

TLCExchange

The Newsletter of the Teaching and Learning Center of Wake Forest University ▲ Volume 7, Number 2 ▲ Spring 2004

Letter from the Director

January 2004

Dear Colleagues,

We all have them—passive students who want us to simply tell them what will be on the test, so they can efficiently give it back to us. It's not the worst thing that can happen in a classroom (at least they're quiet), but it's not very satisfying especially when the subject is something that deeply engages us. So how do you get students not just talking, but really excited and engaged, asking critical questions, asking what more can be learned and how to learn it? We're planning several events this semester that will present a variety of ways to make learning more active and engaging. First, our in-house expert on teaching oral communication skills, Dee Oseroff-Varnell, will offer suggestions on how to help students make their own presentations engaging. Later Bob Swofford will be sharing his ideas about how technology can be used well or poorly to get students more involved in the learning process. We're planning other events later in the semester on visual learning and using film as a pedagogical tool. Many of you who have attended our brown-bags and panel discussions have expressed how much you would like to keep talking about issues that were raised. We hope that having series of related sessions will help interested faculty continue to explore topics. As always, we'd love to hear your suggestions and ideas.

You've probably already discovered that the Teaching and Learning Center is a great place to meet faculty colleagues from other departments. If you've only heard that, but never come to any of our events, please stop by. Our programs are open to everyone involved in teaching at Wake Forest, even if you're only here for a semester. Some of you may be glad to hear that even though the TLC provides lunch at our noon sessions, you are welcome to drop in or to bring your own lunch.

With best wishes for a great semester,

Bernadine Barnes

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Director, Teaching and Learning Center

Weaning—or Encouraging Autonomous Learning

By Larry D. Spence, School of Information Sciences and Technology, Penn State, lspence@ist.psu.edu; previously published in *The Teaching Professor*, March 2003. This article reprinted by permission from Magna Publications and *The Teaching Professor*, www.magnapubs.com or 1-800-433-0499 for submissions and subscriptions.

At 8:30 a.m. she stood up in class. I wanted to sit. She glared, shooting me with her eyes. "I'm paying good money for this class," her thin hands shook. "My parents are sacrificing. It's your job to just tell us what this book means." She waved a worn copy of Immanuel Kant's essay, *On the Old Saw: That May be True in Theory, but It Does Not Apply in Practice*.

"I can do that, but it will burden the rest of your life."

"What do you mean?"

"You will always have to take me with you. If you marry, I'll be there. On your honeymoon, I'll be there. You will need a special room to keep me in your house. I misplace coffee cups and scatter paper clips. I'll need a desk next to yours at work. A special seat where I can work in your car..."

"Stop it," she shouted. "I don't want to drag a professor through life."

"Good," I said. "Then I can't tell you what the book means. Think of all the books, articles, policy papers, and memos that you will have to read. If you don't know how to understand them, you will be lost as a citizen, a worker, and an individual. So you can either figure out what Kant means or you can adopt me for life."

The class's growing laughter filled the room as they imagined living with a seriously uncool prof. "But aren't you paid to teach us? How am I supposed to know what this old German guy meant?" asked a burly tight end.

"No, it is my job to see that you learn how to discover the meaning yourself."

"This class is weird," came a comment from the baseball cap section.

Students' expectation that I could explain the world marred every course I taught. Their

intellectual dependence was frightening. On bad days, they were so docile and dependent I understood how good storm troopers were made.

John Abbot of The 21st Century Learning Initiative (<http://www.21learn.org>) writes that we should adopt the biological idea of weaning to direct our educational efforts. Young children should have plentiful help and direction. Then we should gradually back off as children take over their own learning. He argues that to adopt the weaning model, we have to turn the current system upside down. Lots of resources for teaching in small classes should be spent in the earliest years. The resources we now expend in colleges and university should be curtailed. By the time students reach adolescence, they should be self-directed.

Is he right? Does the system encourage intellectual dependency, wasting the creativity and curiosity of youth? Is it too late to wean them in higher education – to move them away from dependence on formal instruction to become free-range learners? Current research on the biology of learning backs Abbot's contentions. My own experience attracts me to the idea.

But, oh, in the classroom the dependency is sticky and thick. Students seem confused, indifferent, and desirous only of getting this grade, that course, and eventually the big-ticket degree. The best strive for that special relationship, "teacher's pet." They work to say all those things that feed faculty egos. For many years, I saw little hope for developing autonomous learners. Then I made a discovery.

