a particular knowledge or skill needed (such as math skills), and the other for successful habits.

Evidence from student evaluations

- *Math 97, 2003 Ms Partlow pushed us mentally to strive for the best. I was able to apply the journals to the class and my life. This class showed me where I was weak and where I needed to do better.*
- *Math 99, 2005 She really helped me be a better student. She really encouraged me to think. I thought I was bad at math, but recognized that I am actually good in math.*
- *Math 99, 2004 Ms Partlow’s “positive thinking stuff” is a wonderful idea. She has helped me become a better test taker, better student and better person. She will always help anyone that wants to help themselves. She has helped me to like math.*
- *Math 0097, 2007 This teacher made me see that I can do something when I thought I couldn’t. Thank you!*

5. I endeavor to create a learner-centered environment.

I attended several workshops and seminars focusing on the millennial learner and creating a

learner-centered environment. Creating such an environment begins with effective communication. It continues by encouraging students to seek and question, without fear of judgment or reprisal by the instructor. It concludes by taking into consideration special needs and situations, not just documented learning disabilities, but actual happenings in the lives of our individual students. Relationships build by treating students as individuals, giving respect and showing genuine concern.

Evidence from student evaluations

- *Math 97, 2008 She really understood the non-traditional student and their needs. She makes me work hard – but she works with me. I never felt alone.*
- *Math 99, 2003 The teacher and her classroom atmosphere felt open and welcoming. There were no “stupid questions” and I felt comfortable to get my questions answered.*
- *Math 1111, 2001 She does a great job of fostering self-confidence. She really knows her stuff and is fair, consistent and empathetic. She makes you feel comfortable to ask questions, which makes math easier to learn.*
- *Math 1112, 2008 She has given me a light down the dark path. Without her encouragement, I would not be in school today. She helps me anytime and every time I need help. Truly cares for her students and wants to see them succeed.*
- *Math 2208, 2005 I have never had a teacher encourage me as much as she does. She is a very positive and helpful person. I most appreciated that she was willing to help me after class and even after school hours. I felt comfortable to ask questions.*
- *Math 1112, 2007 Ms Melanie is a good teacher. I have enjoyed being in her class. She is enthusiastic about her job which helps me to be a better learner.*

6. Documentation of Teaching Excellence via School Dean reports.

Over the past ten years, Dr. Barber, the School Dean, has rated me exemplary overall for seven and good for the other three. If there was a GPA for faculty, I would have a 3.7. Each year Dr. Barber creates a chart comparing performance ratings of individual faculty to the performance ratings of the School of Science and Mathematics faculty and the college-wide faculty using student evaluations. The ratings show that there are many years where I have scored higher than both the school and college-wide faculty in all areas. I have included a chart which summarizes the years from 2004 to 2009 including 99,347 students who evaluated all campus faculty during that time. Although most of the written comments on my evaluations are positive (80% to 100% most years), the most common negative comment relates to the amount of homework assigned – stating I require more than other professors. I find it odd that I require more homework, offer practice tests, require journal entries in my learning support classes, all of which are all collected and graded; yet, in the past five years, I have had 10% fewer Ds, Ws, and Fs in my classes than my colleagues. I conclude that, although students do not want to do the ‘extra’ work, they understand this work requirement helps them perform better on tests and is directly applicable to the mastery of the material. It is also well known on campus that I want students to succeed and if they are willing to make the effort, I am willing to work with them anyplace and anytime.

REFLECTIVE STATEMENT

My purpose as an educator is to help students become more effective learners and successful people by any means necessary. I have researched best practices in education, attended seminars on the millennial student and read numerous books to help me become a more effective teacher. I have chosen to implement the following in my classes: varying use of teaching styles, addressing the different multiple intelligences, employing effective communication, teaching students how to organize their math process, incorporating study skills and success strategies into the course, all of which create a learner-centered environment. I believe it is important to address the whole student, not just the subject matter. Each person is an individual and the more we can treat them as such, without losing content or lowering expectations, the better.

