

Teaching Excellence Award Portfolio for Dr. Alan Brasher

Along with a nomination letter from Dr. Timothy Goodman, East Georgia College Vice President for Academic Affairs and Student Services, I have included a condensed CV, a reflective letter on teaching and learning, a support letter from a colleague (Dr. Dana Nevil, Humanities Chair), two support letters from students (current student Melissa Cartaya and former student Jordan Cameron), and various appendices: selected unsolicited comments from students, one comment from a WebCT teaching evaluation, an example of my classroom assessment activities, and an example of a WebCT discussion (the whole truth—some students “getting it” more than others, but all wrestling with a philosophical application of literature). The appended documents speak more clearly to the effectiveness of my teaching than any others I can imagine, in part because they allow my students to speak for themselves; I find them more compelling than summary tables.



EAST GEORGIA COLLEGE
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*From the Desk of Dr. Tim Goodman
Vice President for Academic Affairs and Student Services
East Georgia College*

March 28, 2005

It is my distinct pleasure to write this letter of recommendation for Dr. Alan Brasher to receive the Regents' Teaching Excellence Award. Since becoming the Vice President for Academic Affairs in July 2000 I have had opportunity to observe Dr. Brasher and became served as his supervisor in 2001. I evaluated him during this time frame and also observed him through the tenure and promotion process. Thus, I feel very confident in giving this recommendation.

I have visited Dr. Brasher's classes and have always found them to be stimulating and lively. All of his classes are packed and students always gain a good experience from his classes. He is one of the highest rated instructors on student evaluations. He projects a caring attitude that students respond well to and he is always willing to help them. He does all of this and yet maintains strong standards for his students. His classes seem to be the first filled and he has willingly taken extra students in his classes to help with any scheduling difficulties.

I found Dr. Brasher to be very intelligent with a strong interest in theory and pedagogy. Dr. Brasher is technology literate, necessary in this day and time in education. He uses a variety of teaching techniques and media very effectively. His strength lies in his ability to communicate well with students in classes and out of classes.

At East Georgia College faculty are asked to do more than teach classes; they are asked to become part of the college and community. Dr. Brasher is probably one of our strongest faculty in terms of student interaction. He has one of the largest advisee loads on campus because students go to him when their assigned advisor is not available. They know they can trust him to help them with planning and counsels them as they carry out the plan. He is also the advisor for the Music Makers, an informal student/faculty group on campus. He is active in the Renegade Players, serving as a faculty sponsor and chief set builder. He is very active in the MAP program and has helps with supporting our minority students even though he is of majority race.

Although Dr. Brasher is very busy on campus, he is also very active in the community. He is on the board of the Emanuel Arts Council and has worked tirelessly for them. As mentioned before, Dr. Brasher has likely the largest advisee load on the Swainsboro campus because of his popularity with students and the respect he has from his co-workers. He works well outside of the Humanities Division and with other members of the campus community.

With his background I feel he is a valuable asset to East Georgia College and it is without hesitation that I will recommend Dr. Alan Brasher for the Regents' Teaching Excellence Award.

Professionally Yours,

Dr. Tim Goodman
Vice President for Academic Affairs and
Student Services - East Georgia College

ALAN D. BRASHER
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH
EAST GEORGIA COLLEGE

EDUCATION

Ph.D., University of South Carolina, May 1996, Colonial and 19th-Century American Literature
M.A., University of South Carolina, May 1992, American Literature
B.A., University of Montevallo, May 1987, Major: English, Minor: Political Science

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Associate Professor of English, East Georgia College, Swainsboro, GA 1997-present
Adjunct Instructor, George Wallace Community College, Clanton, AL 1996-97
Adjunct Instructor, University of Montevallo, Montevallo, AL 1995-96
Visiting Assistant Professor of English, University of South Carolina, 1994-95
Graduate Teaching Assistant, University of South Carolina, 1989-92

Courses Taught: American Literature, British Literature, World Literature, Western World Literature, Composition I, Composition II, Developmental English, Regents' Reading Review, Beat Writers: American Romantics in the Twentieth Century, Business Writing

AWARDS

Who's Who Among America's Teachers, 2002, 2004, 2005
EGC Faculty of the Month, February 2005, November 2004
Named EGC's Most Student-Friendly Professor by EGC Non-Traditional Club, 2004
EGC Student Government Award, 1999

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Selected Publications

"Samuel Johnson," in *American Transcendentalism in New England*, Rev. ed., Ed. Wesley Mott. Dictionary of Literary Biography, fourth series, vol. 243. Detroit: Bruccoli Clark Layman, 2001.

"'Their Beauty has More Meaning': Transcendental Echoes in Robinson Jeffers's Inhumanist Philosophy of Nature." *Robinson Jeffers and a Galaxy of Writers*. Ed. William B. Thesing. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995. 146-59. Excerpted as "On 'Vulture'" & "On 'Birds and Fishes.'" "Robinson Jeffers (1887-1962)." Compiled by Cary Nelson. *Modern American Poetry*. Ed. Nelson. 1 Jan. 2000. Dept. English, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.
<www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/index.htm>.

"James Freeman Clarke's Journal Accounts of Emerson's Lectures." *Studies in the American Renaissance 1995*.

