

CTE Notebooks

The Center for Teaching Excellence, Vol. 1, No. 1 - Spring 1998

What is Excellence in Teaching?

Deborah Natoli

As Director of the Center for Teaching Excellence, I cannot speak with certainty about what "good teaching" is. Yet, I know it when I see it.

Research indicates that there is much we can do to make teaching "good." My own teaching has benefited from designing lesson plans that stipulate specific learning outcomes for a class or unit. I can determine *what* the "student will be able to..." do or know at the end of the period, *how* I will present the content, and *how* I will check for understanding. I can consider thoughtfully *how* to get students ready to learn by preparing a "set" or "hook" for the lesson and *how* I will then summarize a class and link it to the next lesson. I can contemplate the *why* about what it is that I do.

In the five years that I have worked with faculty and teaching assistants at Saint Louis University, I have visited close to 80 classrooms to observe instruction. These have been delightful experiences! Teachers are engaged in active research concerning their teaching when they decide what feedback would be helpful to them and invite a trained colleague into their classroom to collect data systematically. A conference to report the data follows the observation and offers an opportunity for dialogue and reflection.

There is much we can do to study the science of teaching. The magic of teaching, however, comes not from examination of the *what, how* or *why*. It comes in honoring the *who*. Good teachers are *persons* who are connected. They connect with students, with subject, with self. They are vital in and vulnerable to human relationship. It is through connection and relationship that the good teacher draws forth what is already present and timeless within the student and allows for discovery and celebration of one's truest nature. Hence comes the word educate from "educere" meaning a "drawing forth from within."

We strive for excellence in teaching. Yet, there are as many styles/philosophies/methodologies of teaching as there are teachers. As a community, one idea is to respect the nature and talents of all teachers and encourage them to develop their own philosophy or conceptual framework to guide their teaching. The responsible teacher is thoughtful and reflective about his/her instruction and how it relates to this philosophy. The community of teachers is readily available to inform, model, and serve as mentors for one another, so that the outcome of instruction, collaboration, and relationship is greater awareness of *self as teacher*. This furthers professional and personal development.


As I write this, I am reminded of a scene with Robin Williams as teacher in the movie Dead Poet Society. He instructs his students to "rip out" the introductory page in their poetry book written by Dr. Pritchard, an expert with a formula for analyzing and judging all poetry. Dr. Pritchard designed a method for evaluating poetry. Robin Williams preferred to honor the mystery of it. The same can be said for teaching. Perhaps the truth about excellent teaching lies somewhere between the polarities depending on the teacher, the students and the discipline. ♦



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A Dean for Teaching

Jim Korn

 In July 1 last year, I became Associate Graduate Dean for Teaching. Why do we need another Dean? Aren't all Deans concerned with teaching? I thought that this Newsletter would be a good place for me to describe my role in our Center.

In part my position symbolizes the support for teaching on the part of Dean Brennan and the University administration. Yes, all Deans are concerned with teaching, but I am able to focus attention on this part of our mission, and to keep teaching issues on the agenda.

My specific duties are to advise the Director of the Center on planning and programmatic issues, to develop a program of research on teaching, to raise funds for the development of the Center, and to provide occasional services, such as faculty seminars. I chair three committees: the Center Advisory Committee, a group of 25 individuals chosen to represent the University broadly, the Planning Sub-committee and the Technology Sub-committee. Each of these committees meets once each semester.

That's a general job description, but let me tell you how this feels. This is one of the most satisfying, enjoyable things I have done in the almost 24 years I have been at SLU. Our Director, Deborah Natoli, and her staff of three TAs are wonderful people to work with, and faculty and student participants have appreciated what we are doing. To get a better understanding of how our programs work, I enrolled in the Teaching Certificate Program that has been offered primarily to graduate students. I will receive my certificate on May 1 if my mentor, Belden Lane, and the Center Director approve my teaching portfolio.



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We have some challenges for the coming year that will make this job even more interesting. Finding benefactors to provide an endowment would help to provide the Center with a budget that would put us on the same level as the major teaching centers in this country. Our research program will focus on the evaluation of teaching by direct observation, and we will seek grant support for that project. We will continue to work with providers of technology services to help teachers bring the latest technology into their classrooms and take those classrooms beyond our campus.