Some students might think it silly or unnecessary to use color or tell stories as part of my discussion of the material when teaching; however, these techniques help students remember the concepts. While I always start the conversation with the mathematical definition, I like to give alternative definitions I refer to as 'caveman says'. I use 'caveman' language because some students are intimidated by big words or get lost in the explanation. 'Caveman' uses simple terms, is direct and to the point. When I describe the combining of like terms as "putting cokes and candy bars together" or explaining positive and negative numbers by putting them in terms of 'my money', it is not to tell a silly story, but to incorporate a learning style. I also use a 'plan of attack' (POA) to help students organize their steps, tie information together, and work the problem one step at a time. It is easy to become overwhelmed when a concept is not understood and has no relevance. Using real-life data with the POA helps the students relate and focus. Incorporating real-life information helps bridge the gap between the meaningless repetition of homework and true understanding. Students are able to break a difficult procedure down into small increments to successfully solve the equation and understand the results. The use of the POA allows the students to see the progression of concepts from one section to the next by placing new information with pre-existing information.

People do not learn and retain information when they are stressed, when they do not feel safe, or when the rules governing the group are not fair. Creating a learner-centered environment means providing a place where students are not afraid to ask questions and where they know they will be treated with respect and concern. Breaking down the concepts and reviewing material that students should remember from a previous class, reduces stress and allows students to fill in the gaps to understand. Reviewing material takes extra time, but when the students understand the underlying principles, it makes the new material easier to assimilate. Sometimes this requires extra meetings. I have weekly recitation meetings for my classes to answer questions or go more in depth on topics students did not understand in class. We also spend time on enhancement topics, such as how to use the calculator more effectively. Sometimes we view the next topic and discuss how the current strategies apply to future topics. In an effort to calm fears and help students prepare for the final exam, there is always a review session (outside of class). Now, thanks to helloworld[®], I can video the classes, review sessions, and recitations to place online for students to view at their convenience. Although I try to

accommodate each student, there is always one who has a time conflict. Now the information awaits them in cyberspace.

While I continually search for fresh ways to explain an old topic and employ these teaching strategies, some still find math concepts difficult to master. As I have worked more intensely with these students, I have found that anxiety and self-efficacy block the learning process. Students plagued with fear and self-doubt do not perform well on tests. I believe, as Maslow described in his hierarchy of needs, that students cannot perform at their best as long as they have not fulfilled the basic needs of belonging and self-esteem. By incorporating topics on stress management, math anxiety, and relaxation techniques into my learning support classes, and offering these topics as seminars through the Academic Assistance Center (AAC) to all students in all courses, students can identify issues in their lives that keep them from performing successfully. Focusing on the whole person makes learning more easily attainable and creates a sense of community. Students come to realize that they are not alone and there are others who feel as they do, scared and overwhelmed by math.

Research of best practices indicates that students are more effective learners when they know an educator genuinely cares about them as individuals and they know the expectations in the classroom. High expectations clearly conveyed make for a comfortable and relaxed atmosphere. In order to succeed, students need to feel prepared. They need to know when and how the evaluation of material will be conducted. To this end, I include a calendar and an explanation of the grading policy on my syllabus. Basic classroom rules are set and enforced regarding behavior and performance in an effort to create a relaxed and comfortable learning environment. Communication is of the utmost importance for two individuals to connect and for the teacher to encourage and express care about the student's performance. Students are encouraged to come by my office during office hours or make other arrangements to see me at times convenient for them. Office hours and AAC hours are an important way to accomplish the one-on-one connection between student and instructor. Students need the instructor most when their anxiety level is high or their understanding level is low. For some students the difference between pass and fail may be only a few additional minutes of instruction, one more explanation, a little individualized help from a tutor in the AAC, or even a simple word of encouragement. Several times during the semester I give out my cell phone number to allow students to call whenever they have an emergency. Emergencies may be mathematical or psychological, as long as they are not abused. I have been pleased with the response so far.