Selected Presentations and Panels

"Theodore Parker and Pre-Darwinian Racial Theory," Modern Language Association Convention, 30 December 1993, Toronto.

Selected Conferences Attended

Student Success in First-Year Composition, 2001-2005
Course Imbedded Assessment Techniques, Brewton Parker, fall 2003
Minority Advising Program Conference, 2002-2003
Teaching Non-Western Literature Workshop, in Conjunction with 11th Annual British Commonwealth and Postcolonial Literature Conference, 2002
USG Conference on Teaching and Learning with Advanced Technologies, 2001
Minority Advising Program/Minority Recruitment Office Workshop, 1999-2000
University of Georgia System Conference on Teaching and Learning, 1998-1999

Two-Year College English Association-Southeast, 1999-2000
Georgia Conference on College and University Teaching, 1998

Miscellaneous

Taught Class on Henry D. Thoreau to Swainsboro High School, College Prep American Literature class, March 2005

Member of East Georgia College Teaching Circle, 1997-1999

Regular assessment of teaching effectiveness, i.e., the effectiveness of writing activities, evaluation methods, or instruction delivery (every semester since fall 1997)

INSTITUTIONAL SERVICE

Selected Committees

Presidential Search Committee, 2003-2004

Institution Representative for Jack Kent Cooke Transfer Scholarship, 2004-present

Institutional Effectiveness Committee, 2000-present

Minority Advising Program Committee, 1998-present

Vice President for Student Services Search Committee, 2002

Student Handbook Committee, 2002

Ad-Hoc Committee to Revitalize Student Services, 2001-2002

Student Services Committee, Recorder, 1997-2000

Extracurricular Organizations

Faculty Advisor to Music Makers Anonymous (MMA), 1997-present

Co-Faculty Advisor to *Wiregrass*, 1998-present

Faculty Advisor to African American Union/Multi-Cultural Student Alliance (AAU), Feb. 2000-2003

Selected Activities

Organized and led over a dozen public performances by Music Makers Anonymous, informal EGC music performance club that I advise, 1997-present

Participated in fifteen functions of EGC's African-American Union, many during my three years as the organization's advisor, ranging from drumming performances to book discussions and black history trips to Savannah, Alabama, and Atlanta.

Learning Lab Volunteer Tutor

Held one session ENGL 1102 class at local Dairy Queen in preparation for Vision Series speaker Robert Inman, author of *Dairy Queen Days*, spring 2003

Participated in art Professor Neil Kalmanson's ceramics independent study, spring 2003 (provided additional instruction on hand-building and throwing)

Proposed and participated in a series of four meetings between small groups of faculty and the Institutional Effectiveness committee to pitch classroom assessment in an informal setting, fall 2002

Participated in Faculty Forum meeting dedicated to classroom assessment, fall 2002

Participated in Key Three Freshman Orientation Team, 2001-2002

Composed (with David Strickland) Student Services Survey, given to students March 4-6, 2002, and presented to Student Services Committee, Summer 2003

Gave guest Lectures for the Prep Program (four lectures, 1998-2001)

Led (with Mary Nielsen, Suella McCrimmon, and Gerald Kehr) a discussion of issues raised at the University of Georgia System Conference on Teaching and Learning to the EGC Teaching Circle, spring 1999

Gave informal seminars in semester conversion to all my summer and fall classes, 1997-98

Gave informal advising seminars to my Statesboro classes, fall 1998, explaining issues specific to the Statesboro program that the students did not understand

Carried, for several years, the heaviest advising load of all EGC advisors on the Swainsboro Campus

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Memberships

Board Member of Emanuel Arts Council, July 2003-present

Coffee House, Gallery, Gift Shop Committees

Member Emanuel Arts Council, 1997-present, currently at patron level

Assistant to the Director of the Kalmanson Gallery, 1998-present

Charter member, Swainsboro Artists' Guild, founded October 2003

Member of Canoochie Riverkeeper, 2000-present

Community Liaison to Gallery and Coffee House Committees for EAC, 2001-2003

Selected Activities

As Assistant to the Director of the Kalmanson Gallery, have written press releases for art exhibits (a half-dozen-or-so per year)

Have organized and performed at more than twenty of Emanuel Arts Council's Coffee House programs. Originally I organized college night events; then as advisor of the EGC AAU, I also organized African-American History programs. Now, as a board member and chair of the Coffee House Committee, I organize, set up and run sound, and perform at each monthly event. Recently arranged relocation of EAC's Last Thursday Café to 114 West Main, a local restaurant owned by EGC alumnus, Brian Brown (a former student and advisee)

Have performed in more than a dozen of Emanuel Arts Council's Emu'Ole Opry and Rock-n-Roll Revue fund raisers

Have performed an hour of Country Classics for the Adrian Friendship Club (4 times) and the Swainsboro Nursing Home (2 times)

Designed and built set for EAC production of Larry Shue's *The Foreigner*, January 2005

Judged essay competition for Independent School Literary Meet at EGC, 10 March 2005

Judged essay contest for Region 3AAA Literary Meet in Wrens, 11 March 2005

Led three Ida Belle Williams Book Club discussions: Connie May Fowler's *River of Hidden Dreams*, Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*

(tied to Fowler's November 2003 visit to EGC as Vision Series Speaker), September 2003

Taught Continuing Education Classes in Beat Poetry, Contemporary Song Lyrics as Poetry, Modern American Poetry, American Poetry, from Romanticism to Modernism, Advanced Guitar: Basic Scalar Improvisation

Led AAU Book Discussions of Richard Wright's *Uncle Tom's Children*, the poetry of Langston Hughes, and Frederick Douglass's *Narrative* (1st ed.)

