TLC *EXCHANGE*

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TLC *News*

We're now on the Web!
www.wfu.edu/TLC

What's going on this Spring?
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Letter From The Director

Dear Colleagues,

As The Center enters its second semester of existence, we want to alert you to upcoming events and invite you to let us know your reactions to the newsletter and the kind of material you find most useful in this format. We have established an e-mail address for the Center (**tlc@wfu.edu**) where you can send your comments, suggestions, and questions. It is our hope that the newsletter will help encourage and expand the campus conversation about teaching. If you would like to submit a response to one of the articles we have published or write an article of your own, please let us know.

The e-mail address can also be used for reserving a place at brown bag discussions and workshops. We were encouraged by the enthusiastic response to the brown bags and workshop held last semester but discovered a "problem" (one we are glad to have) with accommodating the number of participants in the space we have. Further, we struggled with the problem of having meaningful discussion in large groups. Consequently, we will experiment with limiting the number of participants in brown bags to fifteen. If you would like to attend one or more of the discussions listed in the SCHEDULE OF EVENTS (see Page 4), please send your reservation to our e-mail address or call X4559. If there is sufficient demand, we will schedule a second meeting.

Finally, let me remind you that the Center offers confidential individual services of class visits, videotaping, mid-term evaluations, and consultation. We would appreciate 2 weeks notice for services that involve class visits so we have time to make the appropriate arrangements with consulting faculty.

Thank you for your support and best wishes for a healthy and productive 1998.

Katy J. Harriger

Peer Classroom Feedback
by Bob Evans, Associate Professor of Education

As university faculty, most of us rely on peers to give us feed back and advise us about ways to improve our professional writing and research. We've earned that having others read our work and comment on our projects adds measurably to their quality. However, when it comes to our classroom teaching, most of us work in virtual isolation, with no collegial input to help us to understand or affirm our efforts. Remarkably, while we feel that peer review of our journal submissions validates, confirms and improves them, most of us teach alone in our classrooms for years with only student evaluations to guide us in our growth as teachers.

Unfortunately, with all the many demands on our time, we also don't often consider the possibility of substantial teaching improvement since most of us do a good enough job so that there are few complaints about our classroom methods. Of course, we may also tend to have few compliments and rarely know if we've done the best that we can do to help both eager and reticent learners get the most out of their time with us. Even worse, it's sometimes seen as embarrassing to admit that we may not be totally satisfied with our in-class performance. This can be particularly true for experienced and tenured faculty members.

During the past decade, projects at major universities throughout the nation have begun to show that various forms of peer review and feedback can not only significantly improve the quality and satisfaction of faculty teaching, but as importantly, bring a genuine sense of community and collegiality to our classroom efforts (Hutchings, 1996). By utilizing voluntary peer review from colleagues who share the content knowledge, institutional goals and professional perspective of other members of their departments, professors have found themselves liberated from the consumerist and sometimes naïve evaluations of students. This is not to say that student perspectives are not necessary and useful (see Genevieve Brock's article *Mid-Term Evaluations Help Keep Class on Track* in the December 1997 issue of TLC *EXCHANGE*), only that their inherent biases and evaluative nature are not sufficient sources of objective nor supportive information for most faculty to use for long-term growth (England, 1996).

Peer review works because it provides the kind of objective data and non-evaluative discussion about our teaching that we need to make significant changes. It's very much like the kind of

feedback which coaches can give individuals to help them improve their performance. Without such external and supportive information, members of teams from basketball to debate would find it much more difficult to improve their efforts.

However, just as with coaches and team members, peer review requires a trusting relationship between colleagues and a common goal for positive change. For university teaching, this has come to mean self-motivated and self-selected peer review partners who choose to work with each other for mutual benefit (Hutchings, 1996). Usually they agree to visit each other's classes over the course of a semester so that both have a context and understanding of each other's teaching profiles to draw upon when discussing teaching methods and change.

For tenured faculty, choosing a peer review partner from one's own department may add the advantage of content knowledge to the dialogue, whereas the freshness and objectivity of someone from another field may be more valuable. For untenured faculty wishing to avoid an element of evaluation, external visits may be preferred, while those from departmental colleagues may communicate a sincere interest in achieving teaching excellence. The point is that everyone needs to select his or her own partner based on their own individual needs and talents.

