

The primary goal of this Learning Circle was discussion and community building. The two sessions were attended by 29 teachers and learners, ranging from aspiring to seasoned educators, and representing all three of the UMass Chan schools.

Key highlights of the discussions:

Your Educational Journey: What inspires you to be an educator?

- **Role models.** This was by far the most frequent response. Educators described these role models as inspiring, kind, supportive, selfless, and motivating
- Educators also described the fresh perspectives and viewpoints of their students as “inspirational”
- One participant was inspired by reminding themselves that “I am teaching students how to teach patients” [helping others to help others]
- Another participant noted that their patients continue to provide inspiration – “As a clinician my students are the patients and families I care for”
- One commented, “learning gives me great pleasure, and this pleasure is enhanced by teaching.”
- The pleasure in helping students thrive and succeed in their academic pursuits was also noted
- One participant summed up their feelings in just three words: “TEACHING IS FUN”

What have been your most rewarding and motivating experiences as a learner or teacher?

- **The most consistent response was witnessing and sharing students’ “aha moments”** when a student suddenly understands something and “gets the light in their eyes” as one participant described it. Others called this “the driving force for teaching,” “infectious,” and “so cool”
- “Learning about positive effects of my teaching on previous students, and receiving their acknowledgments and thanks is also rewarding.”
- Helping the struggling learner and changing their academic trajectory -- figuring out what will help another person understand something. “Recognizing that others may not think about/understand something in the same way I do, and finding approaches that help them”

What has made you feel that you were truly part of a learning community?

- **Feeling valued.** “Noticing that others ask my opinion and value my input. “Recognizing that others now rely on me.” “When I realized that I am comfortable both answering my colleagues’ questions and also tapping *them* for their expertise and valuable insights”
- Being asked to teach other educators how to teach

What challenges have you encountered as an educator and/or learner?

- **Re-engaging learners in the post-COVID era**, and in remote and hy-flex learning environments
- “Understanding perspectives of current students so I can implement effective teaching approaches.”
- Fewer opportunities for direct faculty-student interactions
- “In my research-based academic environment, teaching is generally less valued than successful grant-writing and publication.”
- “The amount of time required to deliver high-quality teaching is often under-estimated.”
- One participant requested help negotiating a scientist/educator career pathway. They would value a GSBS “teaching mentor.” Another wondered about a teaching certificate program for trainees.

In summary, there appear to be 2 groups with somewhat different needs – those who are experienced teachers and those who aspire to become teaching faculty. Experienced teachers focused on challenges with adjusting to the evolving teaching environment while maintaining a sense of success and satisfaction. By contrast, aspiring teachers expressed a need for career guidance and mentoring by more senior educators as they develop their teaching skills.