A group of my students toured with a national champion drum and bugle corps. I went to see them perform. Their precision, quality, and panache astounded me. I could not believe they were the same creatures that shuffled through my courses. They worked twelve hours a day on their musical skills, slept on gym floors, and were driven from city to city without relief. They were disciplined adults.

I walked away with words like "co-dependency" and "enabling" ringing in my ears. My best efforts taught students that to learn was to follow instructions. They didn't need that or my careful explanations, or my crafted syllabi. They needed access to the world's scholarship

and some tough coaching like they got in the bugle corps. And most of all they needed choice and opportunities to pursue their own passions for inquiry and expression.

Maybe we smother the best learning instincts of our students. Seymour Papert writes, "The scandal of education is that every time you teach something, you deprive a child of the pleasure and benefit of discovery." Maybe we should stop chewing and pre-digesting the intellectual food we give our students. We need not joke and enact an excitement we wish they had. We need to focus on the learning and not the comfort of the learners.

In earlier times, people took the passion and energy of adolescents as signs of maturity. They weaned them on responsibilities. The impetuous George Washington was surveying frontier lands by the age of sixteen. By 21, with only a few months of formal education, he could ford rivers, chart mountains, charm legislators, and lead troops. Lord Fairfax wrote his mother that he was "a man who will go to school all his life." Washington's classrooms were the forest, the battlefield, and the halls of government. He never asked what was going to be on the final.

TLC EVENTS

Spring 2004

If you do not already receive e-mail reminders about TLC programs and would like to, please e-mail your request to tlc@wfu.edu. If you are interested in one of the topics but find the time unsuitable, please contact the TLC. All programs take place in the TLC (Room 330 ZSR Library) unless otherwise indicated.

Brown Bag/Breakfast/Discussions

**FACULTY MENTORING:
AN OPEN DISCUSSION**
Thursday, January 29, 3-4:30 P.M.
Teaching and Learning Center
Host: Simone Caron (*History*)

Come to an informal wine and cheese reception to discuss the Faculty Mentoring program at Wake Forest. We'll consider the program as it works now and how it might work better. If you are new to Wake Forest (in the first few years of your teaching career, whether tenure-track or visiting), or if you have been here a bit longer and would simply like to meet some of your new colleagues, please join us. If you are a senior

faculty member interested in joining the program, come and give us your input.
No RSVP necessary.

ACTIVATING THE CLASSROOM: DELIVERY SKILLS FOR ORAL PRESENTATIONS
Wednesday, February 4, 12:00 P.M.
Teaching and Learning Center
Host: Dee Oseroff-Varnell (*Communication*)

"Prepare, prepare, prepare." This is the most valuable lesson a student can learn about giving an oral presentation. Yet preparation is frequently overlooked because students don't know how to adequately prepare for class presentations. This discussion will cover strategies for making classroom presentations more engaging. Power point, delivery skills, and tips for designing and planning for more dynamic student presentations are some of the topics to be highlighted in this lunchtime discussion. **Please RSVP no later than Friday, January 30, to [x4587](mailto:x4587@wfu.edu) or snyderdw@wfu.edu if you would like a lunch provided by the TLC, and be sure to indicate your choice of a Vegetarian Delight Sandwich, a Turkey and Provolone Cheese Sandwich, or a Deacon Club Sandwich. Drop-ins are welcome.**

**STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES:
HOW THEY COPE AND HOW WE COPE**
Wednesday, February 11, 3:00 P.M.
Autumn Room (Reynolda Hall)
Host: Van Westervelt (*Director, Learning Assistance Center*)

Attend a discussion on how students and faculty can collaborate to enable students with learning disabilities to realize their academic potential, including the rationale for accommodations such as extended time on tests. A brief review of diagnostic procedures and the underlying deficit in Reading Disability will also be included. Light refreshments will be offered. **This event will take place in the Autumn Room in Reynolda Hall. No RSVP necessary.**

**WHY I HATE POWERPOINT BUT CONTINUE TO USE IT IN CLASS:
THE PITFALLS AND THE SUCCESSES OF
POWERPOINT AND CONCEPTTESTS**
*Tuesday, February 17, 12:00 P.M.,
Room 204, ZSR Library (Electronic Classroom)*
Host: Robert Swofford (*Chemistry*)

