As we start a new calendar year, most of us create resolutions for our personal lives. Often we miss this opportunity to establish resolutions for our academic lives. We are bogged down in the middle of an academic year, looking for ways to just survive the spring semester, rather than reflecting on the fall semester and seeking opportunities to implement change for spring. If we make changes for spring, they are usually small and easily implemented with a promise of bigger changes before the next fall semester. But, let’s be honest. How many times has the spring semester ended with promises of grand overhaul during the summer to only have minor advances (if any) done during the summer? So, why not make resolutions for the new year as a means to spread advances in effective teaching and scholarly teaching across the entire year? Here are a few to get you started.

Spice Up Old Routines

Have you ever felt that your teaching has gotten into a rut? Using the sage on stage approach to teaching? As Generation Y (Millennial) students give way to Generation Z in the classroom, this new cadre of students will challenge us to re-envision our teaching to ensure we are providing the most meaningful, engaging, and effective learning experiences possible. Because students report being easily bored with traditional learning methods and less willing to simply absorb material presented to them, they seek more varied forms of communication, self-directed learning opportunities, interactive learning environments, multiple forms of feedback, and personally meaningful learning experiences.

Another important aspect to consider is the creation of connections to the real world. Through active learning, experiential learning, service learning, and authentic assessments, students will understand the connections between what they are learning in your course with their future careers.

If you tend to use summative assessments to evaluate student learning, consider adding formative assessment. With formative assessment, the intent is to “improve the quality of student learning, not to provide evidence for evaluating or grading students.” Whether assessing cognitive or affective learning, a variety of formative assessment options are available. In the cognitive domain, any level of higher or lower order thinking can be assessed, including categorizing or pro and con grids to assess critical thinking, muddiest point to assess knowledge, concept maps to assess synthesis, and show-and-tell solutions for problem solving. While faculty may look at these assessments as “extra work” because they are not used in the grading structure, formative assessments provide students with insight into their own learning and provide faculty with insights on how better to assist students in achieving the intended learning outcomes.

Appreciate Differences

Current students represent a diverse population. Having a diverse group of students simply means recognizing that all people are unique in their own way.

Gen Y and Gen Z students are habitual multitaskers. Despite the perception that they have short attention spans, in reality they are attempting to juggle increasing demands on their time by multitasking. If students feel the information presented is interesting and applies to them, they are completely capable of maintaining attention on one task. In the classroom, faculty can take advantage of this by posting course notes and web links for students to explore and engage with relevant resources and content; directing students to discipline-specific, Internet-accessible databases; developing course-specific sites containing class materials and interactive multimedia components; and podcasting lectures so student can re-listen to them at their convenience.

Faculty should value diversity and model this attitude to their students. When people value diversity, they
recognize and respect the fact that people are different and that these differences are generally a good thing. What can faculty do to encourage, value, and promote diversity? Recognize your own implicit biases and remediate your diversity illiteracy. Address diversity tensions when they arise and implement a “zero tolerance” for anything that is disrespectful, hurtful, or intolerant of diversity.

Look at the Whole Picture

Often when we evaluate the success of our courses, experiential rotations, or innovations, we only consider the student perspective as provided in student evaluations of teaching or other surveys. In the submissions to the American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education, we see many submissions that use this same limited approach. Whether defending your teaching for the sake of promotion or reappointment or seeking publication, a 360-degree approach to evaluation of effectiveness is critical. A Barnett and Matthews’ study in 2009 found an expansion of evaluation of teaching practices since 1996, including self-reflection, peer review, teaching portfolios, review by teaching experts, and evaluation by alumni. Although not all schools have adopted these multifaceted approaches to evaluation. Even more disturbing is the limited number of submissions to the Journal that evaluate the success of teaching innovations involving identification of learning objectives, matching of objectives to activities and assessments, and demonstration of achievement of these objectives to assessment items and tools. In 2018, take the time to develop or revise your learning objectives and ensure these align with activities and assessments to ensure student learning and best teaching practices.

Advance Your Own SoTL

Given the amount of time we dedicate to teaching pharmacy students, shouldn’t we evaluate it with the same rigor that we would other scholarly pursuits? Shouldn’t we advance literature in this field by sharing what we have done with others? The academy can benefit from stronger scholarship of teaching and learning.

Now is not the time to fear imposter syndrome. Instead, admit what you do not know, then seek out experts who can provide you with further training or can serve as collaborators on projects. Also admit what you do know and serve as a mentor to others. An effective teacher who promotes student engagement and learning can use 2018 to seek opportunities to become a scholarly teacher. A scholarly teacher can use 2018 to develop scholarship of teaching and learning or even educational research.

Many manuscripts submitted to the Journal do not use validated tools, leaving readers to wonder about the true impact and applicability of the study. Let this be the year you ensure all tools are validated as part of the research project. Whether using Kane’s framework for validation or historical nomenclature (content, construct, criterion, convergent, discriminant or predictive validity), ensuring tools are valid and reliable will broaden the impact of your research and innovation.

Don’t Resolve. Plan!

Despite the title to establish resolutions, in reality you need to plan, not resolve. When we pick personal resolutions, most people pick a New Year’s resolution that is a wish for the ideal version of themselves…but then do nothing to obtain that ideal. Therefore, the first place people go is assume that stating the goal is all that is necessary. On New Year’s Day, you are committed to achieving the goal; a week or month later you will be looking for excuses why you do not need to work toward this goal. When you identify your resolution, you need to break that resolution down into small and specific increments that build on each other and anticipate the obstacles with strategies to overcome them. So, welcome in 2018 with a plan for a stronger appreciation of scholarly teaching and a better academic year.

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