Judged Jefferson County High School essay contest, 14 March 2003

Attended Swainsboro High School's Art Club Chili Dinner, at the invitation of Dabney Edenfield, SHS art teacher, in order to interact with PSO students in a non-classroom setting, fall 2002

Led Drumming Demonstration at St. Phillip Baptist Church in Swainsboro as part of African-American History Month, February 24, accompanied by EGC MMA member Chase Tipps (invited by EGC part-time instructor, Cathy Outlaw), spring 2002

Judged Franklin Library's "Teen Poetry Night & Café," October 11, 2001

Performed for the Masons' Christmas Program at Paul Anderson Boys' Home in Vidalia, December 1999

Coached (as assistant to Reid Derr) a youth soccer team for the Swainsboro/Emanuel County Recreation Department, 1998-1999

Assembled and presented (w/ Jacquie W. Brasher) exhibit of Asian Crafts and Culture for Emanuel Arts Council International Culture Day, fall 1997

Reflective Statement on Teaching and Learning

Alan D. Brasher

Teaching is an art. There is no way around that fact.

As with any art form, teaching can be approached from the perspective of science, taking action based on the tabulated results of empirical evidence. But teaching only approaches its highest form when the notations of past experiences give way to honest and fully engaged interactions between teacher and student, when proving old theories gives way to composing new ones.

The art of teaching is the art of making it new, whatever “it” may be in any given instance. Each student must apprehend, through realization, something new. Teaching cannot depend on repetitions or recitations of past moments, but must be a creative moment of the present. When, in his 1837 Phi Beta Kappa address to Harvard’s graduating seniors, Ralph Waldo Emerson drew a celebrated contrast between genius and talent, he spoke one of the great truths about teaching and learning:

The book, the college, the school of art, the institution of any kind, stop with some past utterance of genius. This is good, say they, let us hold by this. They pin me down. They look backward and not forward. But genius looks forward: the eyes of man are set in his forehead, not in his hindhead: man hopes: genius creates. Whatever talents may be, if the man create not, the pure efflux of the Deity is not his; cinders and smoke there may be, but not yet flame.

For each student, the moment of learning must be one of flame, not smoke alone.

Teaching, then, requires more than the fuel of knowledge and the oxygen of a willing mind, but also the heat to make it flame. Without something actually happening in the present moment, there is no true teaching or learning. So that interdependency between teaching and learning must be expanded to include the creative moment. I love when, in *Franny & Zooey*, J. D. Salinger’s Franny Glass complains about her college experience that one “never hear[s] any hints dropped on a campus that wisdom is *supposed* to be the goal of knowledge.” I love it not because it may be true, but because it points in the direction of a higher goal for learning and because constant awareness of it drives me to aim higher than the talent that Emerson judged far short of genius. If wisdom, or something of its kind, is the goal of knowledge, then the creative act is essential; a mere transfer of knowledge will not suffice—will never lead to something higher than the knowledge transferred.

My approach to teaching has always been conversational. Though I realized as early as grammar school that I was usually the student re-explaining the difficult lessons to my classmates, my first real sense of educational dialogue came from a copy of Plato's *Euthyphro, Apology, and Crito*. Socrates's manipulation of conversation to achieve understanding was and still is arresting. My goal is to lead my students, through careful questioning, to a sound understanding of the issue at hand. Staying out of the way of their ideas, while drawing them further down the paths they choose, is as important as making sure that their final conclusions are intellectually tenable. In order for learning to have occurred, students must leave a course with a set of ideas that are new to them, reasonable, and original. Though we have all met with the disappointment of discovering that our best ideas were published centuries ago, students must come up with ideas through the processes of their own intellectual curiosity in order to become thinking people; it is less important that they construct ideas never yet conceived by mankind than that they construct ideas never yet conceived by them.

In order for a conversational approach to work, the classroom environment must be non-threatening. I make it clear that my classes are discussion classes, and that students will be called on by name; however, I also explain that I simply want to hear what students are thinking. Being called on in my class is non-threatening, because no specific response is required—I rarely resort to a game of “guess what I’m thinking,” and when I do, I let the students know that I’m fishing for a particular response. It is at least as important for students to talk to one another as to engage in serial dialogues with the professor. While this can be difficult to establish, it can be by referring student questions to other students. Web discussions on WebCT have also helped to facilitate productive intellectual interaction between students in my classes. The comments classroom observers offer most often upon sitting in on one of my classes is that my students actually talk to me, that they trust me enough to get involved.