For me, however, the greatest challenge and the most rewarding part of my role is to work with teachers facing day-to-day challenges from their students. While we master the new technologies, I maintain that teaching will always involve what I call, "closeness learning." In a wonderful book called, *The Courage to Teach*, Parker Palmer writes about two very different kinds of experiences that most of us have had: There are "moments when we can hardly hold the joy" as students catch our enthusiasm for our subject. Then at other times "the classroom is so lifeless or painful or confused...that my claim to be a teacher seems a transparent sham."

This is what happens after the computers are turned off and with or without a rich endowment fund. Teaching is about closeness and community, with each other and with our students. Please let us know how we can help you and we will ask you to help us. ♦

Faculty Build Portfolios & Community

The Center for Teaching Excellence hosted a Faculty Portfolio Retreat for pre-tenured faculty at Fordyce House on April 3 and 4. The purpose of this workshop was to assist faculty in developing a teaching portfolio and to facilitate interdisciplinary conversation about teaching. Twenty-one faculty from the various schools and colleges were invited by deans to participate in the event.

Some faculty comments about the experience include:

"I felt that this workshop surpassed my expectations in that you helped me identify my natural teaching philosophy and to see that I've always had a good reason for doing what I am doing."

"The examples of portfolios from other fields and the time to actually work on and write my own portfolio was great!"

"I enjoyed the discussion of teaching techniques, philosophies, and evaluations."

"I liked the mix of informative presentation and time to work on each section. It was helpful to meet other faculty and develop community."

The Center for Teaching Excellence is planning a barbecue this summer for retreat participants as well as another portfolio retreat next year. ♦



Pictured above:
Portfolio Retreat Facilitators
(back row, left to right)
Louise Barbier, Graduate Assistant to the Dean;
Marilyn Miller, Program for Excellence in Teaching
(PET) Mizzou; Jim Groccia, Director of PET;
Debbie Natoli, Director of the Center for Teaching
Excellence.
(front row)
Jim Korn, Associate Graduate Dean for Teaching.

Pictured below left:
Portfolio Retreat Participants
(back row, left to right)
Rob Gabriel, Physical Therapy; Roger Lewis,
Public Health; Griffin Trotter, Health Care Ethics;
James Conner, Communication; Bob Hurd, Health
Care Ethics; Larry Figgs, Public Health; Ann
Hayes, Physical Therapy.
(middle row, left to right)
Mary Ann Lavin, Nursing; Lynda Morrison,
Medicine; John Zhao, Business; Sridhar Condoor,
Parks; Janet Kuebli, Psychology; Jay Memmott,
Social Services; Amy Lang, Parks.
(front row, left to right)
Alexa Serfis, Chemistry; Mary Anne Drake,
Nursing; Elena Andresen, Public Health; Daniel
Gentry, Public Health; Faye Abram, Social
Services; Claudine Jomphe, Languages.
(not pictured)
Wendell Bonner, Counseling.

Technology and Teaching

Paul Myhre

The use of new technologies for teaching is a swiftly growing area of pedagogy. Faculty and teaching assistants are engaged in the process of learning about what technologies are available, how they might use these technologies to enhance their teaching, and what training may be required for implementing technology into their teaching. With the growth of the World Wide Web over the past few years, coupled with enhanced computers and software, the possibilities for integrating technology into classroom teaching have expanded tremendously.



It is our contention that technology ought to be utilized in service of instructional design and curriculum development.

Given the rapid expansion of technology over the past few years, the Center for Teaching Excellence has become involved with research and teaching concerning the use of technology in the classroom. It is our contention that technology ought to be utilized in service of instructional design and curriculum development. Hence, our efforts are focused on how to help teachers develop skills for using technology in meaningful ways that will encourage excellence in their teaching. We do this by providing seminars and workshops, giving one on one instruction with faculty and teaching assistants, disseminating relevant information, and working collaboratively with other Saint Louis University units that utilize technology in teaching.

Teaching faculty and teaching assistants how to use Internet Teaching Assistants has been one of the primary ways by which the Center for Teaching Excellence has sought to assist teachers in the use of technology. We have provided instruction in the use of Nicenet and Web CT, Internet Teaching Assistants, to help teachers provide alternative learning environments, expand discussion possibilities, and enhance collaborative learning.

