

The

Teacher

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The Excellence in Teaching at NGCSU Newsletter

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This Issue of The Teacher

The second issue of *The Teacher* features an article written by Dr. Marc Gilbert, Professor of History and NGCSU's second Regents' Distinguished Professor for Teaching and Learning. Other features include *Fresh Perspectives: New Faculty React* written by Drs. Kirk C. Heriot and C. Michael Powell, Associate Professors of Business Administration; *Mentor Highlights*, a look at the *Excellence in Teaching at NGCSU* Faculty Mentoring Program; *Kudos*; and *Letters to the Editor*. Other inclusions are a RDPTL initiatives update, a schedule of upcoming faculty development opportunities, and an update to the *Excellence in Teaching at NGCSU* web page.

The Teacher is designed to serve as a catalyst for focusing attention on teaching as a scholarly activity and as a venue for publication of teaching-related research. You are invited to submit your reactions to newsletter articles for inclusion in the *Letters to the Editor* column, articles for publication, or suggestions for newsletter inclusions.

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Broadening the Reach of Hands-On Pedagogy

by Marc Jason Gilbert, Professor of History

As is well known to all of us who have had to take a Microsoft Word course to get up to speed with NGCSU's chosen word processing software, there is no substitute for learning by doing. Indeed, the effectiveness of hands-on approaches to learning is universally accepted. There is probably not a single practitioner of any of the academic disciplines on our campus who thinks that learning by doing should not be a part of their pedagogy. From my own conversations with NGCSU students, however, it would seem that "learning by doing" on our campus may be too discipline specific and too oriented toward providing support for course-specific goals. As a result, its use may fall short of some of the higher goals we have set for ourselves as educators and as an institution, such as internationalizing our curriculum, promoting life-long learning techniques via web-based learning, and exposing students to the importance of ethics and values in everyday life.

I had an opportunity to observe this facet of our educational environment when revising a key component of one of my courses: a history of the Vietnam War. One of the course project options available to my students was an on-site analysis of a Vietnam Veteran Memorial in Georgia. This assignment provided my students with as much of a hands-on immersion in the Vietnam Experience as I thought imaginable. This "on site" analysis required students to interview the designer of the memorial, inquire about the sources of the designer's inspiration, and delve into the fund-raising techniques employed to translate the artist's vision into concrete and marble. I assumed that such an intersection between the disciplines of art, business, and history was more than adequate for my course needs.

However, when engaging in some research into the topic of Vietnam Veteran Memorials, I discovered a site on the World Wide Web that provided a window into the literature of loss and recovery as it related to Vietnam War Memorials. The Web site revealed the seriousness of what I had thought to be a minor problem with my old exercise. I expected students to ask visitors to the memorial they were examining how these passers-by responded to the memorial, but almost none of my students encountered anyone on the site to engage in such a discussion. Yet, on the two occasions when I was able to take students to see the "Moving Wall" when it came to North Georgia, I noticed that the students' interaction with mourners, volunteers at the site, and the literature on display moved my students to high levels of interest, empathy and understanding. The papers they subsequently wrote about this activity were, in terms of academic content, superior to the research based on site analysis. I realized that, by also requiring my students to visit the Web site in question and virtually interact with the poems and other forms of discourse by mourners to be found there (as well as with the mourners themselves via e-mail), I could greatly enhance the learning process.

I soon discovered that a reading of the play *Gardens of Stone* (or a viewing of its cinematic version) to accompany this assignment had a similar effect. Just recently, I found that a reading of a much anthologized selection from the most moving personal novel to emerge from the Vietnamese side, Bao Ninh's *Sorrow of War* (a tale that begins with the supernatural experiences of a Vietnamese team tasked with finding the bodies of those Vietnamese listed as Missing in Action) adds an international dimension that also greatly extends the impact of the assignment, while still retaining the original focus of war memorials. When I ask students why I had them read the *Sorrow of War* selection, they routinely respond by saying, "So we would know that the Vietnamese were also human and suffered losses as well." Not a bad

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Mentor Highlights

The NGCSU Faculty Mentoring Program sponsored by the *Excellence in Teaching at NGCSU* program is off to an excellent start. Eight experienced faculty mentors have completed a training program and four mentoring teams have been formed.

Faculty mentors include Thomas H. Fox, Natural & Health Sciences; Mary Lou Frank, Psychology; Donna Gessell, Language & Literature; Kathleen Gruenhagen, Teacher Education; Vicki McCard, Language & Literature; Linda Roberts-Betsch, Nursing; Kathy Sisk, Mathematics & Computer Science; and Donna Waddell, Nursing.

The goals of the NGCSU Faculty Mentoring Program are to:

- promote teaching excellence among new and adjunct faculty, and
- assist new and adjunct faculty to achieve their full potential through collaboration with a network of experienced, successful faculty members.

