

During the last two weeks of school, Gonzaga had a faculty member, Mike Pakenham pass away. Mike was a cornerstone at the school and had served as headmaster until my freshman year in 2008 before transitioning to the science department for the remainder of his career. Mike taught four sections of physics to students who, for the most part, were not interested in learning physics. He was able to keep their attention and hammer the material home no matter what it took.

When he passed away in late November, it became my job to finish teaching his sections of class before the students last test and final. Taking over teaching for such a pillar of GOnzaga was not what I expected when I signed my offer letter in May, but I was eager to fill in where the school needed me and start to understand what it takes to be a teacher. The first challenge was the material. I had been tutoring a couple of Mr. Pakenham's students throughout the year, so I had a pretty good idea of what they were going over, but I had not seen any of the current lesson's problems so I walked in blind. After a day of counseling, we had to start going over material for their upcoming test. I had a thorough understanding of all the material that the test covered, so the challenges that arose for me had more to do with lesson planning and classroom management.

The extent of my lesson planning at the beginning was that there was not any. I walked in each day planning on going over whatever homework problems that the class asked me to walk through. As the day went on, I would see problems that I believed were more important for them to understand so I would choose to cover those for the later periods. When I ran out of my problems I went back to their suggestions and the process repeated. This is an awful way to run a class because the later sections get a significantly more structured class than the early periods. As time went on, I looked through the problems and started to have a plan the day before class started so I could be as useful to first period as I was to eighth.

Classroom management was a constant battle throughout the two weeks I covered class. The classes were not the most mild to begin with, and once they knew that I was subbing for the rest of the quarter, they tried frequently to push the boundaries that were set. One example of something that caused a reaction from the class was the use of devices during class. The students argued that Mr. Pakenham let them have their devices out the entire class because they needed to see their assigned problems and work on them. The first day I tried this method, but quickly remembered that surfing the internet is much more interesting to almost everyone than learning about the impact momentum equation in physics class. After my eyes were opened to how the world really worked, I allowed them to look at their devices to read the problem and write down what they needed to know, but then they needed to be closed. Sixteen, seventeen, and eighteen year olds, like everyone else, do not like their privileges taken away from them and tried to argue against this change. I had to show them that I could see that none of them had been doing the work we were going over because the website had recorded that most of the students who were in class the previous day had not even opened the assignment. They started to tolerate my rule changes after that.

I mourn for the loss of a great teacher and mentor from Gonzaga's campus, and his presence was felt every day that I stood up in his room. I was able to learn so much through the short time that I spent in the front of a classroom and I know that Mike was guiding me through all of the tough situations that I encountered. Knowing how to manage a group of thirty of the most unruly people who I might ever deal with will help me later in life when dealing with other colleagues whose ability to reason is fully developed. I am grateful for the time I was able to spend in the physics class because it strengthened my relationship with a lot of the students and introduced me to so many more who I had not yet been able to meet.