

Faculty Forum

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Lead, Follow, or Get Out of the Way

The new curriculum guidelines from the North Carolina State Department of Public Instruction require that even students in kindergarten become exposed to basic computer skills. These guidelines further require that by fourth grade these students should be exposed to telecomputing--accessing distant computer databases, e-mail, discussion groups, etc. When these guidelines are fully implemented, high school students will have developed applied skills in word processing, databases, spreadsheets, and telecomputing as a requirement for graduation. As these guidelines are going into effect this year, it is not too early to consider the impact of these changes on higher education. It will be all too soon that our incoming students will be required to have skills with personal computers which exceed those of many of us on the faculty.

The impact of the personal computer and related technology is being felt already in our classrooms (or should be). The availability of word processing software with spelling and grammar "checkers" should be assisting our students to spend less time considering the mechanics of writing and to concentrate more on the actual content. Increased access to computer networks should be making a significant impact on the ease of bibliographic and other forms of traditional research. Networking on campus should soon allow for such things as electronic submission of papers and projects; e-mail directly to the professor's desk for questions and problems; and enhanced access to student records for assistance in advising. Multi media applications now offer great possibilities for presenting a wide range of material to students in a non-text format which can be accessed from their (or our) desktop on demand. These and similar developments promise to have a great impact on the nature of what we do as teachers and now is the time we must start to consider how to prepare ourselves to deal with them.

We must start to take advantage of the new technology that can enhance our teaching. It is time to accept the role of the educational facilitator who guides students to self-help rather than holding on to the role of the "talking head" who lectures several times a week. If there is anything one can predict about the future, it is that it will not be the same as the present. We must consider carefully if traditional teaching techniques will offer us the best solutions for dealing with the "Information Age" or prepare our students to deal with it effectively. I suspect that in many cases traditional teaching techniques will fail.

One area of some concern to me is the General Education requirement for computer literacy. My personal impression is that computer literacy has been defined, at least for the basic course, as an introduction to word processing, data bases, and spreadsheets. It is my belief that this definition is rapidly approaching inadequacy, if it is not inadequate already.

While no one should disagree that some understanding of the personal computer should play a major role in the educational experience, I believe that this is too limited for an adequate definition of "computer literacy." Western has already committed itself to becoming fully networked and there has been considerable movement within various colleges and departments towards developing local area networks. The recent discussions concerning a national "information highway" suggest that some understanding of and exposure to telecomputing is fundamental to any currently adequate definition of computer literacy, especially in the light of the State Department of Public Instruction guidelines.

We, as a faculty, must take some rather immediate steps to deal with these realities. First, we must increase our own skills (and comfort) with the use of personal computers and the vast network of available information to which they link us. Second, we must consider the revision of the General Education requirement (or at least the courses used to satisfy this requirement) to address more adequately the nature of computer networking and telecomputing. Third, we must move in the direction of making these tools (for that is really all they are) a more fundamental part of our students' educational experience by requiring that appropriate use of computer skills become a part of all course work. Fourth, we must insure reasonable access to personal computers, terminals, or workstations (with appropriate software) for all students in labs, the library, and in the dorms. Fifth, we must set the appropriate example by taking advantage of these technologies in the classroom, the lab, and the office.

This will not be free. Accomplishing these goals will require considerable thought and expenditure of time and resources. These technologies will require us to rethink much of our current practice as teachers and our approach to the learning environment. Still, the benefits appear to outweigh the obstacles and movement is already underway. The university has seen explosive growth in the number of personal computers in the last few years, and this year the Faculty Center has added a Faculty Fellow for Instructional Technology to assist faculty in using these technologies. Working in this position, I will help develop contacts between faculty who are exploring the educational use of computers by forming an Instructional Technology User's Group. Anyone interested in becoming part of this group can contact the Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence.

The potential exists to improve the quality of our teaching, enhance our research and other teaching-related activities, and to prepare our students to face the realities of the upcoming new century. It is probably true that the "educated" person of the future will be less one who knows a great deal than one who knows how to discover the information he or she needs and can then assemble it in a meaningful way so that it can be understood by others. Personal computers and related technologies offer us much towards providing our students with the background to achieve this new definition of education.

