

U.S. Teacher of the Year to Student Teachers: Too Much Meat, Too Few Fruits and Veggies

Michael Geisen, the 2008

National Teacher of the Year, believes that too many classrooms serve up a steady diet of meat — that is, teacher talk, lecture, discussion led by you-know-who, and writing answers to textbook questions — and offer way too few fruits and vegetables, by which he means games, simulations, music, and classroom dramatics. Children and adolescents, he insists, need a varied menu of tasks, assignments, and ways to demonstrate their learning.

“I’d like to be able to greet my students each week while saying, ‘Here’s your menu.’” The menu would feature a range of options from which young people would make choices about their learning.

Geisen, a seventh-grade science teacher from Prineville, Oregon and National Teacher of the Year (2008), entertained, informed, and inspired spring student teachers at a breakfast on



From left: Early childhood education students April Dorrill (Phenix City) and Lauren Gowin (Sharpsburg, Ga.) chat with National Teacher of the Year Michael Geisen.

St. Patrick’s Day in March.

After delivering prepared remarks, Geisen fielded questions. One student teacher asked about how to be creative when working with a standards-based, assessment-driven curriculum that allows little room for student-centered learning strategies. Geisen responded that, assessment or not, we can serve kids a balanced diet of learning strategies when we teach. Using his nutrition metaphor, he

observed that fruits and vegetables are left off the table in too many classrooms.

Geisen referred to his own science classroom, and, for an example, teaching seventh graders to understand gravity and falling objects. When planning, he asks himself, “How can I approach this content with film, art work, singing, games, and acting out—all the different things that are available?”

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College of Education Faculty Meet with President Mescon

President Tim Mescon has big plans for Columbus State University, and the College of Education, he believes, has great things to offer as the institution moves

toward wrapping up the first decade of the 21st century. In a late-February meeting with COE faculty, Mescon spoke not only of his aspirations for the institution, but

also his concerns about the impact of the economic downturn affecting both the nation and Georgia.

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MESCON continued

CSU's new strategic plan anticipates an enrollment of 10,000 students in the next two to three years. Retention, Mescon and other administrators recognize, is the key to achieving this goal. How to achieve better retention, in fact, has weighed heavily on CSU's leadership for decades.

CSU is one of three university system institutions admitting students who, on paper, are not ready for college-level work. These students comprise only about 10 percent of entering freshmen. Among these students, only about 20 percent eventually earn four-year degrees.

The other 90 percent, though, don't do that much better, Mescon points out. About 35 percent of these students, the capable 90 percent, graduate within six years. "This is hideous," Mescon insists. Equally troubling is that fact that, each year, as many as 15 percent of CSU students "simply disappear."

Coming This Fall: Mandatory First-Year Experience to Enhance Retention Rates

The solution? Among other initiatives, CSU will institute a required First-Year Experience — similar to that found in many schools comparable to CSU — beginning this fall. Freshmen with permanent residences more than 30 miles from campus will be obliged to live in university housing for at least one year, to utilize campus dining services for no fewer than eight meals weekly, and to enroll in courses designed to



President Mescon explains the importance of a "First-Year Experience" for entering freshmen.

build strong relations between faculty and students as well as among students themselves. Senior CSU administrators, Dean David Rock of Education among them, will teach new courses through "Freshman Learning Communities."

Based on research, Mescon believes the First-Year Experience will do a great deal to build loyalty among students who, as he puts it, tend to disappear.

In a separate movement to appeal to both first-year and all students, Mescon said wireless technology expansion will build toward campuswide Wi-Fi access.

Did Someone Say Doctoral Program — in Education?

Mescon is solidly behind the efforts of Dean Rock to establish a doctoral program

in the College of Education. Although there are numerous obstacles to deal with before such a program may become a reality, both Rock and Mescon have been encouraged by the openness of the Regents to such a program at CSU.

From VPAA to University Provost

On another topic, Mescon reported that the new university provost (subsequently announced to be Inessa Levi, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Western Illinois University) — replacing VPAA George Stanton, who returns in the fall to the Biology Department — will be looked upon to re-establish and strengthen a grants management office among her many other tasks.

Graduation Reminder

The commencement ceremony for College of Education degree recipients is 3 p.m. Saturday, May 16 in the Lumpkin Center.



