

**2024 CTE Faculty Fellow**

**By Michael Noltemeyer**

**ACADEMIC RESOURCE CENTER**

**Changing Student Mindsets to Open Students' Minds**

CTE Faculty Fellow Amy Woodson-Boulton has spoken eloquently of the "tax" that faculty must pay in order to reach students in the wake of the pandemic, helping them into the right psychological and emotional space so that they can succeed. And Coelho Center Faculty Fellow Amanda Apgar has correctly pointed out that the pandemic is not the only form of trauma many of our students are facing. For both reasons, the biggest obstacles to students' academic success are often damaging mindsets—beliefs they hold about the material, their professors, and themselves. Addressing those mindsets can therefore be one of the most powerful interventions that faculty can make to increase students' learning.

The idea for a CTE event focusing on student mindsets began with a YouTube video in which the World's Strongest Man described a fundamental difference between novice and advanced weightlifters in terms of their perceptions of difficulty. He described studies showing that the point at which beginners say they have reached their limit is when the speed of the barbell slows. Problem is, it will always slow as the work gets harder. That doesn't mean lifters have reached their limits, though. Advanced lifters claim they have reached their limit only when they can no longer move the bar at all.

That analogy translates directly to students' perceptions of academic difficulty. When the work gets harder and their progress slows, they often correctly perceive the slowing—but then they incorrectly interpret that fact to mean they have reached their limit, that they're not capable of continuing. For students with a fixed mindset, to borrow a term from Carol Dweck, struggle is evidence of limited capacity and elicits shame. For those students, one important academic intervention is therefore a conversation about productive discomfort, about challenging

ourselves in the classroom just like we would in the weight room. Struggle and soreness are evidence of challenge, and challenge is how we grow.

The conversation connecting struggle and growth is one example of many mindset interventions shared during my CTE [event this semester](#). We don't want that conversation to end here, though, and we hope you'll email [\*\*michael.noltemeyer@lmu.edu\*\*](mailto:michael.noltemeyer@lmu.edu) to share other examples of mindsets you have observed in your students that impede their success as well as the ways you have tried to address them. We hope to collect as many examples as we can so that faculty can compare notes about what's going on with our students and how best to help them into the right psychological and emotional space to succeed. And eventually, we hope to develop student-facing communication to assist with that kind of mindset change.

We hope [this list](#) helps you—and, by extension, your students—and we'd love to hear whatever else you're willing to share! After all, it takes a village to raise a child, and it takes a university to educate a Lion.