Other institutions are already moving in this direction, but it is not too late for us to take the initiative in this area. It may be something of a cliché, but the future **is** now. We can lead, follow or get out of the way. I would like Western to **lead**.

Richard S. Beam, Faculty Fellow for Instructional Technology

•••••••Editor's Call for Responses•••••••

If you would like to respond to this opinion piece, please send your comments by the 8th of the month to the FCTE. If possible, send to TNienhuis by VAX or by WP Mail. Please indicate whether you are willing to be quoted or prefer to remain anonymous.

Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence

Responses to "Lead, Follow, or Get Out of the Way"

by Richard Beam, 9/1/93

We received seven pages of exciting responses to Richard Beam's opinion piece, more than the copying budget allows us to print. We hope that the excerpts below give an accurate flavor of the writers' responses. If you would like to read whole responses, please request a copy from the FCTE.

Dr. Beam suggests that computer spelling and grammar checks "should be assisting our students to spend less time considering the mechanics of writing and to concentrate more on the content." But our students understand very little of the mechanics of writing and the computer, that Totally Obedient Moron, cannot really help. These programs will undoubtedly improve, but can they ever replace the human eye and brain?

Dr. Beam is dead right on one thing: we'd better grab hold of this technology--to the degree that we can--before it grabs hold of us. But let us remember that it is a tool, like the obsidian handaxe or the atomic bomb. It can change our lives, but it is not going to make us--or our students--better people. And here, at last, the human teachers have an edge that can never be overcome. (excerpt)

Gael Graham, History

I feel that technology is the only thing that is going to save us in this age of declining budgets. We must find ways of providing better educational services to our students yet at the same time reducing the cost of these services. An example would be the use of a campus wide video system for delivery of instructional videos to students. The Media Center is now checking out these videos to students on a one to one basis. With the same amount of time and energy we could be providing our entire student population with these same videos delivered across a campus video system.

As computer workstations become increasingly powerful and cheaper, exciting new possibilities will be opened for alternative teaching methods. If properly used, technology

can not only enhance the educational experience but also make our job as educators easier and more exciting.

Robert L. Orr, Univ. Media Center

It doesn't work to have state of the art equipment on our desks if our students don't have access to similar equipment. We would like computer literacy to be taught as a skill to be used throughout the curriculum and across the campus, but this is a fruitless exercise unless there is communication and cooperation between all of us, talking about what our needs are and helping each other to fill those needs for all of our students. We need to know what people would like us to be teaching in CS 101, and we need support from all levels to make sure that students have access to a sufficient quantity of suitably modern, readily available, and somewhat uniform equipment and software. (excerpt)

Nory Prochaska, Mathematics and Computer Science

It's pretty clear to me that it's too late for Western to lead in the area of providing an education in telecomputing access for our students. Other schools are years ahead of us. But it is of special concern to me that there are institutional barriers at Western to our even catching up, let alone taking a lead in this area. These barriers could vanish, but it will not happen until some of our strategically placed personnel either undergo a conversion on the road to Damascus, (paul@damascus.edu.sy), step aside, or retire. (excerpt)

Allen Moore, Biology

Responses to Richard Beam

continued

I get frustrated teaching on archaic machines with outdated software with no money available to upgrade. This is a disservice to the student as it adds to his frustration in an already frustrating new environment.

But, Richard is right when he says we need to take the initiative--but we can't do it alone. I submit that the student has to carry some of the burden for his own enlightenment. We have to somehow convince him that this new window to the world is available (soon almost everywhere) to anyone, and that it gives him access to knowledge now, from anywhere the network reaches. Not to convince him leaves him behind. The magic is out there on the wires. We gotta hook em up to it. (excerpt)

Richard Wohlman, Math & Computer Science

"Lead, Follow, or Get Out of the Way"? I think maybe I'll just get out of the way. The thought of my students' papers being "electronically" submitted (rather than "personally") makes me sad. In obvious defiance of current practice, I decided to submit this response non-electronically in handwriting, on lined tablet paper.

J. W. Neff, Geosciences & Anthropology

Education does not consist of mere information retrieval and data processing but relies on the interaction of various interpretive processes that have been developed only in the human brain. These processes affect not only how we see information, but how we present it, and our manner of presentation makes important statements about our understanding of the material. The idea that we should (or even can) separate "actual content" from "the mechanics" of human expression is seriously flawed.