The faculty mentoring program is intended strictly for faculty development purposes and not as a component of the faculty evaluation process. Faculty mentors complete an official training program and volunteer their time to provide confidential assistance to new faculty members in areas such as classroom observation, implementing varied teaching and assessment strategies, preparing for pre-tenure review, documentation of teaching effectiveness, and development of faculty evaluation goals.

Faculty members who have not participated in the pre-tenure review process and who are interested in participating in the NGCSU Faculty Mentoring Program should visit the *Excellence in Teaching at NGCSU* web page. Select the Mentoring Program icon and click on the picture of each NGCSU faculty mentor to examine information that will aid in the selection process. The next step for the new faculty member is to contact the mentor by E-mail or by phone to determine if the relationship is mutually agreeable. The mentor should then notify the program coordinator (Judy O'Neal) of the formation of the mentoring team.

Web Update

Access to the *Excellence in Teaching at NGCSU* web site is now easily accessible to audiences outside of NGCSU through search engines such as AltaVista, Lycos, Infoseek, Excite, Magellan, WebCrawler, and others.

Kudos

Sincere appreciation for conducting an *Excellence in Teaching at NGCSU* seminar or workshop during the past weeks goes to the following faculty:

- Dlynn Armstrong, Political Science & Criminal Justice - Teaching Strategies Seminar
- Toni Bellon, Teacher Education - Using the Web as an Instructional Tool Seminar; Web-Based Course Development Seminar
- Jim Chesnut, Language & Literature - Using the Web as an Instructional Tool Seminar
- Lennet Daigle, Arts & Letters - Preparing for Post-Tenure Review Seminar; Preparing for Pre-Tenure Review Seminar
- Thomas H. Fox, Natural & Health Sciences - Preparing for Post-Tenure Review Seminar; Preparing for Pre-Tenure Review Seminar
- Irene Kokkala, Biology - Web-Based Course Development Seminar
- Vicki McCard, Language & Literature - Teaching Strategies Seminar
- Kim Melton, Business Administration - Introduction to Teaching Portfolios
- John Nardo, Mathematics & Computer Science - Technology-Based Applications Workshop
- Richard Oates, Health & P.E. - Web-Based Course Development Seminar
- Kathy Sisk, Mathematics & Computer Science - Using the Web as an Instructional Tool Seminar
- Steve Smith, Psychology - Web-Based Course Development Seminar
- Gay Tennis, Business Administration - Using the Web as an Instructional Tool Seminar

Letters to the Editor

On Fairer Evaluations

At NGCSU, data from student evaluations of instructors plays a prominent role in tenure, promotion, and salary exercises. However, relying too heavily on student evaluations may not be a valid assessment of teaching effectiveness. The major problem is that educational research has shown that there are numerous extraneous factors, unrelated to instruction and learning, that have a clearly demonstrable effect on student ratings. For example, researchers have found that teachers of elective or non-required courses receive higher ratings than teachers of required courses. Studies have also found that higher-level courses tend to receive higher ratings. Smaller classes tend to receive higher ratings. Male students tend to give female instructors lower ratings and ratings in mathematics and the sciences rank among the lowest. In addition, at this time, the consensus is definitely that there is a moderate positive correlation between expected grade and student ratings. Students expecting higher grades will give more favorable ratings. Therefore, if an assistant professor wants to obtain good evaluations for tenure, he/she should teach all upper-level elective nonscience courses with small classes, and give out high grades for the first few tests.

I believe that effective teaching should be assessed in different ways using several different methods. I don't believe that student evaluation surveys should be done away with entirely. Student evaluations can be a worthwhile means of evaluating teaching effectiveness and can help to improve instruction. My concern is that student evaluations are the only method of evaluating teaching. I believe that teachers also need to be assessed on the planning and organization of their classes, their use of innovative teaching methods, their implementation of critical thinking exercises, and the methods they use to evaluate students. Because it is difficult for students to assess such things, many colleges are turning to peer evaluation.

I know that nobody wants others in their class to evaluate their teaching. But peer evaluation can be an effective assessment tool and can help to improve teaching. When I was a part-time instructor at Georgia State University (GSU), peer assessment helped me tremendously. At GSU, peers were not negative or overly critical; they only made suggestions of how to be more effective. They made suggestions such as: "Did you ever think of asking the question like this?" or "Did you ever think of doing this kind of exercise or assignment?" In conclusion, not only can peer evaluation be an effective assessment tool, but it can replace the current "sink or swim" method of "training" new assistant professors.

