

APPENDIX A: Connecting with Students and Their Worlds

To get to know students and maintain open communication, consider the following:

1. Invite students to reveal something about themselves as scribes through the prompt “I Wish My Teacher Knew,” as modeled by Colorado educator Kyle Schwartz (2016) and reported by Valerie Strauss (2015, 2016). We can be deliberate in negotiating our sense of self and even revealing a part of our scribe and teaching lives.
2. Collect questions from students through the prompt “Questions I’ve Always Wanted to Ask a Professor.” Use their feedback to become aware of their interests in and perceptions about our profession that may reveal a scribe repertoire. A sample of entries appears below.
3. Describe how you practice various elements of literacy in your everyday life and activities. Include specific games (board, card, sports, and video), media, performances, readings, and texts. Use students’ responses to plan lessons about literature and society.
4. Gather students’ comments in an anonymous manner and shared them from your experience as an educator. A sample of entries appears below.

Questions You’ve Always Wanted to Ask a Professor with Responses by Dr. R. Joseph Rodríguez

One of my course assignments was inspired by Ms. Kyle Schwartz, a third-grade teacher in Denver, Colorado. Ms. Schwartz developed a lesson plan called “I Wish My Teacher Knew.”

Early in the semester I asked my undergraduate students, **“What have you always wanted to ask a professor? Write a question that you’d like answered.”** Later in the semester, I will ask students to share their own perspectives that would begin:

“I wish my teacher knew that . . .”

The questions listed below were posed anonymously by UTEP students enrolled in my ENGL 3306 Young Adult Literature and ENGL 3350 English Laboratory courses in Fall 2015. The responses, which are based on my experience and practice, are included.

Happy reading!

R. Joseph Rodríguez

1. What inspired you to become a teacher or an educational coach?

The teachers I had in my public schooling in Houston, Texas—and later my college and university professors—encouraged me in my studies, interests, and research. I was motivated by them to pursue academic success and to press forward by not giving up.

My mother was a public school teacher in Ciudad Victoria, Tamaulipas, México. I remember her fondness for reading, writing, and learning. Also, my mom liked to learn by asking questions in her everyday life and believing in her own abilities and her children's, too. She died in 2000, and I still remember her words, energy, and convictions.

My father, on the other hand, liked to challenge ideas he had and heard. Some of his learning was from his own experiences while growing up in a small agricultural community near Waelder, Texas, which is in Gonzales County. Later, he moved to Pasadena, Texas, and worked as licensed pipefitter in oil refineries. This gave him an additional perspective on the world and some inspiration for me to work hard and smart. My father is in his mid-seventies now, and he and I speak every day via telephone.

2. Tell me your salary. How much money do you make by the hour?

Salary earnings can vary for us. As state employees, our salaries are public information and posted by the Texas Tribune. Some faculty members, who begin their tenure-track careers as assistant professors, can earn about \$58,000 with a nine-month contract, although this is changing. It would be hard to determine our hourly rate, since our teaching and research schedules vary. Our salaries are posted here: <http://salaries.texastribune.org/>.

3. What do you appreciate most about your students?

My greatest appreciation about students is their effort to think and question for themselves. Also, I am drawn to students' empathy for others. I have witnessed students develop deeper thinking, learning, and empathy through our course dialogue, literary studies, and teacher preparation.

4. What and when was your “defining moment” that you wanted to be a teacher or professor?

My defining moment happened in 1997 while I was a volunteer teacher for adults who wanted to learn English in Austin, Texas. One of my elder students, Salvador, explained that he wanted to learn English to defend himself. That was an essential thought for me to hear from a student and then to reach the realization that language can bring an audience and voice to be heard and understood for defense.

5. What made you decide to teach? Why did you choose to become a professor?

My family values both formal and informal teaching and learning. This can describe most families, but through my mother and father I witnessed diverse thinking and pathways that gave me new lenses to see and think. I was able to take away what was helpful, kind, and visionary.