Other universities have found that while there may be some advantages to training partners in how to help each other, significant and meaningful peer reviews are likely to ensue from following these steps:

> **1.** Make a decision to examine your teaching objectively and collegially with another Wake Forest faculty member. Only one or both members of the partnership may be interested in significant observer feedback, but at least one visit by each partner to the other's classes is essential to establish a context for understanding the observations and suggestions likely to be made.
> **2.** Have a pre-visitation meeting during which you each discuss your concerns and goals from such visits and decide on how and when they'll be conducted. Details such as whether you'll each introduce the reviewer and tell your students the reason you're being visited should be worked out at this pre-visitation meeting.
> **3.** Meet as soon after the visits as possible, to communicate the observations and discuss the issues set at the pre-visit meeting. The point of these private sessions is to earnestly explore what may be and not be working in your classrooms and to arrive at both affirmations of excellence as well as some specific ideas for change.
> **4.** If it seems useful, arrange for future visits or at least a follow-up talk to discuss the extent to which any changes have made a difference in your teaching (Hutchings, 1996).

While actual peer visits to classrooms are the best way to make the most valuable and comprehensive observations for faculty to work with in improving their teaching, they are sometimes intrusive or impractical. Another useful method is to make a video tape of one or more classes and then to watch it with your peer review colleague. Just as with live visits, video-taped reviews should be based on apriori goals and result in affirmations of strengths and plans for change. Camcorders are available to all faculty for checkout in room A2E of Tribble Hall (x5525). The Teaching and Learning Center expects to have its own equipment for this service sometime this semester.

One of the best reasons for establishing a tradition of voluntary peer teaching feedback at Wake Forest is that it gives us, as faculty members, control and ownership over the effectiveness of our own teaching. Since most of us already care deeply about our teaching quality, these self-motivated peer exchanges are an easy and effective way to work towards achieving excellence. ▲

References and Further Reading

Hutchings, Pat. *Making Teaching Community Property: A Menu for Peer Collaboration and Peer Review.* Washington, DC: American Association for Higher Education, 1996.

England, James, Pat Hutchings and Wilbert J. McKeachie. *The Professional Evaluation of Teaching.* New York: American Council of Learned Societies, 1996.

REPORT ON CURRENT RESEARCH ON LEARNING

In a recent article in the AAHE BULLETIN, Peter Ewell discusses the challenges that face universities as they attempt to improve collegiate learning based on the wealth of research evidence available on how students learn best. Ewell summarizes a "considerable body of work" from the fields of cognitive science, educational psychology and instructional design. He presents "what we know about learning" and "what we know about promoting learning" in a useful way that seems worth sharing with our faculty.

What we know about learning from the field of cognitive science:*
1. "The learner is not a 'receptacle' of knowledge, but rather creates his or her learning actively and uniquely;"
2. "Learning is about making meaning for each individual learner by establishing and reworking patterns, relationships, and connections;"
3. "Every student learns all the time, both with us and despite us;"
4. "Direct experience decisively shapes individual understanding;"
5. "Learning occurs best in the context of a compelling 'presenting problem';"
6. "Beyond stimulation, learning requires reflection;"
7. "Learning occurs best in a cultural context that provides both enjoyable interaction and substantial personal support."

What we know about promoting learning from educational psychology and instructional design:* The research in these fields suggests six key avenues for promoting learning in a collegiate setting.
1. "Approaches that emphasize application and experience;"
2. "Approaches in which faculty constructively model the learning process;"
3. "Approaches that emphasize linking established concepts to new situations;"
4. "Approaches that emphasize interpersonal collaboration;"
5. "Approaches that emphasize rich and frequent feedback on performance;"
6. "Curricula that consistently develop a limited set of clearly identified, cross-disciplinary skills that are publicly held to be important."

Ewell concludes the article by discussing the difficulties associated with reforming collegiate education to reflect this knowledge that we have about learning. He calls for a systemic approach where universities "organize for learning."

The full article is available at the Teaching and Learning Center.

*Peter T. Ewell, "Organizing for Learning: A New Imperative," AAHE BULLETIN (Vol. 50/ No. 4 - December 1997), pp. 3-6.

Socratic Conversions of the Soul: Are 30 Pages Enough?

By Will Fleeson, Assistant Professor of Psychology

Last year, President Hearn visited us new faculty to answer some of our questions. One answer in particular has stuck out in my mind. One of us asked the President how we should become good teachers, and interestingly enough, the President used about one minute total to answer this large question. He said that we should remember the teacher in our own educations that provided a "Socratic conversion of the soul," and that we should "do the same thing that teacher did." Only President Hearn knows what he meant by a "Socratic conversion of the soul;" I think he was telling us to emulate the one teacher that made the most difference in our own lives. A professor at the University of Wisconsin, Terrence Penner, did initiate a Socratic conversion of my soul when I was an undergraduate. As it happens, the class was <u>Socrates</u>.

Since that meeting with President Hearn, I have been wondering whether I should follow his advice. I would like to emulate Dr. Penner, I would like to teach like he did, and I would like to initiate such conversions of soul in my students. I haven't yet followed his advice however, because it might have some problematic practical implications. This reflection is an attempt to lay out my dilemma.