On May 18, 1998, in conjunction with the Instructional Media Center, Information Technology Services, and Biomedical Communications, we will provide a seminar on "Integrating Technology into the Classroom" for the 14th Annual Nurse Educator Conference at the Saint Louis University of Nursing. ♦

A Dean's Vision for Teaching

Don Brennan

A few days ago I had the opportunity to provide welcoming remarks to a group of faculty who were gathered at Fordyce House for a one and one-half day portfolio workshop sponsored by the Center for Teaching Excellence. In that same room six years ago, I had the pleasure of giving welcoming remarks to a group of about 25 faculty who joined us for our retreat presented by Dr. Leo Lambert of Syracuse University on models for the better preparation of teaching assistants. It was about this time that Fr. Biondi had made a commitment to enhance the number and competitiveness of our graduate assistantships and, in return, wanted to be assured that the graduate assistants we were placing in the classroom were prepared for their serious teaching responsibilities.

The net result of the first Fordyce conference was the establishment of the Teaching Resource Center in the Fall of 1992. The original vision for the Center was to provide orientation and ongoing pedagogical programs to enhance the preparation of graduate teaching assistants. I was frankly a little skeptical about the response this program would receive. To my surprise, not only was the support great among graduate teaching assistants, but there was an outstanding show of faculty support for the program. We didn't have much money, but we had a tireless commitment from my Associate Dean, Dr. Rosetta Moore and from a graduate assistant named Debbie Natoli. Programs were developed, evaluated, and modified. The programs got better each year and the enthusiasm of the participants became contagious. Within three years the Teaching Resource Center established a Graduate Certificate in University Teaching.

The number of graduate students participating in the program continued to grow, but so did the number of faculty who were actually interested in participating in some of the program services (for example, there are currently six faculty enrolled in the Graduate Certificate Program in University Teaching). By the Spring of 1997, we simply could not do more and had to begin sharply to limit services we could not offer. A proposal to the Strategic Initiative Fund, however, was approved and beginning on July 1, 1997 we had an official "Center for Teaching Excellence" with its own budget. We were able to hire Debbie as the Center's Director and Dr. Jim Korn as the Associate Graduate Dean for Teaching. In February, 1998, the Reverend Lawrence Biondi dedicated our own facility, O'Brien House, as the Center for Teaching Excellence. We receive continuous moral support for the program from all of the administrators at the University.

There is so much that has been accomplished in the last six years, but there is so much more that we want to do. I very sincerely believe that the Center for Teaching Excellence has the potential to truly be a unit that will bring national recognition to Saint Louis University. I've been very fortunate to be part of its development. ♦



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Growing as a Teacher: Perspectives on the Role of CTE from Students and Faculty

Brenda Russell

As I was approached to write a piece for the CTE Newsletter I was delighted to share my own perspectives in the role that CTE has played in my life. As a previous participant in the certification program and recent staff member, I've had the opportunity to observe the evolution of the Center and I'm excited to be a part of it. Before I begin with my own perspectives regarding the role of CTE, however, I would like to address one issue. While this piece speaks to the varying perspectives from student and faculty participants, I'd like to note that the motivations to attend CTE are as unique as the participants themselves. While these differences exist, we all share the motivation to develop our teaching skills. We want to know how well we're doing and how we can improve within the institutional culture. We look for ideas, conversations, pedagogical theories, and innovations in teaching techniques. CTE not only offers a forum of support for these shared values, but also encourages TA's and faculty to develop and refine their own unique style of teaching. It is, in a sense, a program to facilitate continuous growth and discovery in one's self and his/her teaching, which ultimately improves student learning.

As a graduate student contemplating my academic job search, I often wondered how well prepared I was for the role of teacher/professor. Those of us aiming toward a career in academia realize the fierce competition for jobs and hope to gain a 'leg up' on our competitors in some way or another. Ironically, while most universities place little or no importance in the development of teaching skills, the majority of universities value excellence in teaching come hiring time. I believe CTE has given me that 'leg up' on the competition. As I began my job search (in both adjunct and tenured positions) I realized that the requirements for the University Teaching Skills Certification (e.g., portfolio, philosophy statement, etc.) left interviewers impressed with the preparedness and forethought I had devoted to teaching. While my own growth and development as a teacher continues, I am convinced that CTE not only helped prepare me for a career in academia, but also aided in learning about myself and my role as a teacher. While I can certainly speak to the role that CTE has had on my life, I thought it would be helpful to bring to the forefront others' unique experiences and perspectives regarding their participation in CTE with regards to personal development of teaching and future direction.

