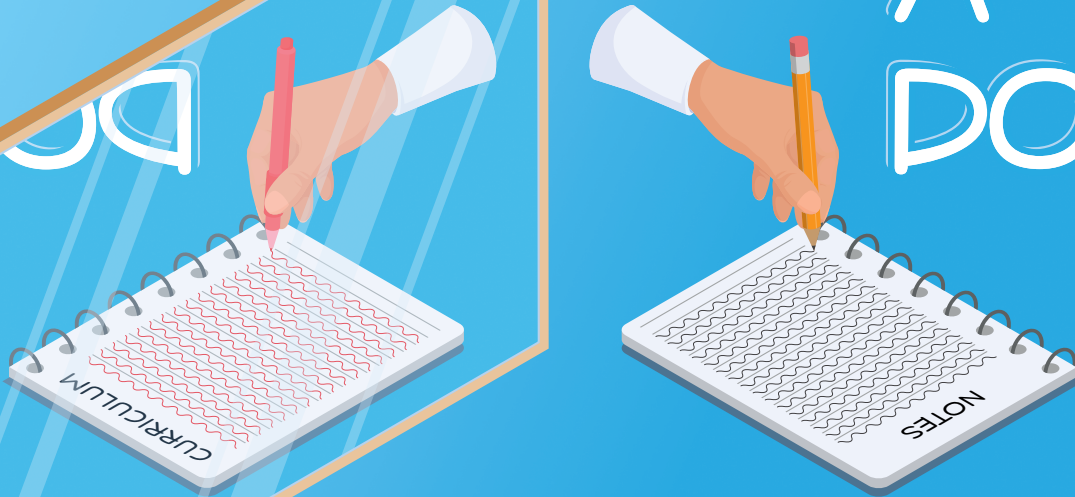


# A DOUBLE TAKE

Students Can Likewise  
Educate Educators



By Cathy Cassata

When their days are spent teaching students, educators might sometimes find themselves on the other side of the dynamic: learning from students.

“Teaching is a reciprocal relationship,” says Melody Gibson, CMA (AAMA), HHS, MHRD, CPT (ASPT), associate dean at Gaston College in Dallas, North Carolina. “I often tell my students that I am here to support them, but the truth is, their growth and feedback are what keep me ready and evolving as an educator.”

Amanda Beaman, CMA (AAMA), AHI(AMT), department chair at Montgomery Community College in Troy, North Carolina, agrees. “I strongly believe that students provide valuable insight into our effectiveness not only as instructors but also as mentors,” she says.

Here are ways you can learn from students to help improve your teaching skills:

## A Two-Way Street

Gaining feedback from students can push you to improve the way you teach. Award-winning educators all regularly asked their students for feedback on what teaching styles and methods were and were not helpful, according to a study from 2019.<sup>1</sup> By providing feedback, students brought up questions regarding material and identified areas that

needed improvement related to lessons, grading policies, and more.

April Jones, CMA (AAMA), who instructed at Everest Institute in Eagan, Minnesota, used SurveyMonkey, a platform for sending surveys and forms, to allow students to answer questions honestly and anonymously. “When we get more comfortable with interactive learning, face-to-face and group discussions can happen authentically,” says Jones.

Gibson replaced a final exam in her medical law and ethics course with a reflective exam. She asked students to answer: “What topic resonated with you the most and why? Do you feel it could have been presented to you in another format?”

“I truly love reading these submissions. They have given me invaluable insight into how students process complex ethical dilemmas and which formats, reflections, case studies, or videos help those topics stick,” she says. “This direct feedback allows me to pivot and refine the course in real time for the next cohort.”

Beaman collects insight from students in multiple ways. Her institution administers course evaluations at the conclusion of each course, providing students with an opportunity to offer structured feedback on instruction and course design. Once students finish the program, they are invited to complete comprehensive surveys that assess their overall

experience, including their practicum.

She also initiates in-person feedback. “During their time in the program, I meet with students at least once per semester to better understand their individual learning styles, identify their needs, and discuss ways to improve their overall experience,” says Beaman. “This multifaceted approach allows for continuous evaluation and improvement of both teaching practices and curriculum.”

## Put Two and Two Together

The practicum serves as a comprehensive culmination of the student’s experience within the medical assisting program, providing valuable insight into the effectiveness of both instructional methods and curriculum design.