Professor Penner taught me a big lesson: if I think someone is wrong, I probably haven't yet understood him or her. Pretty simple, and pretty amazing how hard that lesson is to learn, how hard it is to follow, and in how many domains of life that lesson can be applied. This lesson can not be learned by hearing it, no matter how well the average Wake Forest student can memorize. In fact, I would venture that every person is born believing it (of course, except for the cases in which the other person really <u>is</u> wrong). Penner's students learned this lesson by repeatedly laughing at how silly the ancient Greeks were.

We'd read two pages of one of Socrates' dialogues as homework (the particular dialogue doesn't matter; this scenario was repeated with each of the dialogues. Just for example's sake, let's take the Meno), and wonder why we had to read these historical but useless pieces. "To be an educated person," of course, "one has to know our cultural background." The next lecture, Penner would ask us what we thought was the main point of the text (for example, we'd say that the main point of the Meno was that all people are born knowing Geometry). Penner's reaction uniformly was that this was a silly idea — e.g., obviously people aren't born knowing Geometry. Penner would then ask us whether we really thought we were so smart, that we knew something was obviously foolish when even a man brilliant as Socrates didn't get it. We didn't dare say that of course we were that much smarter, we were raised in the 70s. He pointed out a few key sentences and told us to read the dialogue again.

After a few hours of struggle, many of us had a stunning revelation: Socrates didn't mean what we first thought, he meant something else! (E.g, Socrates meant that we were born with <u>all</u> knowledge.) This new point was still wrong, but we were proud that we could find another interpretation. Predictably, Penner asked us the same question again: "So 20 20-year olds have that good vision? You can see something as wrong when even Socrates couldn't see that it was wrong? Socrates must have been blinded." We were sent home to re-read.

The next conclusion was unnerving: that old silly man from about 60,000 years ago might actually have been right, and might

> *My question is whether I should teach to convey facts or whether I should teach to develop reasoning powers ... so that students can acquire the facts later in their life.*

actually know more than we know now. For example, the Meno really meant that we are born with the capacity to reason, the most important way to spend our time is in developing this capacity, and that knowledge of facts is nothing but a trivial consequence of this capacity.[1] Seeing the new conclusion, and seeing that it was right, made me realize that I hadn't understood Socrates earlier, back when I thought Socrates was wrong. I don't think I would have learned Penner's lesson without first laughing at Socrates, without then going through several revisions, and almost certainly not without that black pit in my stomach when I finally realized I don't know everything already. This sequence simply could not have happened if we had been reading more than 2 pages per week.

I don't really have the space to say how important Penner's lesson was in all domains of my life. Suffice it that this was indeed a Socratic conversion of my soul.

My question is whether I should teach to convey facts or whether I should teach to develop reasoning powers (ala Penner), so that students can acquire the facts later in their life. If I follow President Hearn's advice, I have to scale way back on my reading list, and it's hard to picture my students missing out on all that knowledge. I want badly to teach like Dr. Penner. I want badly for my students to see that when they think a person is wrong that they probably haven't yet understood that person. But I just can't cut down on the number of things that I teach them; I can't now limit myself to 30 pages (where would the other 470 go?).

At least three reasons stand in opposition to teaching so little knowledge (and so much skill). First, the students really do need to know the facts, they really need to have the information to be adequately educated individuals. Although teaching them the skills to acquire knowledge should eventually result in the acquisition of that knowledge, the only way to guarantee that they get the knowledge is to teach it directly to them (I have rarely found myself reading Socrates in my spare time in the last 15 years). Second, there is a real problem with accountability. It is easy to demonstrate that a student has acquired knowledge; it is difficult to demonstrate that a student has acquired a skill, even to the student him or herself. Finally, knowledge builds upon itself. Acquiring knowledge often requires having already acquired background knowledge. Thus, the background knowledge has to be taught.

Maybe it depends on the class. For example, teach knowledge in the lower division survey courses, and then teach reasoning skills in the upper division courses. But why would we want to wait so long to teach them the skills they need to learn? Don't we want to teach that in their first courses?

I don't know what the research says on this question. Without the appropriate training, I don't feel qualified to comment on it in any case. Maybe in part it comes down to a values question: Is the value of education that people learn how to acquire knowledge (of all kinds) later in life, or is the value of education that people acquire knowledge?

I guess it's pretty obvious what Socrates would recommend. But what did he know? ▲

[1] I doubt he meant that individual differences in the capacity to reason were innate, only the pure power to reason at all. This is hard to argue with.

