



## Improving College Teaching

Baum, S., & McPherson, M. (2019). Improving teaching: Strengthening the college learning experience. *Daedalus*, 148 (4), 5-13. [https://doi.org/10.1162/daed\\_e\\_01757](https://doi.org/10.1162/daed_e_01757)

In this lead article to a special issue of *Daedalus*, Baum and McPherson lament that public policy discussions about higher education focus too much on college admissions, pricing, and student debt rather than on how to improve teaching and learning. Such lack of attention to quality education is consistent, they argue, with how faculty are prepared for their profession—greater emphasis is placed on research and mentoring graduate students when, in point of fact, most faculty will spend the majority of time teaching undergraduates.

By "quality education" the authors do not mean an institution's ranking or the amount of resources available to students. Rather they refer to the quality of students' experience, the knowledge and skills they have upon graduation, and the feedback given to faculty about how to improve teaching. The urgency associated with the need for quality education stems from a post-secondary education system where one-third of first-year students at four-year institutions fail to graduate and only 40 percent of those in community colleges earn a degree by the end of six years. Moreover, the cost of an education, and as follows student debt, continues to climb.

Nonetheless, the value of a degree to both the individual and society remains high. Besides an earnings advantage, those with college degrees tend to work better together and communicate more effectively. In addition, preparing citizens to vote intelligently and to serve as public officials should always be a high priority for any society that claims to be a strong democracy.

Although getting a job upon graduating should always be an important concern for students, the authors believe that college should be more than just about vocational training and skills acquisition. Moreover, getting students through their programs is not enough. Faculty need to better understand how students learn and how to improve teaching. Hence, this lead article introduces the special *Daedalus* issue on improving teaching. The following articles are included:

Becoming a Better College Teacher (If You're Lucky), [Harry Brighouse](#)

Catalysts for Achieving Sustained Improvement in the Quality of Undergraduate STEM Education, [Mary Sue Coleman](#), [Tobin L. Smith](#), and [Emily R. Miller](#)

Expertise in University Teaching & the Implications for Teaching Effectiveness, Evaluation & Training, [Carl Edwin Wieman](#)

Together *and* Alone? The Challenge of Talking about Racism on Campus, [Beverly Daniel Tatum](#)

“Now Is the Time”: Civic Learning for a Strong Democracy, [Sylvia Hurtado](#)

The Future of Undergraduate Education: Will Differences across Sectors Exacerbate Inequality?, [Daniel I. Greenstein](#)

CREATE a Revolution in Undergraduates' Understanding of Science: Teach through Close Analysis of Scientific Literature, [Sally G. Hoskins](#)

The False Dichotomy between Academic Learning & Occupational Skills, [Thomas R. Bailey](#) and [Clive R. Belfield](#)

Mitigating Ethical Costs in the Classroom, [Jennifer M. Morton](#)

Financial Constraints & Collegiate Student Learning: A Behavioral Economics Perspective, [Benjamin Castleman](#) and [Katharine Meyer](#)

Toward a 2.0 Compact for the Liberal Arts, [Earl Lewis](#)

The Human Factor: The Promise & Limits of Online Education, [Sandy Baum](#) and [Michael McPherson](#)