While productive discussions are the key to learning, teaching also requires evaluation. For me, evaluation can be the most difficult part of the teaching process. I rely, as much as possible, on student writing. The exams I give in literature surveys are almost exclusively quotes tests, requiring students to identify and respond to passages from works we have discussed in class. These responses must include close reading of

the passage presented, and connections between the passage and the work as a whole and also to the period in which the work originated. This approach gives students the opportunity to convince me that they know something worthwhile about literature and can truly read. I make it clear that reading reaches far beyond the ability to parse sentences. I often take Thoreau's estimation of reading into classes to make my position clear:

Most men have learned to read to serve a paltry convenience, as they have learned to cipher in order to keep accounts and not be cheated in trade; but of reading as a noble and intellectual exercise they know little or nothing; yet this only is reading, in a high sense, not that which lulls us as a luxury and suffers the noble faculties to sleep the whole while, but what we have to stand on tiptoe to read and devote our most alert and wakeful hours to.

To that end, my students understand that in all written work, they must present themselves as living, breathing, thinking human beings—a phrase I use as often as possible to drive the idea home. Exams or any other type of work designed for evaluation should be an opportunity for students to demonstrate that they know something that is relevant and worthwhile. Objective testing has its place, and is a must in content centered courses, but conceptual knowledge can be brought to bear. If learning is what separates teaching from talking, conceptual knowledge is what separates active apprehension (learning) from passive acquisition (memorization).

My first semester as a teaching assistant, I began a process of classroom assessment that has continued to the present. Of course, I hadn't heard the term classroom assessment back in 1988; it just made sense to talk to my students about what was working and what was not working in my teaching. I have never had cause to question the honesty of student responses to the surveys I give every semester, since I give them well after the trust necessary to open discussion has been established. In fact, students generally appreciate my interest in their views of how things are going, about how the classroom looks from the seats that face the front of the room. These surveys have helped me to shape my presentation of certain types of essays and of information about literary movements and historical periods. I have also asked advice about testing and writing instruction. I feel so strongly about the usefulness of classroom assessment, that, upon joining the Institutional Effectiveness Committee, I suggested a series of meetings with small groups of faculty members to pitch classroom assessment and discuss various

methods that might prove useful to those uninitiated in the process. Growth as a teacher, as in most things, requires reflection upon successes and failures. That reflection is enriched by considering student reactions to the methods under examination. The separation between teacher and lesson, on the one hand, and student, on the other, is entirely artificial if the ultimate goal is something more than a transfer of knowledge. While teaching informs learning, the response of learners to instruction must help shape teaching. I reject, out of hand, business-speak descriptions of teaching, because ours is not a cut-and-dried interchange of goods; however, the interdependence of teaching and learning insists upon a two-way exchange of information. To plan a course of instruction without doing all that I can to maximize the chances of students apprehending the key concepts, their foundations and subtleties, is to be satisfied talking rather than teaching.

Of course other factors can help to inform or reform teaching. I finally found that writing instruction can also be approached conversationally, though this revelation came to me late—only a few years ago. When our composition classes were moved into computer classrooms, I suddenly had the ability to project a computer screen onto a screen in the front of the classroom. This new ability offered the opportunity for discussions of sentence structure, centered round the arrangement and rearrangement of sentence elements and the use of punctuation options to enhance communication. It was genuinely surprising that students can actually be engaged in rearranging a sentence and then in differentiating between the nuances of the newly-formed sentences, each containing the same elements in different arrangements. Many students begin to appreciate the intricacies of our language when presented with endless options to choose from, each with a different emphasis. Now my students finally believe me when I tell them that the best writers are those who have the most options to choose from as they arrange the information they set out to communicate.

I am, or have been at various times, a guitarist, singer, potter, poet, drawer, and set builder, but teaching is the highest art I have ever engaged in. The symbiotic relationship between teaching and learning demands a creative moment with the flexibility to be expanded, redirected, or completely rewritten, according to the needs of the student. Requiring my students to be living, breathing, thinking human beings means requiring the same of myself. Teaching means igniting aspirations to genius and wisdom.

March 26, 2005

Dear Members of the Teaching Excellence Awards Committee:

I am honored to write this letter recommending Dr. Alan Brasher for the Board of Regents' Teaching Excellence Award. In my twenty years of experience in the field of education, I cannot think of any other who so fully embodies dedication to and excellence in teaching. I am reminded of a comment made by author Philip Lee Williams as he spoke to the faculty at East Georgia College about the legacy of teaching in his family. Williams commented that teaching is not something we do, it is who we are. This comment describes Dr. Brasher precisely, and it is one of the many reasons he earns the respect of those whose lives he touches, including students, colleagues, staff, administrators, and community members.

With his keen intuition, intelligence, and sensitivity, Dr. Brasher earns the respect and trust of his students and advisees. He is one who forgoes lecturing and works diligently to nurture students' critical thinking skills by building a classroom based on mutual respect and trust. Empowering and building self-confidence in his students, Dr. Brasher clearly believes that the students' ideas are just as important as his own, even when they disagree. Dr. Brasher's teaching expertise and high expectations provide his students with the tools to analyze and interpret many ideas – those of literary giants, their classmates, and their instructor. Students are encouraged to express their ideas and interpretations clearly and confidently in Dr. Brasher's supportive classroom environment. These skills stay with the students long after the specifics of content has faded. We at EGC are proud, but not surprised, that Dr. Brasher is a multiple-year honoree in *Who's Who Among America's Teachers*. Also not surprising is that Dr. Brasher's student evaluations are consistently some of the highest in our division. Serving as his supervisor, I have observed Dr. Brasher's classes and have witnessed the skill with which he handles classroom discussions: he consistently nurtures his students to become active learners and thinkers. Students enjoy his classes. Passive learning has no place in Dr. Brasher's classroom.