I began teaching at the university level while I was an undergraduate student at Kenyon College in Gambier, Ohio. I taught Spanish at the introductory and intermediate levels during my senior year before earning my bachelor’s degree in 1997. After earning my master’s degree in 1999, I became a lecturer in the Department of English and Department of Modern Languages at the University of Houston (UH). I worked at UH from 1999 through 2009. During this time, I taught in the public schools. Later, I became a research specialist for Houston ISD, university administrator at UH, and instructional supervisor for Houston Community College.

6. In order to become a professor, you once had to be a student. Were you anything else aside from being a student before that? Were/are you a father? Volunteer? Teaching Assistant? Husband?

I began my public school in the fall of 1980 as a kindergartener. I was a benefactor of a bilingual education program in Houston ISD that valued both Spanish and English as my heritage, home, and native languages. I graduated from high school in May 1993.

At the age of ten, I began working at a neighborhood grocery store named Carrabba’s Friendly Grocery in the East End of Houston, Texas. I worked there for four years, and then I worked two years at the Carrabba family’s new restaurant named Carrabba’s Italian Restaurant. From 1991 to 1993, I was a cashier at a larger grocery store named Kroger.

I am a benefactor of the federal Work-Study Program. I worked at two universities as a writing tutor and then as a student assistant in public affairs. In my career, I have been an enumerator (U.S. Census Bureau), teacher, substitute/associate teacher, youth advocate and development specialist, public relations specialist, instructional supervisor, grant writer, storyteller, university administrator, and, most recently, a school bus driver.

Although I am not a parent, I believe I have had positive influences in the lives of young people and adults.

Yes, I am married. We married in Dubuque, Iowa, in March 2012. We met in 2002 while we were doing community service and teaching in my home neighborhood, the East End or Magnolia Park, in Houston, Texas.

7. Other than what you teach, have you ever thought about changing your career to something else? How much do you love your job?

I enjoy teaching, learning, and research. Maybe in the future I can become either a landscape artist or professional hiker. Perhaps I can be both.

8. Is it hard to be a professor of Mexican origin at UTEP?

I believe being a professor can become challenging, and the demands vary daily and by semester.

While at UT El Paso, I am learning that there are histories here that were not always in support of borderlands citizens and their education and advancement. This includes the education and advancement of Mexican-origin citizens, veterans, women, and young people. Frankly, this can be seen over time in the demographics, majors, and career tracks of our professionals and students. Change has come, although change can be S-L-O-W and surprising, too.

We need to support students who are trying to “make a way out of no way” with resilience and hope. As a person of Mexican origin, I value our cultures, contributions, histories, languages, literatures, and legacies of the borderlands region that are empowering for the self and interconnected with the greater United States.

9. How do you make teaching seem so easy?

I had not meant to make it seem easy or difficult. I participate in teaching and learning workshops every semester to strengthen my practice. I have been

teaching since the mid-1990s, and I do not want to remain in a pattern or routine, which can become a rut. Thus, I add new teaching methods every semester to grow. I seek feedback from my students, too.

10. Do you choose how to run your classes 100 percent of the time, or is some of it mandated by the university?

There are teaching standards and student learning outcomes that guide our course work. Since I am in teacher preparation, I like to model methods, approaches, and strategies that work for teaching and learning. I hope teachers will test these later in their own classrooms.

Our accrediting body is named Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Commission on Colleges (SACS–COC). This organization is responsible for reviewing our accreditation as well as some oversight from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), Texas Education Agency (TEA), and U.S. Department of Education.

11. Why are professors so against extra credit?

Extra credit assignments can be helpful, but I have been unable to link some activities in advance for credit. Sometimes extra credit assignments can give the impression that some assignments are irrelevant or unworthy of student planning, thinking, and preparation. Nevertheless, I embed assignments similar to extra credit in the course work, so extra credit points are unnecessary.

12. Do you ever feel like some required courses ask too much from students with majors and concentrations in other areas?

As outlined in our program descriptions, the courses are sequenced to be interconnected and interrelated. Thus, students can learn and apply concepts that are transferable across courses and projects and when they enter the workforce.