A very good summary of the use of ConcepTests in introductory courses was

published in the Wake Forest Magazine, March 2003. Powerpoint is used to pose a conceptual question to students, who were given one minute to ponder before a "secret ballot" is cast. A chemistry pilot project used Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs) to record and transmit the students' answers, which could be viewed as anonymous responses by the instructor but not seen by the students. Next year, Wake Forest will pilot the use of "smartphones" - similar to cell phones but capable of voice-over-internet for on-campus use. The availability of a "student response system" in class could change significantly how we approach our use of class time. Come hear how Powerpoint was successfully used in class while careful attempts were made to avoid its pitfalls. **Please RSVP no later than Thursday, February 12, to snyderdw@wfu.edu or x4587 if you would like a lunch provided by the TLC, and be sure to indicate your choice of a Grilled Portabello Mushroom Sandwich, a Chicken Salad Croissant, or a Roast Beef and Cheddar Sandwich. Drop-ins are welcome. Please note the location of this event is Room 204 of the ZSR Library.**

**THE CHALLENGES OF TEACHING
WRITING ACROSS THE DISCIPLINES**
Tuesday, February 24, 12:00 P.M.
Teaching and Learning Center
Hosts: Anne Boyle (*Women's and Gender Studies*), Robert Cone, Tom McGohey (*English*)

Many of us experience writing as a means of discovering or constructing knowledge, yet our students often view writing assignments as dull exercises in summary. We have all been surprised and distressed when an intelligent and motivated student submits a paper that is far below our level of expectations, but most of us have little if any training in composition theory and practice. While our writing assignments and pedagogical goals differ across the disciplines, let's see what ideas and experiences we have in common. Join colleagues across the disciplines as we think about ways we might improve the quality of student writing. **Please RSVP no later than Thursday, February 19, to snyderdw@wfu.edu or x4587 if you would like a lunch provided by the TLC, and be sure to indicate your choice of a Vegetarian Delight Sandwich, a Turkey and Provolone Cheese Sandwich, or a Deacon Club Sandwich. Drop-ins are welcome.**

New Teaching Award Planned

Beginning next year the TLC will be sponsoring a new Innovative Teaching Award. If you are trying something new, perhaps applying a method you've read about or retooling a course in an untraditional way, please consider applying for this award. Self-nominations will be solicited in early Fall 2004, and you may submit materials related to a course you have taught anytime between Fall 2003 through Fall 2004. You will need to provide documentation that shows your method is both new and effective, so consider videotaping classes, soliciting student feedback, etc. Watch for more details in the coming months.

Free Lunch for New (and Not-So-New) Faculty

As a way to find out how the TLC can help new faculty, we will be organizing several informal lunches during the semester just to meet, eat, and find out what's on your mind. You don't have to be tenure-track or full-time; you don't even have to be brand-new. You only have to call or e-mail Deborah Snyder, the Coordinator of the TLC, at x4587 or snyderdw@wfu.edu so we can find a good time and place.

Plagiarism Software Availability

Last year several plagiarism detection software programs were available through the Teaching and Learning Center. Since then the University has adopted the *Turnitin* program, which is available to all faculty as a web-based program. Contact Beth Boyd <boydmbet@wfu.edu>, the Instructional Technology Consultant for the Religion Department, who will give you a login and password. Beth will also be offering training sessions.

Past Program Notes: Fall 2003

By popular demand, the TLC Exchange will reprint or make available notes and handouts from several of the previous semester's brown bag discussions and programs.

DESIGNING ORAL ASSIGNMENTS FOR THE CLASSROOM

Brown Bag Discussion September 17

Host: Dee Oseroff-Varnell (*Communication*)

Dr. Oseroff-Varnell's information packet from this discussion is available to interested faculty by contacting the TLC Coordinator at x4587.

CREATING DIALOGUE ON DIFFICULT ISSUES

Brown Bag Discussion October 13

Host: Bob Evans (*Education*)

Dr. Evans' handout, "Experimentation of Interactive Didactic Activities on Complex and Controversial Environmental Issues with Students of Higher Secondary School," written by Daniela Marchetti and Elena Camino, is available to interested faculty by contacting the TLC Coordinator at x4587. Please note that this article cannot be cited without permission of the authors.

THE SILENT SOCRATIC DIALOGUE: MOVING STUDENTS FROM TOPICS TO IDEAS

Brown Bag Discussion October 23

Host: Tom McGohey (*Writing Center*)

Mr. McGohey's information packet from this discussion is available to interested faculty by contacting the TLC Coordinator at x4587.

WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY TEACHING AND LEARNING CENTER

The Teaching and Learning Center was established in 1997 with a dual purpose: meeting faculty-identified needs for teaching support and promoting dialogue about teaching. Faculty are encouraged to fill out a Faculty Information Form available from the Center designed to help us target specific needs and concerns which are then the topics for brown bag lunch discussion and workshops throughout the academic year.

The Teaching and Learning Center also offers a number of voluntary and confidential evaluation services outside the traditional departmental evaluation process. These have included midterm evaluations, videotaping, and peer class visitations, and a faculty-mentoring program.

To learn more about the Teaching and Learning Center, and/or to discuss the programs and services the TLC offers, please contact TLC Director, Bernadine Barnes at Ext. 4559 (barnes@wfu.edu) or TLC Coordinator, Deborah Snyder at Ext. 4587 (snyderdw@wfu.edu). The Teaching and Learning Center is open Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays from 8 am. until 4:00 pm, Thursdays from 8:00am until 3:30 pm, Fridays from 8:00am until 11:00am, and is located in 330 Z. Smith Reynolds Library.

The TLC faculty advisory committee is elected annually. Committee members for the 2003/04-year are: Natalie Holzwarth (Physics), Joe Milner (Education), Teresa Sanhueza (Romance Languages), Stewart Carter (Music), Jonathan Duchac (Calloway), and Batja Mesquita (Psychology).

Evaluation Services

The center offers services to faculty who would like voluntary and confidential peer review of their classes outside the traditional departmental evaluation process. All of these services require some lead-time to arrange since faculty volunteers provide them. If you would like to schedule any of these services, please give us at least two weeks notice. You can call X4587 or e-mail tlc@wfu.edu for scheduling or more information.

▲ Mid-term evaluations

A colleague administers this evaluation to your class(es) at mid-term during the last twenty minutes of class. Students discuss in small groups the following topics: What is working in the class? What is not working? Suggestions? A secretary in each group takes notes of the discussion. After approximately five to seven minutes, the class comes together and each group reports. The colleague begins a list on the board of group answers in the three categories, coming to consensus with the entire class about which answers will be passed on to the professor. Three student secretaries are responsible for making a clean copy of each list. After class, the colleague meets with you to discuss the results. The information that is passed on to the professor is anonymous and reflects only those matters on which there is a consensus or majority opinion. For more information about the process and its benefits, read the article by Genevieve Brock (Romance Languages) in the first issue of *The TLC Exchange*. It is available on-line at our web site www.wfu.edu.TLC.

▲ Videotaping

The Center owns a video camera and related multimedia/audio-visual equipment. You may use this service in two ways:

- a) Borrow the equipment and set up the camera in your classroom yourself. You keep the tape and view it yourself. This procedure requires less lead-time as long as the equipment is available and you know how to use it.
- b) Arrange for someone representing the Center who has been trained in using the equipment to tape the class and meet with you afterward to discuss the tape.

▲ Peer Class Visitations

A colleague whom you select from a list available at the TLC visits your class on one or more occasions and discusses their observations with you. To read more about the process and benefits of this service, see the article by Bob Evans (Education) in the second issue of *The TLC Exchange*. It is available on-line at our web site www.wfu.edu.TLC.

Resources

The TLC has many resources available to the campus community, including books and journals promoting teaching excellence. These items are available for use in the Center and/or can be checked out at the circulation desk of the Z. Smith Reynolds Library. TLC hours are **8:00 AM to 4:00 PM Monday through Wednesday, 8:00 to 3:30 PM Thursday, and 8:00 AM to 11:00 PM Friday**; if you need to consult or check out TLC resources when the center is closed, you may obtain a key at the circulation desk by showing your faculty ID card.

The Teaching and Learning Center also maintains a vertical file of teaching-related articles. Subjects include, but are not limited to:

- Active learning
- Assessment
- Collaborative learning
- Critical thinking
- Generating discussion
- Syllabus construction
- Teaching portfolios
- Testing and grading
- Writing across disciplines

The Teaching and Learning Center is available for departmental and committee meetings. Please call extension 4587 or e-mail tlc@wfu.edu to reserve the space.

For information about other TLC services

and upcoming events, see the TLC web site. The site also includes several articles from the IDEA CENTER that address topics frequently mentioned as concerns by faculty in TLC brown bag discussion, including how to improve lectures, discussions, and student writing, and helping students develop critical thinking skills. In addition, FYS proposals from several faculty members are now available. The articles and proposals, as well as other web-based information, are accessible by going to the TLC homepage and clicking on "Teaching Resources."