One participant in particular described the role that CTE has played in her life. Mary Timm-Harrison noted that CTE has helped her to develop and confirm her own pedagogical style. In this regard, she emphasizes that the genuineness of seminar speakers and CTE staff encourage participants to "connect with them", and in turn, participants "get a sense of validation ...in a supportive atmosphere." She added, "I've learned so much...including tools about how to integrate what I've gained the most...to be able to be real and comfortable with who you are." Mary says she often integrates suggestions made within the context of the seminars into her classes. While Mary will be completing her certificate requirements this semester, she says, "Its exciting for me...I love teaching, and I don't intend to stop...I'll continue to go to presentations." She takes the program seriously and finds both she and her students are thriving. According to Mary, "the nature of the certificate has offered opportunities for a closer relationship with my mentor." Mary sees her participation in CTE as the "perfect springboard" for her future. "I don't think I could've done anything better to prepare myself."

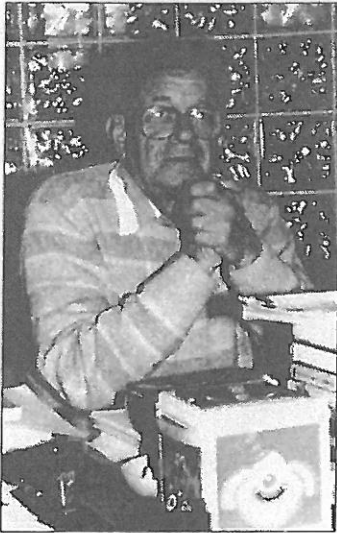
I think of the Center as a protected space, where optimism should prevail... and new ideas can be introduced.

While the motivating factors for participation as a faculty member may be similar to those of the TAs in some contexts, their needs and interests in the CTE program may reflect other concerns, such as those of Dr. Janet Kuebli, an active faculty participant in the program. Dr. Kuebli believes some of the benefits are "meeting other people who are interested in teaching to the degree that I am." She speaks to the fact that the CTE offers a community of people who value teaching, where "the value of teaching is explicit and takes precedence over other things." "There is a sense of camaraderie, where we think in terms of the welfare of what's in the best interest of the students." Kuebli also notes that the program helps in her own self-assessment as a teacher. Dr. Kuebli spoke highly of the pre-tenure portfolio retreat. She believes that her participation in the program is recognized and "will be viewed favorably in rank and tenure decisions." She also states that participation in the program creates "an opportunity to give a special contribution." "I think of the Center as a protected space, where optimism should prevail...and new ideas can be introduced." ♦

A Tribute to John J. O'Brien

John J. O'Brien, Professor Emeritus of Pedagogy at Saint Louis University, died on April 15, 1998. In this first issue of our newsletter, we celebrate Jack's life and the many things he taught us about the ideals of the university, the ideals of education, and the ideals of the self.

A few of J.J.'s friends tried to find words to honor him. As so often happens when you talk about someone you love, it is difficult to put feelings into words. We use one of the poems given to us by J.J. to express his spirit for us, a spirit that continues to seek the winds of destiny.



J.J. O'Brien

George Gray

*I have studied many times
The marble which was chiseled for me —
A boat with a furled sail at rest in a harbor.
In truth it pictures not my destination
But my life.
For love was offered me and I shrank from its disillusionment;
Sorrow knocked at my door, but I was afraid;
Ambition called to me, but I dreaded the chances.
Yet all the while I hungered for meaning in my life.
And now I know that we must lift the sail
And catch the winds of destiny
Wherever they drive the boat.
To put meaning in one's life may end in madness,
But life without meaning is the torture
Of restlessness and vague desire —
It is a boat longing for the sea and yet afraid.*

*Edgar Lee Masters
Spoon River Anthology*

Teaching Certificates to be Awarded

A ceremony for the awarding of Certificates in University Teaching Skills and Participation in University Teaching Seminars will be held on May 1, 1998, 1:00 p.m. at the O'Brien House. Faculty and Graduate Students who have fulfilled all of the requirements will receive their Certificates at this ceremony. Faculty, staff and students are invited to attend. Those who intend to receive the Certificate in University Teaching Skills or the Certificate of Participation in University Teaching Seminars

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Ophera Davis-Antoine
Kathy Lund Dean
Terry Dunn
Mary Lou Farb*

*Tecleberhan Ghebremicael
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Trey Hammond
Shirin Jamasb
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