13. How did you get involved in literature?

When I was a young boy, I began to read and study the books I was NOT assigned in my schooling. This encouraged me to write to the authors I enjoyed reading and re-reading. I began regular correspondence with authors such as Toni Cade Bambara, Gwendolyn Brooks, Denise Chávez, Sandra Cisneros, Pat Mora, Gary Soto, Tino Villanueva, and Alice Walker, among others.

I remember writing to Pat Mora, a native El Pasoan, while she was an instructor and then a university administrator at UTEP. Like the authors noted here, Mora

encouraged me in my reading, writing, and studies. We keep in touch often and support one another in our work.

14. Why did you choose the books you chose for our class?

I favor books that open dialogue and support questioning and self-affirmation. Thus, I seek students' feedback on the books we read. I make adjustments each semester. Today, I assign shorter books, and I pay attention to students' direct costs and book-talk participation. I am trying to adopt books and readings that are: a) shorter for quick consumption, b) in the public domain, and c) cost less or are of no cost to students with renting options.

15. Honestly, is there ever a time you find you cannot stand a student, and it secretly gives you joy to drop or fail them?

We must be ethical and fair with our students and colleagues. I want all students to succeed and advance in their studies. As a professor, I practice self-reflection to improve my communications, teaching, and learning.

16. What are some of your favorite quotes?

"It's not the mountains we conquer, but ourselves."

Sir Edmund Hillary (1919–2008)

"To err is human; to admit it, superhuman."

Doug Larson (born 1926)

"I've always had enough imagination to fall in love all by myself."

Sandra Cisneros (born 1954)

"Read, read, read. Read everything."

William Faulkner (1897–1962)

"Life is a turbulent journey, fraught with confusion, heartbreak, and inconvenience. This book will not help."

Lemony Snicket aka Daniel Handler (born 1970)

"Your vision will become clear only when you look into your heart. Who looks outside, dreams. Who looks inside, awakens."

Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961)

“Wisdom is the reward you get for a lifetime of listening when you’d have preferred to talk.”

Doug Larson (born 1926)

17. Which countries have you visited and enjoyed?

Over the years, I have enjoyed visiting Costa Rica, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Latvia, México, Netherlands, Russia, and Sweden.

18. Which places would you like to visit?

I would like to visit Alaska, Australia, Austria, Chile, China, Denmark, Ecuador, Germany, Hawaii, India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Nepal, Palestine, Spain, and Vietnam.

19. What is your favorite food?

Must I choose only one? Must I? Some of my favorite foods include almonds, almond and coconut milk, beets, broccoli, brown rice, carrot cake, cheeses, dark chocolates, honey, kale, miso soup, naan, oatmeal, peas, pecans, potatoes, salads, salsas, spinach, sushi, tortillas, tofu, vino tinto, vermicelli (fideo), and water.

20. What do you do for fun?

For fun, I enjoy cycling, hiking, reading, convertible rides, storytelling, and traveling. Lastly, I enjoy listening to the rustle of trees and walking the neighborhoods with our three canines.

¡Tan tan!

**What Students Say to Professors Sometimes
(Voiced by UTEP Students in My ENGL Courses . . .)**

The following fifty statements were collected from several undergraduate and graduate-level courses during the past four academic years, beginning in 2013 and through 2016. The statements reveal competing thoughts and experiences for reflection by professors and students alike:

1. “I now realize I just needed to read books like the ones in this class to like to read again.”
2. “I’m taking five classes, and this is one of them. This class is a lot of work really. I’ve not had so much work in a class, and I’m a senior. I can’t wait to graduate. No offense.”