It is clear that higher education fails some, perhaps even much of the time. It is not at all clear that the expensive technologies today being proposed as the salvation of higher education will be able to help. Indeed, "if one can predict

anything about the future," it is that we will continue to make the same mistakes we have in the past. Foremost among these continues to be the attractive but barren belief that new tools and methodologies will necessarily improve the educational process. (excerpt)

Will Peebles, Music

Dr. Beam's Faculty Forum piece lends support to the growing number of faculty and students who are wondering when computer-aided instruction (CAI) is coming to Western. Inquiries in my freshman composition classes over the last few years reveal that the majority of students are leaving my class, going back to their dorms (or to one of the few public computer labs on campus), and recopying onto a computer what they have handwritten in class. I cannot help but wonder what their writing would be like if they could do their initial prewriting, drafting, and revising on computers right in the classroom. The fact is these students know that composing on a computer is much easier and more time efficient than the traditional "write, copy, write" method. Likewise, they are aware that being computer literate is a prerequisite for their future career success. Dr. Beam is right; we are teaching a new generation, many of whom have been exposed to computers since kindergarten. Clearly, the development of CAI, especially in our writing courses, needs to be made available to Western students as soon as possible.

Linda Kinnear, English

Despite many reasons NOT to be amazed at what people get hot over, somehow I still DO get surprised. Fortunately, I no longer get particularly hot in response--just more persistent. (read, "stubborn"). Of course I think Beam is right on target.

Marilyn Jody, English



Faculty Forum

From the Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence

WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

CULLOWHEE, NORTH CAROLINA

Vol. 6, No. 2

October 1, 1993

Could You Be Next?

If you think "gender issues" are just for women or just for students, think again: **the job you save may be your own.** Consider this scenario:

You are summoned to the Dean's office and charged with sexual harassment. You are given two options: resign immediately or be recommended for dismissal. Your dean and department head tell you some of the specific complaints but they want your decision even before you are allowed to read the letters of complaint or know the names of your accusers. You are told you must decide quickly whether you will resign.

Is this a melodramatic plot for a made-for-TV movie? Nothing like this really happens--at least not in Cullowhee--right? Wrong. The scenario is all too close to reality, here and across the country. I am shocked to find how little is required to suspend or dismiss a tenured faculty member. You don't need to have touched anyone in inappropriate places or ways. Apparently nothing has to happen behind closed doors. Apparently you need only to be perceived to be harassing--to some students--in the classroom or in the hall.

The administration is compelled to act since Supreme Court rulings in 1992 upheld the right of victims of intentional harassment to sue the University (or other employer) if it does not react quickly and appropriately in response to complaints--and who can wait to determine whether the harassment was intentional? Charges are made and there is a rush to quietly and quickly "dispose of the problem," namely the accused faculty member. And the charges may not be what you would expect for dismissal.

Materials distributed by the University Sexual Harassment Officer at UNC Chapel Hill list five categories defining a continuum of sexually harassing behaviors:

- gender harassment
- seductive behavior
- sexual bribery
- sexual coercion
- sexual imposition

The behaviors are on a continuum of increasing intimidation because sexual harassment is about abuse of power in a sexualized context. The term gender harassment "consists of generalized remarks or behaviors which inappropriately emphasize the sexuality of another person or which communicate insulting, demeaning, or sexist attitudes." Is it reasonable that behavior confined to this lowest step on the continuum be grounds for dismissal? I am extremely troubled, for I fear that many of my friends and colleagues, men nearing retirement age, are ticking time bombs, waiting for the right (wrong?) students to sit in their classes, catalog their speech and body language, and launch formal complaints.

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We have a sexual harassment policy on campus which spells out what a student must do to file a complaint. Do we not also need a detailed policy which spells out the penalties for specific behaviors and assists faculty members to avoid offending (harassing) behaviors? Most of us know that forcing a student into a sexual relationship is harassment, but we may not agree on the gray areas that involve body posture, verbal patterns, loudness of voice, and class assignments which some students may construe as harassment.

The phrases from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission that are intended to define sexual harassment--"verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature" and "creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment"--are so vague that they can also be used to punish free speech in the classroom. Should not the intent to harass be considered as well as whether the student felt harassed in a given situation? If an entire class observes the same behavior and only two indicate that they felt harassed, is the professor to be condemned? It's time administrators and faculty cooperate to describe what is considered as misconduct and specify corresponding penalties.