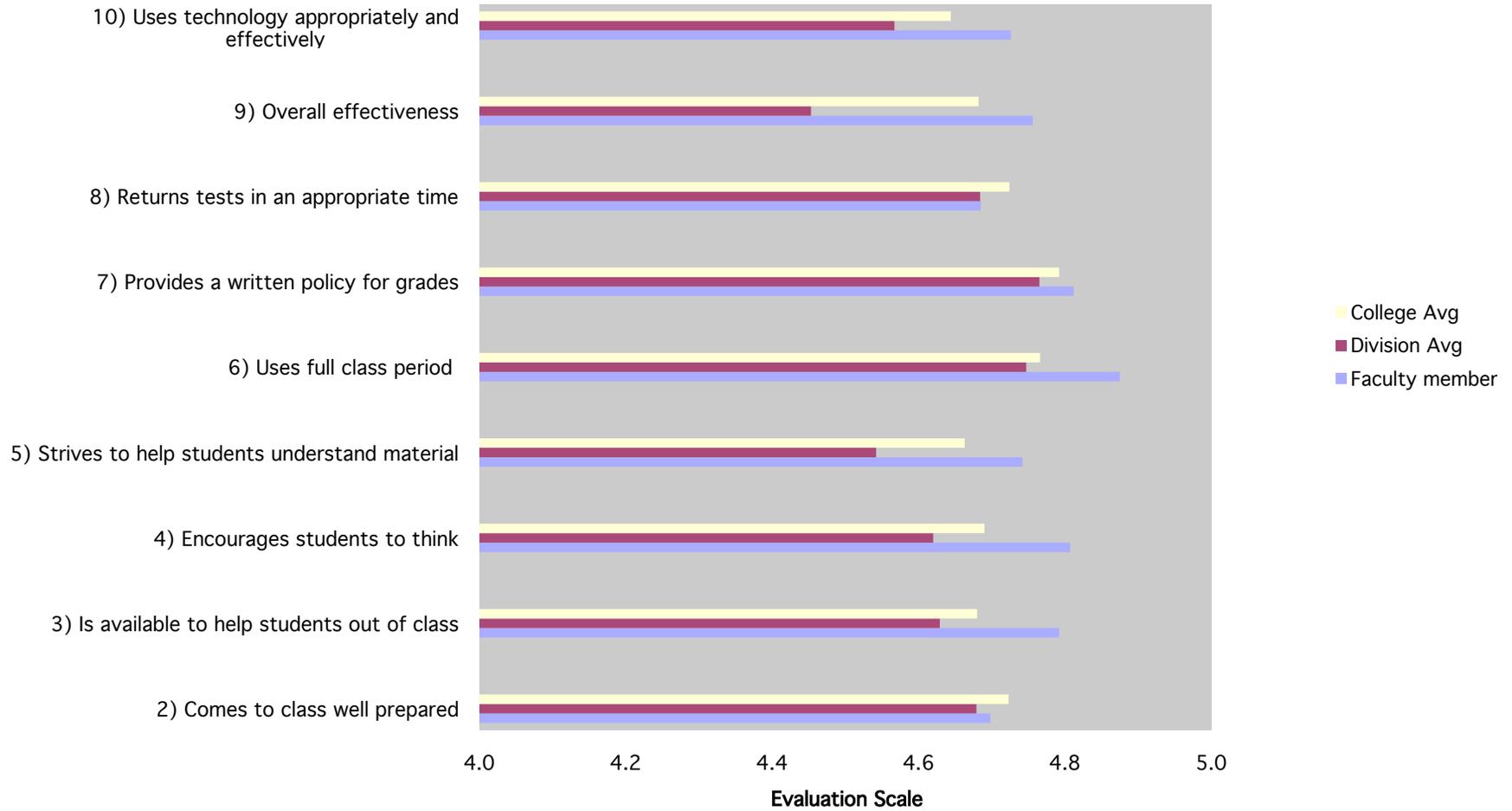
Attitude makes the difference; the attitude of the instructor, as well as the student. I prefer to think of math as a challenging game to be played and mastered rather than a treacherous mountain to overcome. First, one must learn the rules of the game – methods and definitions. As the game progresses and the game pieces change, the player must see how the rules fit these new pieces. The player learns how to combine rules to make larger and more complicated moves. When math is viewed as a game, the pressure to 'be a good student and make it work' is minimized and learning the math game is maximized. I compare math to the game of baseball. As a child progresses from T-ball