Dr. Brasher's presence around campus further illustrates his positive influence on EGC's student body. On most days, one finds current and former students stopping by Dr. Brasher's office to discuss literature that has sparked their curiosity. As well, one also finds student advisees asking for help or advice. For years Dr. Brasher has carried the largest advising load on our campus. While students are typically assigned advisors through our registrar's office, students frequently visit this office to specifically request Dr. Brasher. His large advising load can be somewhat burdensome; however, Dr. Brasher never turns away students who ask for help. Because his nature is to teach and to help, Dr. Brasher has served many volunteer hours as a tutor in EGC's learning support

center. Additionally, Dr. Brasher has remained dedicated to serving as a sponsor for our student organizations, including EGC's art and literary magazine, the Art Club, and the African American Union. One finds Dr. Brasher on campus every Friday afternoon playing his guitar along with the students in the Music Makers Anonymous group, an organization created by Dr. Brasher. This group makes several public appearances every year both on campus and in the community.

The trust, respect, and rapport that Dr. Brasher so naturally builds with students is a gift. His teaching skills are superior. His classroom is alive. Dr. Brasher has distinguished himself in the classroom, around campus, and in his service to our college and to our community. I feel honored to work with a professor of such high caliber, and I can think of no other whom I would recommend so highly for this honor.

Most sincerely,

Dana A. Nevil, Ph.D.
Chair, Humanities Division

P.O. Box 443
Adrian, GA 31002
(478) 668 4473

March 24, 2005

Dr. Dorothy Zinsmeister
Senior Assistant for Academic Affairs
Board of Regents
University System of Georgia
270 Washington Street SW
Atlanta, GA 30334-1450

Dear Dr. Zinsmeister:

I am writing to recommend Dr. Alan Brasher of East Georgia College for the Regents Award for Excellence in Teaching. I have been acquainted with Dr. Brasher for seven years, as one of his students and now, a collaborating educator. He is also a board member on the Emanuel Arts Council, an organization with which I am actively involved. I have no doubt that Dr. Brasher is an excellent teacher and a wonderful asset to our community.

As I prepared to enter East Georgia College as a post-secondary options student, I readied myself to meet the world of indifferent and uncooperative professors about which my high school teachers warned me. To my great relief, in an English 1102 class, Dr. Brasher proved those stereotypes wrong. He structured his class around our questions rather than teacher contrived lectures. Clearly, his goal inside the classroom was to make his students think. He cared about our opinions and interpretations of the different pieces of assigned literature, and although he definitely steered us in certain directions, he never discredited or ignored anyone's contributions or feelings. After transferring to another college and eventually majoring in English, I came to appreciate Dr. Brasher's teaching style more and more. So many college professors teach the material instead of the student. Dr. Brasher taught his students the material.

Dr. Brasher's influence as a teacher extends outside of his classroom and even away from the campus of East Georgia College. He has been instrumental in creating interest in live music in Swainsboro. He encourages his students to become involved in writing, performing, and appreciating music in the area. Dr. Brasher coordinates and participates in Emanuel Arts Council's "Last Wednesday Coffee House," a monthly event that gives aspiring musicians and poets the opportunity to perform publicly. He teaches by example, and his students remember his willingness to engage them in "undercover" academic pursuits.

Dr. Brasher and I recently collaborated on a project that shows his commitment to the community in which he lives. In an effort to keep students from feeling the way I did when I first went to college, I asked Dr. Brasher to become a regular guest teacher at Swainsboro High School. He was extremely excited about this venture. In February, he came to speak to my eleventh grade college preparatory American Literature class. Dr. Brasher taught the high school students the same way he taught my class at East Georgia College years earlier. His demeanor quickly put the students at ease. After he left, several of them voiced the desire to enroll in East Georgia College just so they could have him as a teacher.

I have never known an educator who deserves an award for excellence in teaching as much as Dr. Brasher. I personally consider him to be a major influence on my own teaching style and philosophy. As a life-long resident of Emanuel County, I know several of Dr. Brasher's former and current students; most of them have told me that Dr. Brasher is the best professor they've ever had. He has not only proven himself to hundreds of students over the years, he constantly proves his worth to our community by involving himself in activities that contribute to the intellectual and creative life of the area. Without hesitation, I urge you to present Dr. Alan Brasher with the Regents Award for Excellence in Teaching.

Sincerely,

Jordan Powell Cameron
English Instructor
Swainsboro High School
689 S. Main Street
Swainsboro, GA 30401
478-237-2267

To Whom It May Concern:

Simply stated Alan Brasher is an extraordinary professor. He loves to teach and it shows. Without exception, every student who I've spoken to has said something to that effect about him. I feel fortunate to have met Dr. Brasher and hold him considerably responsible for "putting the wind back into my sail." His gentle yet persistent encouragement has led me to become more involved in campus and community activities. He has helped me find my place in this community, and he has done so with a caring hand.

