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Book Review of, Tools for Teaching, 2nd edition

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As Syrett describes the public traditions and behaviors of fraternity life throughout the past two centuries, he also offers a window on how fraternity men have viewed themselves over the years. This is a fascinating perspective, and offers college educators an insight into how the fraternity men on our campuses today may see themselves.

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Tools for Teaching, 2nd edition

Barbara Gross Davis

San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 2009, 592 pages, \$50.00 (softcover)

Reviewed by Karen Haley
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The second edition of *Tools for Teaching* by Barbara Gross Davis is a great resource for college instructors at all levels. The new edition includes 61 chapters grouped into 12 sections that roughly correspond to the process of course development, enactment, and assessment. There are 12 new chapters that reflect the changes in higher education classrooms since the first edition was printed over 15 years ago, but the new edition is more than just new chapters, it is a complete revision. Incorporated into all chapters are the concepts of Universal Design, the use of technology in the classroom, and closer attention to learning outcomes and student learning.

While technology is a key component of the revision, the book is written for instructors who teach primarily face-to-face and are self-directed. It is a sourcebook rather than a collection of essays to sit and read. You can pick up the book, pick a chapter from the table

of contents, and jump right in. While some material seems to suit new instructors, there are always tips that can help the experienced instructor—maybe something that has been forgotten or deals with a new technology. The chapters are short and the layout provides easy access to information. The process and strategy suggestions are bolded and supported with narrative and bulleted lists, and each chapter includes updated additional resources.

Part I, Getting Under Way, details the process of designing a course, creating a syllabus, and planning the first day of class. While the topics may seem self-evident to seasoned instructors, there are excellent reminders, such as the connection between learning outcomes and course materials and activities. The final chapter in this section addresses the timely issue of teaching during times of campus crisis or tragedy.

Part II, Responding to a Changing Student Body, addresses attitudes and pedagogical considerations for including all students in the learning process—based on race, ethnicity, sexual identity, physical abilities, and reentry and transfer students (including veterans). The concept of Universal Design is particularly relevant as instructors create course materials to reach all students.

Part III, Discussion Strategies, includes chapters on leading discussion, encouraging participation, asking questions, promoting critical thinking, and answering student questions. A lot of ideas are packed into these chapters, a reminder that we may get into a rut and forget to expand or revise our own toolkits of teaching.

Part IV, Large Enrollment Courses, is particularly important for undergraduate instructors in large general education courses. The lecture, as a teaching technique, has been criticized; however, a large number of our undergraduate general education courses are lecture based, with large enrollments.

Davis outlines the strengths and limitations of lectures but also provides techniques and strategies to engage students. Creating a community in a large class has similar benefits as with a small class and many of the same small group techniques can be used for any class size.

Part V, *Alternatives and Supplements to Lectures and Discussions*, provides a variety of topics that reflect the changes in technology and how students learn. Role playing has taken on new meanings through the use of virtual worlds, so the question is posed on how we can use technology to further student learning. Several chapters address group learning and group activities as well as case studies and undergraduate research. Finally, the section includes a great introduction to integrating service learning and civic engagement into the classroom and connecting activities to course goals and learning outcomes.

Part VI, *Enhancing Students' Learning and Motivation*, addresses a growing understanding of individual learning styles and how they may influence a student's motivation to complete course assignments. A new chapter looks at the use of mobile devices (e.g., laptops, mobile phones, digital cameras, iPods) as learning tools to enhance student learning.

Part VII, *Strengthening Students' Writing and Problem Solving Skills*, presents ideas to improve student work through the design of effective writing assignments and homework. Writing across the curriculum is an underlying priority in this chapter, meaning that every course and every instructor can help students improve writing. Davis also covers some strategies for evaluating students' written work, which needs to be reconsidered every time a syllabus is revised.

Part VIII, *Testing and Grading*, includes the standard review of types of tests, and how to design and grade them to meet course goals. However, the most helpful chapter deals with

promoting academic honesty. Examples are given to understand and detect plagiarism, and strategies are outlined for handling academic dishonesty.

Part IX, *Presentation Technologies*, reflects the changing methods of presentation in the classroom. This section starts with flipcharts and chalkboards, but spends most of the time on the newer technology of interactive whiteboards, slide shows, and video recordings.

The last three sections are short but address important topics that are not always included in teaching books. Part X, *Evaluation to Improve Teaching*, encourages the use of teaching portfolios to document teaching effectiveness through early and consistent peer feedback, teaching evaluations, and video recordings. Part XI, *Teaching Outside the Classroom*, addresses the advising of undergraduates and graduate students, office hours, and the now ubiquitous use of email. Part XII, *Finishing Up*, covers the last day of class, student ratings, and how to handle letters of recommendation.

Tools for Teaching is a comprehensive treatment of college classroom teaching and is easily transferable to many student affairs contexts. In addition, it will assist student affairs educators in supporting faculty and TA development in addition to enriching their own teaching skills. Each chapter provides new and experienced instructors with techniques to improve their teaching and student learning. The content of each chapter is not exhaustive, but when combined with the references and resources, the overall coverage is amazingly complete. This new edition is worth owning because of the extensive new material, the integration of Universal Design concepts and student learning outcomes, and the updated resources.