to coach-pitch and into high school ball, the basic game is the same, but the players get 'bigger and uglier.' So it is with mathematics. Math is a subject where practice makes a difference. Just as the athlete practices to be successful in the game, math skills need to be practiced. If students are not initially successful, they need practice, practice, and more practice. By reviewing the rules, understanding the definitions, and practicing the methods, students will find they become more proficient in math. In the same way that great ball players do not achieve greatness by simply reading the rules, but by playing, math is not mastered by reading, but by doing. Math is not a collection of isolated concepts and disjointed procedures, but a weaving of connected and interdependent ideas.

The classroom experience should be enjoyable, not dreaded or feared. The more relaxed and confident the students are, the better they will perform. In order to keep students interested in the material and on task, the instructor must present the material with enthusiasm. My personal goal is to mitigate the fear of math and infuse some fun. Having an enjoyable class facilitates learning and is conducive to building a lasting confidence within the student. We use games, stories, and sometimes accents to help students review topics and practice ideas.

When describing myself as a teacher, I say I am a facilitator of learning and a cheerleader of mathematics; I am a thesaurus of definitions and methods; I am a siphon, drawing existing knowledge into the open where it can be processed. I believe a great teacher draws knowledge from the student and builds confidence in the student. She teaches the person, not the subject. If we can teach students to be successful people, they will be successful students. Any caterer or mortician will tell you that each person knows about 250 people; so, when you significantly alter one life, just one, you have affected approximately 250 others.

Student Evaluation of Instructor Effectiveness
Spring, Summer, Fall
2004-2009
Melanie Partlow





ABRAHAM BALDWIN AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE

Office of Academic Affairs

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Dr. Linda Noble
Associate Vice Chancellor for Faculty Affairs
University System of Georgia
270 Washington Street, SW
Atlanta, GA 30334-1450

April 22, 2010

Dear Dr. Noble:

It is with pleasure, and without hesitation, that I write a recommendation on behalf of Melanie Partlow's application to the University System of Georgia's Teaching Excellence award.

As the Vice President for Academic Affairs at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College, I have had the opportunity to work closely with Melanie Partlow as Coordinator of ABAC's Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), which essentially deals with improving the success of college Algebra. I have found Melanie to be a very competent and capable professional who consistently demonstrates excellent communication skills, motivation, and dedication, not just to the QEP, but to all she undertakes in the best interest of students, her department, school, and to the college as a whole.

Melanie has been a faculty member at ABAC since 1998 in the School of Science and Mathematics and has a plethora of teaching experience, professional development, and other activities and accolades. Most recently, Ms. Partlow was the recipient of Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College's Donaldson teaching excellence award this year and was unanimously selected from among many nominees by a college wide committee of faculty and students.

In addition to her offering professional development to faculty campus-wide related to the QEP, she has been involved locally in the community, she has been active in her field through presentations at conferences, she has been involved state-wide through development of Math e-core coursework, and she has been involved in SACS efforts for other institutions. In what has to be one of the most dreaded subjects on a college campus, Ms. Partlow consistently receives high evaluations from her students because she teaches Math courses with a passion and love for the material in such a way that students say they "get it" and it "came alive" for them.

Again, I support Ms. Partlow's application whole-heartedly. Should you have additional questions, or need additional information, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Niles Reddick, Ph.D.
Vice President for Academic Affairs
229-391-4783

To Whom It May Concern:

When I found out that Melanie Partlow was nominated for the Donaldson Award she didn't have to ask me to write a letter, I insisted. I should start by saying that I have an incredible fear of all things algebra. I don't mean the typical hatred of math that each student harbors either, algebra evokes feelings in me that are akin to my affinity for sharks or spiders. Something happened long ago that made me believe that I would never be able to do it. I gave up on word problems, functions, and deemed imaginary numbers a joke. Anything harder may as well be Hebrew. Math topics that are simple to most people come incredibly hard to me. I am a good student, an honor student, except when it comes to algebra. Then my whole body transforms; I panic, I cry, I use my inhaler, and then I blank out. Fortunately, I ended up in Ms. Partlow's class. After the first two weeks of this semester, I had a breakdown in her office. How she handled it, I will never forget. I was there for tutoring, but couldn't pull myself together enough to focus. She stopped what we were doing and told me that it was ok. She printed a list of positive affirmations and told me that if I believed them, they would come true. She told me that panic attacks are real and we devised a plan to help me stop the panic reflex. I have sampled four or five algebra professors from ABAC, dropping the course at midterm each time. This is my third semester needing only one class, College Algebra, to graduate. I have the drive, the work ethic, and the intelligence, but until now I didn't have an instructor who could help me make the connection. I put in the work and so does she. That day in her office she believed me and *in* me. I wasn't the crazy girl with a syndrome in my head, just a person who is stressed and prone to freaking out. Ms Partlow knows that anxiety is real, it's not a cop out and it's not pretend. She let me own that and then taught me how to give it away. Mrs. Partlow instills in me a calm that my prescription for math anxiety, Clonazepam, cannot do. She has helped me overcome my magnificent fear.

I know there are days that I drive her crazy and make her wish she had never opened her heart to me, but she never lets on. She spends hours each week outside of class drilling algebra into my head in a way that I understand. I know that I will never be a mathematician, but I also believe that at the end of this semester I will graduate. Mrs. Partlow has taught me that if I believe in myself, I am capable of anything (not just algebra). The methods we are using are methods that I can apply to other areas of my life. I am still a work in progress, but she never gives up on me. I entered this semester with hopes of a C, which in math for me is the equivalent of an A. I discussed this with her and she told me that a C was a realistic goal and not unobtainable. She didn't pressure me to wish for higher, but I know she knew I could do it. Right now my *lowest* test score in her class is a 90, largely because of her. I feel that she is a rare and precious jewel and that any student that does their part in her class should not only pass, but do well. I dare to even say that she is the best math professor in the world, and I mean that. She actually *teaches* and conveys things that I never thought possible. So, no matter how silly it sounds, I believe it to be true. ABAC is lucky to have her on staff and the students are fortunate to have her for any course.

In closing, I am grateful for the opportunity to shed some light on Melanie Partlow and her exemplary teaching skills. Mrs. Partlow is very deserving of the title *Teacher of the Year* and in my eyes, she already is.

Sincerely,

Heather Dale Roberts



ABRAHAM BALDWIN AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE

School of Human Sciences

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March 9, 2010

Dear Search Committee,

I am writing on behalf of Ms. Melanie Partlow's Donaldson Award application. I have known Ms. Partlow on two levels-as a student and as a colleague.

When I was a student at ABAC from 1999-2001, I worked as a math tutor in the AAC. Ms. Partlow conducted training classes for math tutors, and I enjoyed taking part in these classes. She truly made learning fun, and I could tell that her passion was for student success. She taught me how to be an effective, encouraging teacher. I use the skills learned in her class on a daily basis.

One thing that I fondly remember about Ms. Partlow is that she positively interacted with all students. She volunteered to spend many hours in the AAC helping struggling students. She did not do this because it was required; she volunteered because she truly cared about student success. In her interactions with students, there are no "dumb questions." She respectfully assisted students, even the ones who were struggling with high school level concepts.

When I returned to ABAC as an instructor, I was delighted to see Ms. Partlow. She is still making the same impact on students today that she was ten years ago. As an advisor and instructor, I have never overheard students speaking negatively about Ms. Partlow. My advisees state that she truly cares about her students, and she has the ability to break lessons down into small parts so that the topics will be more understandable. I believe that she is her students' biggest cheerleader; she does not simply allow students to give up. She teaches with a can-do attitude that is simply contagious.

Ms. Partlow is also very involved on campus and in professional development. The best instructors realize the value of continuing education, and Ms. Partlow constantly seeks ways to improve her teaching practice. She also participates in various ABAC activities.

Why does she do this? She realizes the importance of being involved, as it shows support to her students. Also, she has a desire to be a well-rounded individual.

I believe that Ms. Partlow is an excellent candidate for the award. Please contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Shelley Fandel, Ed.D.