Brent Paterline, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice

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Fresh Perspectives: New Faculty React

RDPTL Initiatives Update

by Judy O'Neal, 1998-99 RDPTL

Teaching with an 'Attitude' vs. Teaching with a Positive Attitude

by Kirk C. Heriot, Associate Professor of Business Administration &
C. Michael Powell, Associate Professor of Business Administration

Recent discussions in college hallways and offices and recent endeavors in higher education, such as *The Teacher* newsletter, have tried to focus attention on teaching excellence. These discussions and endeavors have looked at a variety of issues related to how an individual can better teach. This emphasis on teaching excellence is very much a response to public outcries about poor teaching in colleges and universities in the United States. You have probably heard many horror stories of graduate students teaching classes, instead of qualified faculty members with terminal degrees.

Have you ever noticed, when you overhear students debating the merits of one faculty member or another, that students invariably comment on the faculty members' behavior or demeanor? Some people might explain this away as a "personality" issue, but we suggest that it is much more than simply a difference between professor and student. Certainly, the fault may be with the faculty member. Maybe the comments by students such as, "he/she is mean" or "he never explains things to us" or "she doesn't like us to ask questions", etc. are reflections of the faculty member's attitude toward teaching rather than reflections of the student's poor behavior. We must remember that the students are important, not us.

Thus, before we can make any meaningful, beneficial changes to the teaching process, we must start with the attitude of the teacher. One means to assess our own attitude is to conduct a self-appraisal. Consider your responses to the following questions, now and in the future. Your honest response to these questions will prove a valuable means of determining whether you presently have a positive attitude toward teaching.

1. Do you come to NGCSU in a "good" mood?
2. Do you project a melancholy or malicious image?
3. Do students feel free to ask you questions in class?
4. Do students frequently come by your office to ask questions unrelated to the course?
5. Do students come by your office to

- ask you questions related to the course?
6. Do your students perform well in your classes?
7. Do you find yourself in your office preparing for class outside your normal office hours?
8. Do you constantly look for new or better ways to explain critical concepts?
9. Do you smile and say "hello" or "good morning" to your students (and colleagues)?
10. Do you enjoy interacting with young adults?
11. Do you enjoy teaching?

If you find yourself responding in the negative rather than the positive to any of these questions, it may be time to analyze your feelings. Your reasons may be based on an event that has caused a short-term disruption in your life. In that case, you will be able to develop a more positive response to these questions as you begin to cope with the crisis or problem. On the other hand, if you find that you consistently have a "poor" attitude toward teaching, it may be time to consider making some changes.

Perhaps the comments in this article can be summarized as, "If you don't enjoy teaching, maybe you shouldn't teach." Your attitude as a teacher is reflected not only by your understanding of the material you teach, (whether physics, languages, secondary education, business, or whatever you may teach), but in the way you go about teaching. Maybe we can better expect students to have positive attitudes about learning if we have positive attitudes about teaching. When we teach, the emphasis should be on learning. The attitudes we have toward teaching greatly influence the atmosphere we create in the classroom. Does your classroom have an atmosphere in which learning can occur? If not, you might want to check your attitude at the door, so you can ensure that teaching and learning occur in a positive atmosphere conducive to our real purpose here, to assist in the formation of a well-educated populace. For these are the citizens who will create our future and that of our children.

Efforts to focus attention upon excellence in teaching have been well received by the NGCSU faculty. Participation in seminars, workshops, and discussion forums has reflected a broad-based representation across discipline areas. Thus far, web-related sessions have proven to be the most popular. However, as the year progresses and faculty interests begin moving toward preparation for annual evaluations, faculty development offerings have been planned to respond to specified faculty interests and requests.

Progress toward the formation of a faculty-oriented center for teaching and learning continues as the recommendation of the Ad Hoc Committee for Teaching and Learning is presented to the NGCSU Faculty Senate on November 5. The committee has been working for the past two months to develop a mission statement, goals, programmatic and facilities components, and budgetary projections. Committee members include: Judy O'Neal, chair; Toni Bellon, Teacher Education; Mark Davis, Biology; Martha Merritt, Business Administration; Brent Paterline, Political Science & Criminal Justice; and Donna Waddell, Nursing.

Upcoming Activities

November:

- 10th, Addressing Varied Learning Styles, 12:30-1:15 p.m., DX 010
- 11th, Peer Review, 3:30-4:10 p.m., DX 010
- 12th, Using the Web as an Instructional Tool, 12:30-1:15 p.m., DX 208
- 16th, Classroom Assessment Techniques, 3:30-4:15 p.m., DX 010
- 17th, Recognizing and Rewarding Teaching Excellence Discussion, 12:30-1:15 p.m., DX 206
- 23rd, Technology-Based Applications, 3:30-4:15 p.m., DX 208
- 24th, Promoting Active Learning, 12:30-1:15 p.m., DX 010
- 30th, Faculty Evaluation, 3:30-4:15 p.m., DX 010

January:

- 11th, Measuring Teaching Effectiveness, 3:30-4:15 p.m., DX 010
- 12th, Technology-Based Applications, 12:30-1:15 p.m., DX 208

Broadening the Reach of Hands-On Pedagogy *continued*

response given that this course is chiefly populated by non-history majors.