He instigates intelligent thought and provokes learning not in a methodical or redundant way, but rather equips each student with the tools necessary to come to their own realizations. He is a stellar listener, and it is quite apparent that he cares about his students. As far as I have seen, he has never hesitated to put forth extra time or effort into helping any student who is in need. His commitment to teaching is self-evident. In short, Dr. Brasher is truly an excellent professor and human being, and most definitely worthy of recognition for being so.

Melissa Cartaya

Classroom Assessment Example—Alan D. Brasher

English 1101 Assessment

At the end of the fall 2001 semester, I surveyed my 1101 classes about the general effectiveness of the course; their responses indicate a high level of satisfaction. The survey consisted of five questions, listed below with a summary of results. I surveyed two classes, with 26 respondents in one and 21 in the other. The classes were taught from the same syllabus and met in subsequent time slots (9:00 and 10:00 a.m.). I have considered their responses together, but have noted significant variations in responses between classes.

Did your writing improve as a result of English 1101?

33 students indicated significant improvement, 12 indicated moderate improvement, 2 indicated no improvement.

If so, why; if not, why not?

Frequent writing assignments: 18

Rigorous grading standards: 15

Variety of essay assignments: 6

What was the most useful activity or assignment in English 1101?

Class discussions: 24 (17 in one class)

Internet research project: 10 (7 in one class)

Complex sentence exercises: 4

Narrative essay assignment (because of required revision): 4 (all in one class)

What was the least useful assignment or activity in English 1101?

Carnivore essay: 6

Novel: 6

Peer review: 5 (4 in one class)

Students who dominate class discussion: 5 (all in one class)

If you could add one thing to the course, what would it be?

The responses were too numerous and scattered to be helpful.

The results of the survey indicate that the course doesn't need a complete overhaul. The students affirmed my own notion that frequent writing assignments and rigorous standards lead to improvement. The "variety of writing assignments" response to the second question seemed to include both variety of essay type and varied topics that interested the students.

Responses to the second question argue for the structure of the course as it now stands. We spend time in class discussing issues that serve as essay topics, in order to help students develop educated opinions of the issues and improve their critical thinking skills. The solid (1/3) response to the internet research project is encouraging—it introduces students to important skills: internet research, secondary sources, and MLA documentation; it also sharpens critical thinking skills. Any positive response to the complex sentence exercises I open 1101 with is encouraging. While only four students indicated the narrative essay project, I surveyed my 1101 classes on that project alone and found the response overwhelmingly positive.

There was no real consensus on the third question, which, in itself, is positive. The negative response to the Carnivore essay is no surprise—it was an assignment that became unmanageable and will not be repeated. The negative response to the novel reflects the notion that the literary assignment seems somewhat out of place in a first-semester composition class; in the final question, several students chose literature as something to add to the course. The final responses came from the same class and indicate a clash of personalities that involved four or five students: the class, as a whole, cast 17 votes for class discussion as the most helpful part of the class.

Classroom Assessment Example—Alan D. Brasher

Assessment of Students comprehension of Modernism and Existentialism in ENGL 2112

In the spring of 2002, I emphasized, for the second or third semester, the implications of modernism to the psychological construction of reality, via the poems of Wallace Stevens, and the significance of existentialism as a philosophy of purpose and responsibility, rather than an excuse for moral dissolution. I asked my students (24), for each philosophy, to indicate their percentage of understanding and whether or not the time spent on the subject were worthwhile—emphasizing that their answers would partially inform my approach the following fall. The most common percentage for understanding modernism was 80% (6) and the second was 50% (5). However, sixteen students indicated an understanding higher than 50% (14 higher than 60%). Nineteen students considered the discussions of modernism worthwhile. 50% and 70% were the most common percentages given for understanding existentialism (5 each). However, sixteen students indicated a level of understanding higher than 50%, with twelve (half of the students surveyed) indicating a percentage higher than 60%. Twenty-one students considered the time spent on existentialism worthwhile. The final question asked students to declare themselves satisfied or dissatisfied with our discussion of these two philosophies and to suggest the primary reason for their response. The answers were impossible to summarize, but students were overwhelmingly satisfied, with the most common concern about the treatment of the philosophies being discussions that were sometimes “too deep.”

I will continue to emphasize these themes, as the students seem to agree with me about their importance. With respect to the “too deep” discussions, I can only try to urge more students to leave the shallow end of the pool—to give up wading and swim.

Assessment of Computer Classroom Delivery of English 1101

In spring 2003, I surveyed a total of thirty-three students, in two sections, about the effectiveness of delivering English 1101 in the computer classroom. I asked seven questions that fell into three categories: composition in the computer classroom, use of instructor’s computer to offer illustrations of sentence structure and revision, and use of Opposing Viewpoints database as primary reading text for the course.

Thirty-one students indicated that their learning experiences had been enhanced by everyday classroom access to computer workstations, with twenty-three citing internet access as the biggest advantage, and eleven citing ability to type in-class essays (some students offered more than one response); two responses were neither fully positive or negative. While eight students indicated no negative effects of the computer classroom, nineteen pointed out that internet is a distraction and that some students surf the net or check their email during class discussion.