Chispa Recruits Hispanic Students

CSU's Hispanic Student organization, Chispa, sponsored its third Hispanic/Latino Youth College Conference in January.

Approximately 200 high school students and family members attended the event, which is designed to better inform area Hispanic and Latino students about opportunities for study after high school. Among topics addressed were goal-setting, paying for college, and the characteristics of the education system in the United States.

Jose Villavicencio, associate professor of foreign language education, is a founding sponsor of Chispa, which means "spark" in Spanish.



Computer science professor Rodrigo Obando, Muscogee County ESOL Coordinator Doris Brown and Jose Villavicencio welcomed participants of the Hispanic/Latino Youth College Conference.

African-American Read-In, 2009

Rosa Stanback, Columbus State University's first African-American faculty member, led 15 faculty, students and staff, including CSU president Tim Mescon, in the 2009 African-American Read-In on Feb. 3. A proud graduate of Tuskegee University, Stanback read Paul Lawrence Dunbar's "The Tuskegee Song," Dunbar composed the song in 1906 at the request of Tuskegee founder Booker T. Washington to celebrate the institution's 25th anniversary.

Stanback, social studies chair at Carver High School before being lured in 1970 to what was then Columbus College, retired in 1999 and was designated the following year as professor emeritus. She took part in the 2009 Read-In at the invitation of Schwob librarian Erma Banks, who organized the event.

Among others participating in CSU's Read-In were Anne Klinkenborg (physical education), who read Ambrose Braselton's "What Phys Ed Ain't"; James Brewbaker (language arts education), who read poems by young-adult writer Walter Dean Myers from *Brown Angels and Here in Harlem*, and President Mescon who read Langston Hughes' powerful "I Dream a World."

One Million Readers

The National Council of Teachers of English has sponsored the read-in since 1989 as part of a national observance of Black History Month in February. It reports that the event has attracted more than a million participants.

Read-Ins, according to NCTE, are as simple as an individual pausing on her or his own to enjoy reading — for 30 minutes or more — a

novel, poem, or other work of literature by an African American or as complex as a public program involving prepared readings by citizens of all backgrounds



Read-In enthusiasts enjoy reminiscences of CSU's first African-American faculty member, Rosa Stanback, as her husband, Oscar, looks on.



Professor Emeritus Rosa Stanback reads "The Tuskegee Song" by Paul Lawrence Dunbar.

choosing to celebrate the achievement of such writers as Langston Hughes, Toni Morrison, Maya Angelou, and others.

Read-In at Veterans Memorial Middle School on Feb. 6

CSU's own campus Read-In attracted about 40 participants. In contrast, Veterans Memorial Middle School took part in a big way, with almost every student in the school — about 500 grades 6-8 youngsters — having the opportunity to listen to literature by African Americans. Teachers and students at the school heard powerful renditions of Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech and selections from Sharon Draper's novel *Tears of a Tiger*. Draper, later National Teacher of the Year, was a classroom teacher when she wrote this novel.

Veterans Memorial is a member of the College of Education's Partner School Network. Education specialist candidate Kathie Jones, a sixth-grade language arts teacher, organized the read-in at the school.

A Look Back at African-American Author Visits to CSU

Among prominent African-American writers who have spoken to Columbus State audiences are poets Gwendolyn Brooks ("We Real Cool") and Nikki Giovanni. Others include

performer/playwright duo Ruby Dee and Ossie Davis. Davis, born near Waycross, Georgia, penned the Broadway play which became the musical *Purlie* (1970). Shay Youngblood, a graduate of

Hardaway High School and author of the *Big Mama Stories*, has also spoken on campus.

Georgia's best-known living African American writer is Alice Walker, whose

Kuforiji Leads Technology and Library Media Programs

Native of Nigeria Helps CSU Students Broaden Understanding of World Cultures

“What am I doing in this country?” wondered Paulina Ige soon after arriving at the University of Pittsburgh in the early 1980s. Her dismay at the time had a good deal to do with weather, for the young Nigerian teacher — recipient of a government scholarship to pursue a master’s degree in the United States — had never experienced cold of the sort she eventually regarded as normal during a 15-year stint in Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Ohio. Not long after enrolling at Pitt, though, Ms. Ige became acquainted with John Kuforiji — another Nigerian pursuing graduate studies at Pitt — and, in time, accustomed herself not only to U.S. winters but to many things about her adopted country.