Shoving sexual harassment complaints into the closet is no way to reduce sexism in the classroom: there must be constructive ways of alerting men to the types of behavior which can apparently be firing offenses. There must be some programs designed to change behavior, not just to catch and fire productive faculty who happen to have been born in an age when "mankind" and "his" were acceptable as terms including women as well as men.

I'm torn in two directions. As a woman I am elated that we have finally been empowered to rid ourselves of unwanted sexual advances and overt pressure for sexual favors. This was long overdue. But as the wife of a male faculty member and friend to many who are now fiftyish--and many are, for the university was growing rapidly when I came in 27 years ago--my heart goes out to men who have been teaching for many years. Behaviors and body language which have been acceptable for all that time are now apparently so "harassing" that these men cannot be rehabilitated and must go, quickly and quietly if possible.

Is this humane? If we empower students to get professors fired for sexist behavior in the classroom, shouldn't we at least make an honest attempt to empower at-risk professors to change behaviors before--and even after--charges are made?

EEOC Guidelines (1980) state that "Prevention is the best tool for the elimination of sexual harassment. An employer should take all steps necessary to prevent sexual harassment from occurring, such as affirmatively raising the subject, expressing strong disapproval, developing appropriate sanctions, informing employees of their rights to raise and how to raise the issue of harassment under Title VII, and developing methods to sensitize all concerned."

I think we are far behind in providing faculty with what public schools would call "in-service" programs in the area of sexual harassment. The Gender Issues group on campus is certainly a start, but participation is voluntary and it may not attract the group of faculty most at risk. We need to set up mechanisms for resolving conflict between faculty and students rather than just accusing and dismissing. It seems to me past time we had programs in place to bring together faculty and students in such a way that there is common understanding about what is acceptable and what is considered harassing in the teaching/learning environment.

Linda DelForge, Biology

• • • • • **Editor's Call for Responses** • • • • •

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Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence

Responses to "Could You Be Next?"

by Linda DeForge, 10/1/93

When I read Linda's opinion piece, I thought about the anecdote concerning ordinary citizens and the Nazis before WW II:

"When they came for the gays, I did nothing. When they came for the infirm, I did nothing. When they came for the mentally defective, I did nothing. When they came for the Christians, I did nothing. When they came for the Jews, I did nothing. When they came for me, there was no one left to help."

The issue here is due process for faculty. If any faculty member can be accused and forced to "choose" a penalty before seeing the letters and accusers, any of us can be dismissed with charges, whether trumped up or real. There must be some sort of preliminary hearing that provides protection of the ACCUSED person, as well as the accusers.

A personal experience: I was called into the Dean's office about 10 years ago. I was accused in the presence of the Department Head of some vague offense purportedly committed during a class. No accusers, just the Dean attempting to get me to admit to something that he had not defined. I still don't know what I was accused of or who did the accusing. I asked for more information about the offense and who might be complaining, but that was not forthcoming. The explanation was that if I were told, it would become a "matter of record." The Department head smoothed things over somehow, and I returned to my office, but with a new view of that Dean.

I close with a quote from Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas: "As the nightfall does not come at once, neither does oppression. It is in such twilight that we must all be aware of change in the air--however slight--lest we become unwitting victims of the darkness."

David Teague, Mathematics and CS

While many of us believe we know the line between harassment and the proper exchange of ideas in an academic setting, the general feeling at WCU seems to be, "it couldn't be me, so it's not my concern." But judging from the scenario Linda sketches out, all of us should bring these issues into open debate, without delay. If we--whose jobs depend on our abilities to think logically and present our ideas lucidly--cannot provide clearer language for preventing sexual harassment than "generalized remarks or behaviors which inappropriately emphasize the sexuality of another person or which communicate insulting, demeaning, or sexist attitudes," then perhaps we don't deserve our positions.