Thirty-two students responded positively to the use of the instructor’s computer and projector to illustrate sentence structure and revision; one response was unclear. Thirty-three students responded positively to the use of the instructor’s computer and projector to track class discussion by displaying key ideas as they arise.

Thirty-three students responded positively to the use of the Opposing Viewpoints database as the primary reading text for the course; the two reasons for the positive response to Opposing Viewpoints were easy access to useful information and access to a variety of opinions on a single issue which helped broaden students’ views of the issues addressed.

I will continue using the instructor’s computer to offer illustrations of sentence structure and revision and to track class discussions.

How would you rate the overall value of the course to you?

No.: 8

I am glad I have this opportunity to express my thanks to the college and Dr. Brasher for the mind opening experience I have had in World Literature II. I am a 1974 high school graduate who never had a class where open discussion was encouraged. Dr. Brasher's approach of encouraging many of the students to form and expand their own methods of thinking about certain works was refreshing. One recent high school graduate who sat behind me had made the statement that she had fiercely dreaded an open discussion class because of her fear of peer pressure or how others would react to her hesitant answers, but Dr. Brasher's non-judgmental way of asking and listening had made her feel that her opinions were of some worth. Additionally, she said she now enjoyed the reading assignments and looked forward to coming to class, which was wonderful for me to hear as a future teacher! Even though many of my comments may not have contributed to the response Dr. Brasher was looking for at the moment, he accepted them gracefully and did not brush them off as out of place or worthless to the discussion, and at my age I really appreciate that consideration. I feel this class is of supreme importance to the development of young people's abilities to form their own thoughts and express them coherently. As a young student I had an extremely difficult time putting my own thoughts into words, even though I had been a voracious reader since the third grade. I just wish that at that time I had met a teacher who could draw a child into an academic conversation as enthusiastically as Dr. Brasher does. What a difference it would have made in my academic pursuits and thoughts for the future! This course is much better for the social and psychological development of our student's minds than even the actual courses offered here in sociology and psychology, just due to the casual way Dr. Brasher can get a student to become interested in a subject many of us have pre-conceived ideas about. I just wish this course could become expanded into a deeper search of the art of literature. It has such a great impact on young minds.

Hi, Dr. Brasher. I know we haven't spoken in quite some time, but I've been busily trying to get a college degree. Although I'm graduating in May with a degree in geology, I've decided to try and get a job teaching middle grades science and language arts. I just wanted to know if it was okay if I listed you as a reference since you're the professor that was so influential in my decision to do something with literature. I've always wanted to do science research (and I still will), but I want to be a teacher, too. And I want language involved in my life, as well. I don't think I ever properly thanked you. I sort of lost track of everyone at East Georgia, but I truly enjoyed my time there. And a lot of it was because of you. You always kept me interested in literature. Thanks so much, Dr. Brasher, for all that you did. I hope I can be half the teacher for my students that you were for me.

Thanks—

Dr. Brasher,

Thank you for being a mentor, teacher, and friend to me these past two years. You have helped to make my experience at EGC a great one. Thank you for everything you've done for me and my sis. You and your class have been more inspiring than you will ever know. If there's anything I can ever do for you and Jacquie, please let me know!

Sincerely,

I just wanted to let you know that I really do appreciate your nominating me to receive the award for Western W. Literature. I consider the knowledge you have given me priceless, and I thank you for motivating me to do my best. As I move on to pursue my goal, your hard work and dedication shall never be forgotten.

Thanks Again,

Dr. Brasher

I thoroughly enjoyed your class this semester. It was stimulating and thought provoking. You are truly an artist; you seem very passionate about your work. Being a student in your class was like watching an artist paint a picture. I would come home and read an assignment and I wouldn't have a clue as to what might have been going on inside the author's head, but after the class discussion there was always a beautiful and completed painting before me. The class was so much more than just a literature class for me. The earlier works that we read at the beginning of the semester were like stepping into a totally different world. The authors opened up their hearts, their minds, and their souls to express their views and theories about our world and the connection between God, man, and nature. Each period offered something wonderfully different, your choice of works for class assignments were right on time. I must admit your assignment choices made me wonder why these? What's going on inside his head? I say that because I feel that everything we read was engaging, educative and mind stirring. You are very good at what you do, and I hope you love what you do Dr. Brasher because I truly loved being apart of your class. I always looked forward to coming to class and it was always a little dissapointing when it was over; I could sit in your class all day and listen to you and discuss with you because you have a way of painting a picture with your thought provoking questions and your philosophic explanations you force my brain to think beyond the written word. Your class, your style or method of teaching allowed us to journey inside the hearts and minds of the authors and see what they were feeling and thinking. Before your class I couldn't do that and I still can't, to the level that I would like to. Dr. Brasher keep doing what you do, just the way you're doing it, in so doing, your class will continue to offer more than just literature. Thank you so very much for a wonderful journey.