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS - SPRING 1998

Please feel free to bring your lunch to brown bag discussions. We will provide coffee, hot water, and cookies.   Given the size of our discussion area, we need to limit participation to the first fifteen faculty who sign up. Please e-mail **tlc@wfu.edu** or call X4559 to let us know if you are planning to attend.

FEBRUARY

- **18 (Wed.)**
  "Curriculum Review: The First Year Seminar"
  Brown Bag Discussion, 12:00 noon, TLC
  Led by John Collins, Religion

- **25 (Wed.)**
  "Student Writing at Wake Forest"
  Brown Bag Discussion, 12:00 noon, TLC
  Led by Anne Boyle, English

MARCH

- **4 (Wed.)**
  "Curriculum Review: Divisional Requirements"
  Brown Bag Discussion, 12:00 noon, TLC
  Led by John Collins, Religion

- **18 (Wed.)**
  "Grades and Grading"
  Brown Bag Discussion, 12:00 noon, TLC
  Led by Sally Barbour, Romance Languages

- **24 (Tues.)**
  "Rethinking the Way We Teach"
  Workshop, 4:00-6:30 PM, Detamble Auditorium
  Co-sponsored by TLC and CELI
  (Please see this page for more information)

APRIL

- **1 (Wed.)**
  "Curriculum Review: New Requirements"
  Brown Bag Discussion, 12:00 noon, TLC
  Led by John Collins, Religion

- **8 (Wed.)**
  "Active Learning in the Science Classroom"
  Brown Bag Discussion, 12:00 noon, TLC
  Led by Rick Matthews and Daniel Kim-Shapiro, Physics

- **21 (Tues.)**
  "Using Technology: Tips for On-Line Discussion"
  Brown Bag Discussion, 12:00 noon, TLC
  Led by Jennifer Burg, Math and Computer Science

MAY

- **5 (Tues.)**
  "What Do I Do When A Student Cheats?"
  Brown Bag Discussion, 12:00 noon, TLC
  Led by Billy Hamilton, Deans' Office and Russian

TEACHING CENTER HOURS

MON, WED, FRI : 9:00am-12:30pm, 1:30pm-4:30pm
(The Director is available for appointments during these hours.)

TUE, THU : 12:00pm-4:00pm
(The Center is staffed by a work study student during these hours.)

TLC/CELI Workshop Announcement
"Rethinking The Way We Teach"

Tuesday, March 24, 1998, 4:00-6:00 PM
Wine and Cheese, 6:00-6:30 PM
Detamble Auditorium

This workshop will focus on ways in which computer-enhanced learning can help us achieve desirable learning outcomes in the classroom. Organized around the *Seven Principles of Good Practice in Undergraduate Education,** it will involve the demonstration by Wake Forest colleagues of techniques they have used in their classrooms and the opportunity for participants to work with CELI directors on ways to use these techniques in their own classes.

SIGN UP INFORMATION:
If you would like to participate in this workshop, please phone X4559 or e-mail **tlc@wfu.edu** with your reservation no later than Monday, March 16, 1998. Participation will be limited to the first 25 faculty who sign up.

Participants should bring their laptops and a syllabus for a course in which they would like to incorporate technology. The workshop will conclude with a wine and cheese reception and time for informal talk.

***Z. Camson and A. Chickering,** *"Seven Principles for Good Practice in Under-graduate Education,"* AAHE BULLETIN, March 1987, pp. 3-7.   Good practice…encourages contact between students and faculty, develops reciprocity and cooperation among students, encourages active learning, gives prompt feedback on performance, emphasizes time on task, communicates high expectations, and respects diverse talents and ways of learning.

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

OVERSEAS PROGRAMS: The Office of International Studies has money available to encourage faculty to organize overseas study opportunities for students. Many students do not have the chance to participate in our existing programs. This program is designed to help faculty identify and develop alternative opportunities for study and travel.   For more information contact Richard Sears X5939.

THEME YEAR SUPPORT: Small grants up to $300 are available from the Committee organizing the Year of Globalization & Diversity activities of next year (1998-99). The grants can fund course-related enhancements such as instructional materials and guest speakers. Submit proposals by April 1, 1998 for Fall 1998 projects and by November 2, 1998 for Spring 1999 projects to either Mary Jane Berman (Anthropology) or Tom Taylor (Calloway School).   Guidelines are available through department chairs.

MARY REYNOLDS BABCOCK FUND FOR LEADERSHIP AND ETHICS: Grants are available for many projects related to the theme of the fund, including the development of new courses or the alteration of courses to include issues of leadership, ethics, or community service. Deadlines for applications are March 1st and October 1st.   Applications are available on-line. From the Wake Forest Web Page, click on Administration and then Official University Information.