Paulina Ige and John Kuforiji, master’s degrees in hand, married in 1984. Then, seven years after she completed doctoral study at West Virginia University in 1992, she accepted a position at Columbus State University as its new faculty member in the rapidly developing field of educational technology. Kuforiji now holds the rank of professor. Husband John, an economist, is a faculty member at Tuskegee University.

Americans: Thin on Knowledge of Africa

Americans, Kuforiji observed recently, know relatively little about Africa, less about Nigeria. “This was very offensive at first,” she noted. “Some Americans think Africa is a country and that Africans live in trees,” she explained, laughing aloud at the image. Early in her years in the US, Kuforiji met Americans who had never seen someone from a foreign country. “I wondered, ‘Don’t they know anything?’”

This characteristic bothers her less today. American schools, she points out, do not emphasize factual information about so-called Third World countries.

Kuforiji became a naturalized U.S. citizen two or three years after joining the faculty at Columbus State. Her children — sons Gbenga and Tobi — were born in the United States. The elder son’s name means “God has exalted me,” and Tobi translates in Yoruba as “God is great.” These are names derived from Christian theology.

Gbenga is a senior at Tuskegee, and Tobi is a freshman at the University of West Georgia in Carrollton.

Today Kuforiji coordinates two College of Education master’s degree programs, the M.S. in Educational Technology and the M.Ed. in School Library Media, the latter implemented in 2008. Neither role was what she anticipated when she joined the faculty. Each program, though, was developed by Columbus State based on what area stakeholders were seeking locally.

Passionate about Ed Tech and Web 2.0

The professor’s passions have been, and remain, centered on educational technology, where Kuforiji does the bulk of her teaching. “We need to keep exploring ways to improve our online courses,” she comments. “We need to improve student-to-student

*“We need to keep exploring ways to improve our online courses
.... to use tools available through Web 2.0....”*

— Paulina Kuforiji



interaction, to use tools now available for free through Web 2.0.” (Web 2.0, rather than a specific kind of software or a Web site, refers to an array of relatively new tools accessible for little or no cost on the Web.)

Kuforiji speaks excitedly when she considers the potential for teaching and learning made possible through “virtual worlds,” which are accessed through such sites as Second Life. Computer Science faculty member Chris Whitehead, she explained to the *Quarterly*, introduced faculty to Second Life last summer. On its Web site (www.secondlife.com), Second Life is described as “a free online virtual world imagined and created by its residents,” where one may

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Special thanks to Chris Russell for his contributions to *The College of Education Quarterly*. Chris is among several university employees whose positions were recently eliminated due to the budget shortfall. We wish him the best. — James Brewbaker

TEACHER OF THE YEAR continued

“I could spend three weeks teaching about gravity,” he noted, but stressed that, if he has two days, his students will still learn more with a menu of different activities to choose from.

Putting the Teacher of the Year Through His Paces

Columbus State has hosted the National Teacher of the Year (NTOY) since 1989, perhaps the longest unbroken series of appearances by the educator honored as the nation’s “best” for a given year.

The NTOY, selected from teachers who have been named teachers of the year in their home states, is identified by the Council of Chief State School Officers and honored in a White House ceremony each spring. At Columbus State, former Education Dean Arthur E. Justice initiated the practice of inviting the NTOY to visit Columbus.

Geisen was put through his paces during his day and a half in the city. He made appearances at three major events in addition to his breakfast with spring student teachers, including a Phi Delta



**National Teacher of the Year
Michael Geisen**

Kappa banquet and ceremonies recognizing Muscogee County and Fort Benning teachers of the year.

“I Needed to Give. I Needed to Teach.”

Geisen, born in Seattle, received his bachelor’s degree in Forest Resource Management from the University of Washington in 1996. He began his professional career as a forester but while this was satisfying work for a while, eventually he missed the direct connection with people.

Early in his forestry career, Geisen spent several months as a teaching assistant at the University of Washington. “For 12–14 hours a day, I designed and implemented exercises to teach forestry majors the field skills they needed to succeed, and spent hours in the forest helping them, guiding them and getting to know them. But for several years, I had been working as a professional forester using those same skills... alone.