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March 4, 2010

To Whom It May Concern:

I am strongly recommending Melanie Partlow for the honor of earning the Donaldson Award for Teaching Excellence for the academic year 2009-2010.

Melanie is approachable and friendly, and an extremely competent professor. She teaches a variety of mathematics classes at ABAC – all levels – and does so with a wonderful balance of high expectations and compassion. She uses technology effectively (through videotaping her class for putting her lectures online using Helloworld/Attain Response, through PowerPoint presentations, the TI Virtual Calculator, and My Math Lab). Melanie also uses humorous quips to encourage correct understanding and recall of mathematics, making her classes very enjoyable. She clearly enjoys teaching. When I visited her class in September, I had to really hunt to find anything to improve her lecture. I enjoyed her class very much, and I wasn't the bit surprised when she was nominated for the Donaldson Award this year. She does a superior job!

She shows her commitment to student learning through her AAC tutoring/recitation sessions for Math 0097, her extensive work on implementation of the QEP over the last 3-plus years, her work with a Living and Learning Community, her use of "Few Keys" to challenge students toward growth in important character qualities, her emphasis on stress management, self-esteem, and test anxiety discussions and journal assignments, her willingness to pilot new course formats and instructional delivery methods for the College, and her significant involvement with faculty development and the Center for Teaching and Learning. She also co-directs the regional Science Olympiad every spring.

As first year department chair, I wasn't required to write this letter, and as busy as these days are, it is clearly a sacrifice of precious time to write this letter. But I am convinced that Melanie is doing a remarkable job in her own classrooms and as she influences other instructors for the good of our students.

And so, I wholeheartedly endorse Melanie for this Award to recognize her "superior instruction and dedication of the College".

Sincerely,

Geoff Clement
Associate Professor and
Interim Department Chair, Mathematics
Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College

To Whom It May Concern:

When I began college I was a nursing major. After one semester I decided it wasn't what I wanted to do for the rest of my life. In the Spring of 2007, I was floundering around taking random classes to complete my core curriculum. One of those random classes was Pre-Calculus with Ms. Melanie Partlow. The class met four-days-a-week at 8 am; I was sure I'd be skipping it often to sleep in. However, after attending this class for only one week, I looked forward to it daily and never wanted to miss this class. By the end of the semester, I knew what I wanted to do with my life - I became a math major.

Ms. Partlow made learning math fun and interesting. I've had several math professors during my college experience. All were brilliant individuals, but only a few were brilliant teachers. I count Ms. Partlow among the few. Her teaching style truly reaches students. A student learns the material instead of memorizing it for class and then forgetting it by the next semester.

While I never had the chance to take another math course with Ms Partlow, I had the pleasure of sitting in on her other classes. I've watched her give motivational lectures, digital record and upload lessons, and interact with students in only the way she can. I believe her two greatest features are her dedication and sense of humor. Ms. Partlow is one of the most dedicated teachers I've ever met. For any student willing to put forth the effort, she's willing to bend over backwards to help. She will tutor a student until they understand the material, no matter how long it takes. Most professors are only available during their office hours, and sometimes not even then. Her application of humor is very effective in a mathematical setting. Most students hate attending math classes because they're boring, and boredom makes one sleepy. I can't vouch for other students, but I'd rather laugh while I'm learning than yawn.

I'm currently obtaining a master's degree so that one day I too can teach college mathematics myself. Ms Partlow has been my mentor throughout my journey. She has spent hours talking with me about different colleges, classes, job opportunities, and teaching styles. She's shown me lesson plans, software programs, but more importantly to me, she's allowed me experiences that I probably wouldn't have obtained until I started teaching. If I had to model my teaching style after someone, it would be Ms. Partlow.

To speak honestly, when I read over the award criteria, I immediately thought of Ms. Partlow and how fitting it is for her. It may seem I have a biased opinion; but, it should be noted that she has some of the highest ratings on the on-line professor rating systems, such as ratemyprofessors.com. These sites are anonymous so there's no reason to lie. They all say she's an incredible teacher and I must agree. What a way to sum her up!

April Abbott
4th Year Mathematics Major