“It allows me to identify potential gaps in content delivery or teaching strategies and evaluate whether prior instruction has adequately prepared students for real-world clinical performance,” says Beaman. “This process is instrumental in determining how effectively the program equips students to perform at a high level and informs any necessary adjustments to enhance student readiness and success.”

Gibson learns most from students who attend high-volume, busy clinics. “When students return with stories of the whirlwind nature of the job, I realize that a sterile, quiet classroom doesn’t always prepare them for

the reality of the field,” she says.

As a result, she started building simulations that force students to multitask under pressure, mimicking a real-world clinic where phones are ringing and multiple patients need attention simultaneously.

“Practicums have taught me that my job is to prepare them for the chaos, not just the textbook,” says Gibson.

### Copy That

The greatest lesson Gibson learned from students is to receive their grace. “As an instructor, you often feel you must be the ‘rock’ or the one with all the answers. However, seeing students overcome personal hurdles to stay in the program has taught me the lesson of human resilience,” she says.

She learned that when she models vulnerability and offers grace, she creates a safe space for excellence to grow. “It has taught me to be more patient ... and to lead with empathy first,” says Gibson.

When students perceive higher levels of empathy from their educator, they experience reduced stress, anxiety, and depression while enhancing their engagement in learning activities, according to a 2025 study.<sup>2</sup>

Getting to know students’ experiences allows Beaman to gain empathy for their situations and refine her approach to better support their academic and professional development. “Engaging with students fosters greater empathy and a deeper understanding of their individual circumstances and learning needs,” she says. “By taking the time to know students on an individual level, we are better positioned to provide meaningful support and guide them toward successful outcomes within the program.”

Jones recalls a student who struggled to take a patient’s blood pressure correctly during a one-on-one meeting that lasted almost two hours. “There were breaks to help keep us both from getting frustrated,

## Twice the Benefits

Having students teach other students not only helps them learn but can also inform educators about areas that need improvement when it comes to teaching students’ skills.

Researchers observing more advanced medical students teaching beginner medical students found that teaching is about understanding how students think, not just whether they get the correct answer. Moreover, they determined that teachers learn more about student thinking and their own assumptions, when they focus on the process, not the outcome.<sup>4</sup>

Melody Gibson, HHS, MHRD, CMA (AAMA), CPT (ASPT), implemented a Peer Lab Leader program in her examination room and laboratory procedures courses. The leaders are students who have excelled in their evaluations and consistently step up to help others. “By setting up practice sessions, these leaders provide their peers with hands-on pointers and memory cues for the tougher skills,” says Gibson. “We’ve found that students are often less intimidated by a peer than an instructor, which opens the door for better teamwork and critical thinking. Even though an instructor is always on campus to step in if needed, giving students this autonomy has really boosted their confidence and helped them move away from a constant reliance on their notes.”

but she taught me to keep digging into the issue, and we found out that the issue was she could not count backwards by twos,” says Jones. “This was nearly 20 years ago, and I have never forgotten this lesson.”

The solution they came up with was for the student to repeat “eight, six, four, two” multiple times and then Jones would call out a number for her to start counting backwards by two. “It was a sensitive moment because there was humility in play,” says Jones. “My role was to mentor, encourage, and keep those moments safe.”

### Couple Methods Together

Some students learn more effectively with words, visuals, or both. In fact, a meta-analysis from 2024 found that in the context of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics education, studies consistently show better learning outcomes when students use multiple representations (e.g., text, pictures, and graphs) versus just one. Benefits of this include stronger understanding and better problem-solving.<sup>3</sup>

Because students come from different backgrounds and have different levels of base knowledge and learning styles, Jones

adapts her teaching styles to meet their needs. “Sometimes you need more explaining of a topic, and other times showing them how to do something or providing a visual is more effective,” she says.

Recognizing that students have diverse learning styles has taught Beaman to ask students for guidance on how to enhance engagement, clarify content, and strengthen overall effectiveness. “This ongoing exchange allows me to continually adapt and grow as an educator to better meet the needs of all learners,” she says.

### Think Twice about Tech

Because of students, Gibson has learned that a course is only

as effective as its accessibility.

“They’ve shown me the importance of staying current with technology while ensuring the core concepts remain basic,” she says. “Balancing diverse learning needs and how technology evolves over time is an ever-evolving process.” ♦

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