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From Corporate Career to Classroom Excellence

Russell Miles wins Jean Brierley Award for Excellence in Teaching

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Russell Miles didn't become an award-winning teacher overnight. In fact, he'll be the first to admit that it was a process.

"Initially I wasn't a patient or understanding instructor. I would go into class thinking my course was the only thing students had going on in their lives," Miles says. "Over time I became more empathetic. I kept my standards high, but I tried to become more understanding of the challenges students may be faced with beyond the classroom."

As the 2023 recipient of the University of New Hampshire's Jean C. Brierley Award for Excellence in Teaching, it is clear Miles (<https://paulcollege.unh.edu/person/russell-miles>), a senior lecturer of decision sciences, has honed his craft.

"I am competitive by nature," Miles says. "Whenever I do something, I throw myself fully into it. I want to perform at the highest level."

When Miles started teaching as an adjunct at UNH in 2006, there was no guarantee that it was going to turn into a career. Teaching wasn't part of his original plan.

Miles earned his bachelor's in mechanical engineering and master's in business administration from UNH, before starting a career in operations management at General Electric (GE), where he worked at multiple divisions across the country.

He only returned to UNH to explore getting a doctorate in operations management. However, after learning the degree wasn't offered, he was talked into trying teaching.

"Like most people, I'm not excited about public speaking. I'm a full-fledged introvert, so I knew that teaching a course would be a good way to practice presenting material, while also forcing me out of my comfort zone," he says. "I kind of fell into it and it's been a nice second chapter following my corporate career."

Miles said it took a few years to hit his stride as a teacher, and he improved as he got the opportunity to teach more courses in his fields of expertise, including supply chain management and quantitative decision-making.

Some of the phrases used by students in teacher evaluations to describe Miles include, “really cares about his students,” “passionate professor,” and “best professor at UNH.”

Miles considers his strengths to be a balance between his creativity and his ability to plan complex projects. He builds highly structured courses – and knows exactly what he wants to cover and when.

Examples of Miles’ creativity include his popular lecture videos, in which he presents topics using animation, sound effects and scripted narration. These videos even include original music he produced.

Students are assigned to watch the topic videos and complete a quiz before class; then, in class, they practice the subject concept through hands-on activities.

Learn More About Russell Miles

UNH Faculty Excellence: Russell Miles



“I put extra time into the up-front planning and structuring of the course content so that classroom interactions can be more open-ended,” he says. “I try to make class time less about me lecturing to everybody and more about facilitating hands-on activities where I can engage with smaller groups or one-on-one with individual students.”

Khole Gwebu, associate professor and chair of the decision sciences department, nominated Miles for the Brierley Award, saying that he has a passion for teaching and goes the extra mile for students.

“In addition to creating his own course content, Russ has been instrumental in developing the Paul Projects (<https://paulcollege.unh.edu/career-professional-success/employer-resources/paul-projects-corporate-engagement-programs>) program that connects student consulting teams with ‘real world’ corporate clients,” Gwebu said. “Thanks to Russ’ efforts, the college now formally solicits client proposals, reviews submissions and matches student project teams with best-fit business engagements. The system has enabled thousands of students to gain project experience with hundreds of clients – not just in Russ’ classes or within the decision sciences department, but across the entire college.”

Playing a part in students launching their careers is something that never gets old to Miles.

“It’s rewarding to have a student email me three, four years after graduation and say ‘I actually used that thing we did in class at work, and my boss was really impressed,’” Miles says. “It’s nice knowing that I’m helping students get started in their careers. I like connecting students with people in my corporate network, especially those students interested in pursuing careers in operations and supply chain management.”

Miles said it’s an exciting time to be teaching supply chain and operations management. There’s increased interest from students, and demand in the job market. Last spring, he taught the first supply chain management elective course for undergraduates, and he is hoping to take a leadership role in expanding the supply chain management curriculum at Paul College.

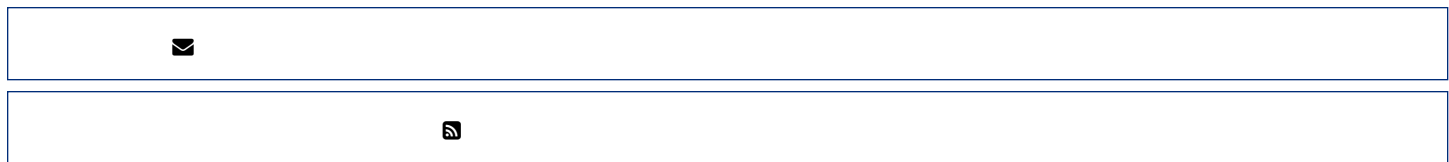
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