“One day I realized why I was barely able to get up every morning: I needed to give. My vocation needed to have deeper meaning, to have relationship, to have heart. I needed to teach.”

KUFORJI continued

“discover a fast-growing digital world filled with people, entertainment, experiences and opportunity.” Kuforji participated in a workshop in mid-2008 where she had the opportunity to develop and refine her knowledge of virtual worlds.

Paulina Kuforji’s colleagues know her as a hard worker, a committed scholar, an advocate for international peace and a friend.

Recent events in her homeland — ongoing conflicts between Christian and Muslim factions — worry her greatly, inasmuch as she still has many family members, including four siblings, who continue to live in Nigeria.

Ultimately, Kuforji will make her mark at CSU, which is all the richer for her professional role in the Teacher Education Department.

What you probably don’t know about Nigeria . . .

- **Nigeria is Africa’s most populous country with more than 150 million residents.**
- **Many Americans are descended from people enslaved in parts of Africa that today make up Nigeria.**
- **Approximately half of Nigerians practice Islam. Close to that many are Christian.**
- **Nigeria gained its independence from England on Oct. 1, 1960, which is celebrated as Independence Day.**
- **English is Nigeria’s official language, though its citizens speak as many as 200 other languages, including Yoruba and Ibo.**
- **Nigeria is a major oil producer.**
- **Two-thirds of Nigerians are literate.**



Undergraduates Make Their Views Known On Hot Topics

Among the first professional courses teacher education majors take is EDUC 2110: Investigating Critical & Contemporary Issues in Education.

Issues range from traditional concerns such as the role of the federal government in local schools to frequently hot topics such as zero tolerance policies and same-sex classrooms.

Following the 2008 Presidential election, students in Spencer Garrard's three sections of the class weighed this question: To what extent and in what ways should teachers, including college faculty, share their political views with their students?

Here — edited for length and stylistic consistency — are the views of five of those students.

Sarah Beth Dubberly, a transfer student from the University of Alabama and an early childhood education major from Winston, Ga.:

I do not think that teachers should share their political views with students.

This usually causes students to get pumped up and on a tangent about their particular belief. If the teacher's view doesn't match the student's, the student might start having different views about that particular teacher. If the student has the same views as the teacher, they might start to think they can get the teacher to talk about politics more. This can then cause huge controversy in the classroom, which is quite unnecessary. I think that each person has a right to their own political views and opinions, but bringing them into the classroom is not needed.

Even in political science classes, I think that teachers need to hold back on their opinions. Leaving the political views of a teacher out of a lesson will help everyone to be on a neutral level.

Rebecca Hanif, a chemistry/secondary education major from Columbus:

Sharing one's political beliefs with students is tricky. If the teacher can do so in a



Rebecca Hanif (left) believes that teachers must present both sides of political issues. Tiffany Rhodes argues that the First Amendment right to free speech should apply to teachers.

dispassionate manner, and listen to the opinions of students respectfully, then sharing political beliefs is okay. The teacher should present all sides of the issues no matter how much it galls the teacher to do so, because people need to make up their own minds . . . sometimes people cannot find the gray area, and sometimes there really is no gray area at all. When I first graduated from college, and I went overseas to teach, I noticed that there were extreme discrimination and class issues in the country I was in. I jeopardized my career by telling students that discrimination among other things was totally and completely wrong. In the years that followed, I learned that I had to teach the subjects—and nothing else. I found other ways to work for the causes in which I believed and realized that there is a time and a place to discuss political views.

Tiffany Rhodes, an third early childhood education major from Fortson:

The First Amendment prohibits Congress from making laws that infringe upon the freedom of speech, so shouldn't that apply to teachers too?

Tiffany Rhodes

As long as politics is relevant to the subject of the class and as long as a professor or teacher is not trying to sway or influence anyone else's opinion, then teachers should be allowed to share their political views with high school and college students. The First Amendment prohibits Congress from making laws that infringe upon the freedom of speech, so shouldn't that apply to teachers too?