Of course, since there is so much material culture available to historians, my colleagues might argue that their approaches to "learning by doing" could not be so easily enriched. However, would not repeated visits to an increasingly polluted stream by biology students be enhanced by a reading from Rachael Carson's *Silent Spring* (especially in view of the recent declines in the songbird population)? To return to Vietnam, students in a new NGCSU literature course will read the North Vietnamese novel *Paradise of the Blind*. Would they not profit from a visit to our the nearest Vietnamese restaurant, whose owner battled the Vietnamese Mafia in Atlanta, or from listening to a live singing of Vietnamese songs that reveal the searing pain and frustration (palpable in the novel) the Vietnamese have suffered through their countless wars? Students engaged in hands-on replications of Einstein's formulae in physics or Newton's theorems in mathematics would no doubt be excited to find, via new biographies of these men, how they struggled just to stay employed and how Einstein fought against the first use of his Atomic Bomb. Young astronomers would profit not only from finding an asteroid in the lens of a telescope, but engaging in an exercise in warning an "imagined community" of the relative likelihood and dangers of a deep impact (a visit to the web site or the film *Deep Impact* would be engaging and useful in this regard). Young geologists may have little luck finding active volcanoes in Georgia, but, visits to or encounters with igneous rocks can be supplemented by a viewing of the brilliant PBS documentary on the volcano watchers that risked their lives to make a tough but correct call that saved millions when Mt. Pinatubo erupted in the Philippines (Vulcanologists maintain several web sites which bring the subject as close as we would permit students to get!).

Respect for those who sacrifice themselves in the name of honor, duty and country, witnessing the price of success in the world of ideas, observing community awareness, ethics, the international dimensions of human activity and seeing people maintain the courage of their professional convictions are all things worthy of placing within reach of our students engaged in hands-on exercises, in whichever discipline they occur.

It would be easy to say that our ability to enrich our hands-on exercises by interdisciplinary, international material, accompanying web site interaction, etc. is limited only by our imagination, but it might not be fair to do so. Given our current workload, it is not exactly an easy task for a mathematician to keep up with new biographies of Newton. However, we at NGCSU are part

Letters to the Editor *continued*

Excellence in Teaching

Excitement should be pervasive among the professoriate as we are now giving real-time thought and activity to excellence in teaching. As we reflect upon and assess our performance, we must ask, "Are we professing or are we teaching?"

Learning is both a tremendous opportunity and a challenge. Students have historically faced difficulty in mastering new concepts and/or acquiring necessary skills. This level of difficulty, varying greatly among individual students, is, however, the fundamental excitement of learning.

In virtually all aspects of life, seizing opportunities and meeting challenges involves looking toward something about which much remains to be known. It takes personal ambition, initiative, courage, determination, effort, and enthusiasm to make the most of the opportunities. Such personal behavior energizes the individual to a realization that even the seemingly insurmountable challenges are indeed opportunities. The individual is involved, excited, and committed to the greatest benefits offered through the opportunity at hand.

How truly exciting learning can be! Pursuing the fundamental belief that all individuals need to experience this educational excitement, we as teachers must be energized, caring, learning guides. We need to utilize the intangible as well as the tangible tools available to us to promote, enhance, and facilitate the learning process for our students, both inside and outside the classroom.

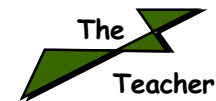
Professing is only one aspect of the role of college professors. As teachers, we must use a variety of strategies to effect student learning during their collegiate experiences. Effective teaching only happens when learning is happening! That is, the primary focus of the academic environment is the student.

of a community, a community linked by an e-mail system that makes faculty inquiries regarding such enrichment material easy to make and gain a useful response. Bringing the global village into a hands-on exercise is not as hard as one might think when it is realized what rich resources are available to us as educators who are living in one.

Individuals learn differently. Therefore, variety in teaching methodology is essential. No one strategy or no one teaching tool is truly effective for all classes or all subjects. The use of many strategies and tools in guiding the learning process is crucial. This variety might include, but is not limited to the following: lecture, individual and group problem solving, class discussion, independent research and reporting, oral and written presentation of concepts and their applications, interactive learning activities via computerized technology, teamwork tutoring, and multimedia presentations. Teachers have the complex responsibility of determining the most effective teaching methodology with respect to the learning goals for the students in each class for each topical subject area.

Without the excitement of learning opportunities of different forms and types, some students will miss the joy of the process. Also, for those students and many others, the collegiate educational experience can quickly become just a series of classes to endure to attain a degree. With the focus on student learning and thoughtful use of the many strategies and tools available in today's academic environment, the teacher can often change the endurance test into excitement. The **caring, energized teacher** is the key!

Martha Merritt
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