Sincerely

Dr. Brasher,

I wanted to thank all of the professors that helped me this semester to succeed and to find my skills. I enjoyed my English classes so much that I've decided to teach English, as you already know. I truly found something this semester in World Lit that caused me to really think and interested me beyond my expectations. It's because of great teachers like the ones at EGC that cause the students to dig inside themselves to find the person they truly are. I will miss this great college next year! Thanks again for being a great teacher.

Compiled Messages: Uncle Al's Happy Talk > Walden

Subject: More Ben and Henry **Author:** Alan Brasher **Date:** February 6, 2003 5:35 PM

Consider this angle--and try to connect your answer to something one or both of them says in the work we've read: you can drive across town through the industrial park (a lovely collection of dumpsters and loading docks) in fifteen minutes, while a more scenic route around the outskirts (trees, flowers, and horsies) takes twenty-two. Match Ben and Henry to the routes they would take (not a trick question--they wouldn't take the same one).

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Subject: Easy Squeezy, Lemon Peezy **Author:** student 1 **Date:** February 6, 2003 9:21 PM

This is relatively simple to answer. Franklin would more than likely travel the "scenic" route while Thoreau would take the more directed path to the destination. Thoreau is a man of my liking. In most cases I am a no nonsense type of person that would rather get to the desired destination or complete the desired task rather than lollygag around and try to find new ways to invent the wheel. Of course if I am not a part of the solution making process then I would rather sit to the side and observe all the nice things that may come to pass.

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Subject: Re: Easy Squeezy, Lemon Peezy **Author:** Alan Brasher **Date:** February 6, 2003 9:51 PM

Assuming, of course, that nice things come to pass when we choose not to impose ourselves into the solution-making process. Somewhere along the way in Walden, I can't remember just where, Thoreau says "a man sits as many risks as he runs" (and that goes for you women, too).

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Subject: Re: More Ben and Henry **Author:** student 2 **Date:** February 7, 2003 12:22 PM

Ben would take the scenic route, "He was a believer in the possibilities of human progress and the comforts of material success." The scenic route for him would be evidence of progress and success. For Henry the fifteen minute route would suffice. I'm not sure why I think Thoreau would take the shorter route, maybe because he seems to be a no nonsense type.

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Subject: Re: More Ben and Henry **Author:** student 3 **Date:** February 7, 2003 6:12 PM

Henry would take the route through industrial park, because he would rather take a direct way. Franklin would take the scenic route, because he enjoys the laws of man.

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Subject: Re: More Ben and Henry **Author:** student 4 **Date:** February 8, 2003 6:34 PM

....Wouldn't Franklin be too busy calculating, dividing, and figuring out gas mileage and the efficiency of the car's engine to actually "drive"anywhere?

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Subject: Re: More Ben and Henry **Author:** student 5 **Date:** February 9, 2003 10:15 PM

Same thing I was thinking...but if Franklin ever got around to actually driving, I think he'd have to get out and check out the environment to enjoy its pleasures. It definitely wouldn't take him 22 minutes.

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Subject: Re: More Ben and Henry

Author: student 6

Date: February 9, 2003
11:00 AM

Henry would take the scenic route because his peace was in nature and he wanted to see what nature had to offer him. Ben would take the industrial route in case he spotted something of interest to himself towards science. Just like the preacher talking in the town square and being heard at a specific distance.

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Subject: Re: More Ben and Henry

Author: Alan Brasher

Date: February 9, 2003
6:56 PM

The reference to Whitefield's projection is on the money; the preacher offers salvation, and Benny-boy's too busy calculating the number of people he could cram into hearing range to pay the message any mind.

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Subject: Re: More Ben and Henry

Author: student 5

Date: February 9, 2003
10:19 PM

I don't particularly care for Franklin's work. I'm not exactly sure why, but maybe he just seems kind of uptight.

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Subject: Re: More Ben and Henry

Author: student 7

Date: February 9, 2003
10:10 PM

Oh boy, you people have really confused me now. Even through the confusion, I can see that Kal and Melanie make a good point (and an amusing one at that.) It's kind of funny because I can picture Ole Benny wandering around Harmon Park with his pen and pencil. Hee Hee.

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Subject: Re: More Ben and Henry

Author: student 8

Date: February 10, 2003
9:25 AM

I may be wrong, but I'm thinking that Henry would be the one to take the scenic route. After all, he is the one who secluded himself from the rest of society in order to enjoy living off of the nature. He would probably take the 22 minute route and stop to write about what he sees along the way. Ben would probably take the shorter route, then attempt to discover a shorter one than that.

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Subject: Re: More Ben and Henry

Author: student 9

Date: February 12, 2003
9:39 AM

Franklin would be the one to take the longer route because he thinks more of what nature is and not what it offers. Thoreau only wants to do what is absolutely necessary to get him a place in heaven. He doesn't believe in wasting a single moment on anything, including something that can bring a single moment of happiness. Franklin enjoys life and all that exists within it. Thoreau enjoys what he can get from trying to better things to his satisfaction.

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Subject: Re: More Ben and Henry

Author: student 10

Date: February 25, 2003
11:21 PM

Ben would take the scenic route because he felt that you should learn and see as much as possible. Henry would take the shorter route because he believed you should only do as much as you had too, so why stay longer in a car when you don't have too?