3. "This class looks overwhelming, but if I plan ahead I think I can do this."
4. "I don't know why you've not given me good grades for everything else. Yes, I know I've not done any of the assignments, but I can't fail, mister."
5. "I was supposed to go to UT, but I didn't want to leave home. I am glad I came to UTEP though."
6. "Why aren't we learning nothing about grammar? I thought this was an English class when I registered."
7. "I am living on my own. My parents didn't think I could do it. They kept discouraging me and making me feel guilty for it. I just needed to get away and focus on my studies and me."
8. "I read that you taught at UT Austin, but this isn't UT Austin. It's UTEP."
9. "I like this class already. I'm married, and I'm a father and veteran working on a degree. It's helping me to finally think and ask questions as I read and write."
10. "What do you think about religion? We don't talk about it in class, and I want to know what you believe in."
11. "Something happened to me in middle and high school that made me hate reading and writing. It's taken me some time to get used to liking reading and writing again."
12. "I feel like some of the characters we are reading in this class. I didn't know characters like me existed. I really didn't. Did you make us read these books on purpose?"
13. "Professors have a good life. I want to be a professor. How can I do that?"
14. "I'm sorry to be a bother, but I like to come to office hours to talk about what I am reading and to find out how I am doing."
15. "I know it's the sixth week already, but I'm still confused about what's due. I don't see anything in the syllabus or modules."
16. "I can't wait to start teaching what I am reading and learning."
17. "So, like, why do we have to make presentations in class? I didn't know I was going to be doing some public speaking. What do we have to say to make a good grade?"
18. "I am open to a hybrid class, but that doesn't mean I'm gonna like technology when this class is over."
19. "I used to be so shy. I wanted to remain shy, but this class made me come out of my shell all of a sudden. It helped me be less shy and to speak up about what I think. It helped me a lot to take this class."
20. "I know I can't make a lot of money as a teacher, but my girlfriend and I are getting married next year. We are going to be English teachers. We can't wait! Thanks."

21. "Nobody told me this was a hybrid class, so now I am counted absent. Please let me know if I missed anything important this week."
22. "My adviser said I could take six classes. That's why I'm taking six classes. It's a lot of stress, and this class is the most stressful one for me and my family. I don't remember my advisor's name, so I can't give you his name. I don't think he works here anymore."
23. "Did you always like to read?"
24. "I don't have to be in a rush in this class. I like that."
25. "Blackboard isn't working, so I can't turn work in on time all the time. Just sayin'."
26. "What about the classics? I already read a whole bunch of classics, but all we read in this class are books that were published in the past five or ten years. I want to read great literature in this class. Why can't we?"
27. "You're not from here and things are done differently here."
28. "I like you as my professor for this class, so far."
29. "Sometimes it feels like there's some ulterior motive in what we are reading in this class and assigned to do. I feel like this is the case in most of my English classes here at UTEP."
30. "Why are we meeting in the library? I don't like going there at all."
31. "I grew up to learn to hate Spanish and anything that's close to being or sounding Mexican or Latino. That was a mistake, and I am realizing how wrong that was for me and my family. I had to come to UTEP to learn this."
32. "I'm sharing some of my books with my sister, because I want her to like to read and to think. She's started to read them. We both talk and laugh about what we are reading."
33. "Are you married? How long have you been married?"
34. "Yes, you shared how we can become teachers both in and out of El Paso. I don't want to move though. I've not really thought about moving to be honest. For some reason I can't just get up and go over a teaching job. It got me thinking about it now though."
35. "What made you want to become a professor, anyway?"
36. "It seems like I have enough time to read one book before going to the next one. Was this done on purpose?"
37. "I think it's weird that we can use our notes app on our iPhone in class or a computer to take notes at different periods in class. None of my professors let us use devices in class."
38. "Tell me what you like about El Paso and Ciudad Juárez."
39. "I want to take more classes, but I am going to graduate."

40. "Being from here, the border, is not a bad thing. It's about perspective, right?"
41. "I have a full-time job, a family, and four other classes besides this one. I want you to know that."
42. "What were you before you became a professor?"
43. "I read some great books in school and here at UTEP, too. I know that I want to become a writer. Also, my teachers inspired me to do my best and to go to college. That's why I'm here."
44. "My laptop is acting up again, and I can't just get up and go to campus to use the computers there."
45. "The pace of this class is making me SCREAM."
46. "I can't fail."
47. "Do you think you'll always be a professor, even to the end?"
48. "I have to pass this class, and I just need to know what to do to pass. I don't see it on the syllabus."
49. "Is writing always required? Why can't we just take a multiple-choice test? That's easier."
50. "I'm glad that you read our work and comment on it to improve our writing and thinking. I don't get that all the time. I just turn stuff in, and then a mystery grade appears on my transcript."

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16 September 2016
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