It certainly behooves us, as well, to treat claims of harassment as seriously as we would claims of "bad teaching," as warning signs that there are problems that perhaps must be dealt with. But treating harassing behaviors as grounds for dismissal without carefully defining what harassing behaviors are will certainly not increase the humane qualities of our community. In fact, such procedures may produce a "witch-hunt" mentality in which otherwise decent teachers decide that they will not discuss anything--in class or out--which might, from any perspective, be construed as giving offense to anyone. After all, in a litigious society, one worries first about getting sued and only secondly about living a fulfilled and fulfilling life in a human community of scholars (or scholarship, if you prefer).

I commend Linda for presenting so forceful a call for action on this point, and I ask that the rest of us not hide behind the moralistic screen of "it can't happen to me." If it happens to any one of our colleagues, we need to ask rather, "how can we prevent such problems from occurring again?"

Steve Eberly, English

Responses to Linda DelForge

continued

One should not be startled if charges of sexual harassment are not handled with sensitivity by the University administrators. In the past they have always dealt with sexual harassment by ignoring it. Some administrators may be guilty of sexual harassment themselves. Considering these circumstances, no one should be shocked if administrators do not have a deft touch in dealing with it. Crimes unpunished are crimes none-the-less, and chronic, on-going, sexist behavior must no longer be tolerated, ignored, or excused. Sexual harassment is just one type of discrimination against women on this campus, and it is the least subtle form.

I should think that many male employees who are "fiftyish" might be offended by the assumption that they had been regularly engaging in behavior considered by most people to be socially unacceptable, if not illegal. But many men of this age are guilty of some degree of harassment, and all are guilty of tolerating it, though some have been thoroughly embarrassed by the behavior of particular colleagues.

One could hardly live in the electric atmosphere in this country since the Clarence Thomas/Anita Hill debacle without knowing that times are changing for men of all ages. Removal "for cause" of a tenured member of the faculty is a very serious matter, and failure to acknowledge enlightened attitudes in our society, which clearly extend into the University community, indicates a certain dullness of intellect. Let the "ticking time bombs" beware. Let the pendulum swing. Let the heads roll.

anonymous

While I wholeheartedly agree with the thrust of Linda's piece I confess I am a bit bothered by the seeming implication that only males can be the instigators of such harassment. Sexism can cut both ways, and while it may be much more common one way than the other all of us need to be concerned about this issue, especially when there is such a lack of clear-cut definitions and so much seems to depend on perception, regardless of intent (or even overt actions).

Richard Beam, Comm. & Theatre Arts

Kudos to Linda DelForge for her strong and timely call to "set up mechanisms for resolving conflict between faculty and students rather than just accusing and dismissing." In a Western After Hours focus group two years ago and a Gender Issues meeting last spring, I heard students make similar calls for student-faculty dialogues. As our national, judicial, and penal systems demonstrate, mere disciplinary sanctions often leave all parties dissatisfied and the risk of repetition high. Add my voice to these calls for new "mechanisms" or "dialogues." And, so, who will answer?

**Chris Gunn, Counseling &
Psychological Services**

On June 2, 1993, the American Association of University Women released the report, Hostile Hallways: The AAUW Survey on Sexual Harassment in America's Schools. Among its conclusions were the following: sexual harassment in school is widespread; harassing others is a routine part of school culture; public areas are the most common harassment sites; students usually do not report incidents to adults; and notably higher numbers of girls than boys say they have suffered as a result of sexual harassment in school. According to Judith Scott, University Sexual Harassment Officer at UNC-Chapel Hill, socialized sexism is the major factor contributing to sexual harassment. As she explains: "Sex and gender-role stereotyping mean that social norms encourage it, adults do not disparage or actively discourage it, and young people don't respond to it with understanding or clear communication. Adult failure to appreciate the devastating social impact of stereotyped attitudes and behaviors mean a lack of effective policy, procedures, and preventive education." As a female faculty member, AAUW member, and mother whose daughter experienced her first sexual harassment at age five on the school bus, I applaud and support Linda DelForge's call to action. Sexual harassment will continue to exist as long as we fail to treat it seriously. The message must be clear: control and intimidation of any type have no place in our environment.

**Lynn R. Heinrichs,
Accounting/IS/Management**

WHAT CONSTITUTES EFFECTIVE TEACHING? A Response From the Psychology Department

The instructor for the course I was a student in years ago was shy and had a severe stutter that worsened the longer he spoke. He was also disorganized. I am not sure if there was a syllabus, per se, but if there was, it listed no educational objectives. The tests had little relation to the short, cursory textbook we were required to purchase, and there was no use of overhead projectors, films, or videos. We, the students, were confused and anxious most of the time as we ran around the library and the laboratory. We did not know how we were going to pass this course, the most difficult I ever took at any level. Is this an instance of effective or ineffective teaching? When the course was over, I realized that I had been exposed to the most effective teaching I had ever seen.