On the other hand, I do not think that elementary and middle school teachers should discuss their political views with their students because they are too young and immature. Also, children at that age are easily swayed from what they believe in to match what others want them to believe in. So I believe that as long as

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PEEX Students and Faculty ‘Share the Wealth’

Seven physical education and exercise science majors participated in the “Share the Wealth” Conference at Jekyll Island early this year. Students — along with professors Ellen Martin, Jeanine Fittipaldi-Wert and Ann Klinkenborg — presented two sessions, “Creating a Field Day Activities Kit” and “Meaningful Integrated Activities for Elementary School Students.”

Students were upbeat about the experience. “I left Jekyll with ideas that I will be able to put into practice now, in the future, and build off of,” said Kim Seehusen, of Phenix City.

Victoria Teague, from Peachtree City, echoed this sentiment. “I was able to apply what I have been learning in classrooms and see what kinds of activities can be expanded and used for more than one lesson.”

Graduate student Shannon Bright, a non-traditional M.Ed. candidate, was pleased to be surrounded by leading professionals in the field. This, she said, “reinforced my love for my chosen field.”

“Share the Wealth” is a regional conference geared toward not only practitioners but also students preparing to become teachers. Funding for the trip was provided by the Student Academic Travel budget.



The “Share the Wealth” conference is replete with interactive physical education activities.

STUDENTS continued

politics is related to the subject matter of the class and as long as the teacher is not trying to influence the student’s beliefs and the students are mature enough to discuss politics in a civilized fashion, that teachers should be allowed to share their political views.

Erin Deadwyler, an early childhood education major from Covington, Ga.:

I think that in any type of work environment, political issues and perspectives should not be discussed.

Political points of view are a personal matter that vary with the individual. If teachers, or any professional, express their feelings about a political matter, they could easily offend someone.

This can have harsh effects on a person that may cause them to feel different, or see you in a different light than that they might have already had, being good, or bad.

I have had teachers stay totally politically neutral as well as teachers that have voiced their political opinion everyday. I did not agree with this teacher politically; therefore, it made every day a struggle.

Erin Deadwyler

College is a time of change. Some people are really finding out who they are and what they believe in. I have had teachers stay totally politically neutral as well as teachers that have voiced their political opinion everyday. I did not agree with this teacher politically; therefore, it made every day a struggle. There were some days where I left the class totally offended; I wanted to go to the Dean.

On the other hand, teachers that have stayed neutral were easy to get along with, and class seemed like business, not war. Teachers should not express political positions to students for this reason.

Tara Feltner, an English/secondary education major from Columbus:

Political views, while once regarded as private, have become popular topics for debates everywhere.

They are presented in the mainstream media, schools, and even churches. America’s right to free speech is often abused, but — paradoxically — it is also confined by situational factors. For example, while teachers have the right to freedom-of-speech, they often come under fire for sharing their politically related opinions.

Personally, I would prefer

my teachers to share their political opinions, under the condition they do not enforce their opinions to the extreme or bash another individual for their beliefs.

Teachers are usually well-educated individuals who have critical thinking skills and other tools that aid in the formation of their opinions. Their views are not merely products of propaganda and expensive TV ads propelled by politicians.

Also, teachers are responsible for equipping their students with the same skills and tools so they may form their own opinions.

If teachers cannot share their personal beliefs, it is their inherent duty to instill qualities in students that will hopefully lead them in the right direction to become productive, independent, respectful and responsible citizens.

For high school and college, I immensely enjoy the Socratic teaching method, an appropriate and productive way of introducing sensitive subject matter.

As long as the “rules of debate,” are observed, I do not see a problem with the exchange of political views. While teaching others to handle sensitive material, everyone would benefit from the rhetorical strategies involved.



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Teacher Education Induction Ceremony

With friends, family, and faculty members looking on, more than 30 undergraduates or post-baccalaureate students (right) were inducted into the teacher education program on Jan. 16. A light breakfast was served, and teacher candidates enjoyed hearing from



Melissa Wilkes, Muscogee County 2008 Teacher of the Year, and Dawn Upshaw, principal of North Columbus Elementary School, a partner school of the College of Education.

Wilkes, who teaches at the Wynnton Arts Academy, is a theatre education alumna of Columbus State. Upshaw earned advanced degrees from CSU in educational leadership.

The SAFE Office (Student Advising and Field Experiences) and the Student Services Committee hosted the event.

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