Common sense supports the idea that academic psychologists should have something sensible to say about effective teaching, a subject of much psychological research. However, the fact that the above anecdote describes a psychology professor and is reported by another psychology teacher may give you pause. Nevertheless, when the question embodied in the title of this paper was posed to me, the strange anecdote that I have begun with sprang to my mind. As a dedicated scientist, I decided to test my results by asking the same question of a few of my colleagues in the Psychology Department. Were their generalizations as unorthodox as mine? You can be the judge as I briefly summarize here what some of my colleagues in the psychology department--Drs. Chovan, Herzog, and Randolph--told me in response to the question: "What constitutes effective teaching?"

First, my colleagues think it depends on the nature of the subject matter, the aims of the instructor, the size of the class, the preferred teaching strategies of the teacher and the preferred learning strategies of the student. There are more and less effective lecturing, discussion leading, and Socratic questioning techniques, but which strategy is more effective in a particular situation is a function of many factors. Dr. Herzog relates a discussion with a recent UNC-CH graduate whose upper-level courses were no larger than most of the classes at WCU yet who pointed to a class of 400 as her "best." She felt that the professor had been brilliant and had been able to make political science "come alive." For some instructors and students effective teaching (and learning) is the building of a personal relationship; for others, effective teaching can occur in huge lecture halls.

Second, my colleagues agree that students must somehow be involved when teaching is effective. The involvement may consist of being awestruck as was the Chapel Hill student

mentioned above, or the involvement may occur through the "hypothetical learning" that Dr. Randolph uses in her classes by posing cases for students to analyze and apply theoretical principles to during class discussions. She believes such techniques make the learning process fun as well as worthwhile.

Third, my colleagues agree that effective teaching must take into consideration where the student's starting point is. As Dr Chovan puts it, it is unlikely "that the same teaching strategy is always appropriate for each university student at every point in her/his educational development." Dr. Randolph emphasizes that meeting the students where they can learn best involves using language and examples they can understand and apply.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, all my colleagues agree that effective teaching is teaching that results in learning. Could it be that anything that leads to effective learning is effective teaching? What of the awful situation I described as effective teaching in the first paragraph? How could a course that violates all the standards suggested by modern teacher evaluation instruments be effective? My response is that I learned. I learned a lot, and I learned a lot of things that are important to the education of a psychologist. I learned to think better, to write better, to deal with my peers better, and most of all, I learned how to learn, independent of the instructor. This teacher did not make "effective" presentations, lay out clear objectives, or even guide class discussions. What he did do was to create the conditions for learning to occur. He provided guidance, but not too much guidance, through the way he structured assignments, asked good questions, helped us with resources for hands-on experiences, and provided feedback when necessary. What would have been the outcome of student evaluations on a standard instrument? Probably a very long AFE meeting with his department head.

Perhaps more so than my colleagues, I think that an important point made by this example is that when we think of effective teaching, too frequently we are thinking about the presentation made by the instructor in front of a classroom of students. That is what is emphasized in the standard instructor evaluation instrument. With organized, erudite, enthusiastic presentations, we may be able to impress students in the classroom. With well thought-out Socratic questioning, we may be able to get them to talk and think for the few minutes they are actually with us. With well-conceived and multi-media demonstrations, we even may be able to provide some information that will stick longer than the time between presentation and test. However, the long-term learning of the students may depend much more on how we "trap" them into reading, writing, thinking, and learning to learn outside our classrooms, independent of the in-the-classroom behavior of the instructor. Success in doing so may constitute the most effective teaching of all.

Bruce Henderson, Psychology

••••••••**Editor's Call for Responses**••••••••

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Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence

Responses to "What Constitutes Effective Teaching?"

by Bruce Henderson, 11/1/93

Bruce Henderson's presentation is some of the best sense on teaching effectiveness I've seen. I'm really uncomfortable with the uncritical application of the usual criteria for evaluating teaching, including student evaluations made while the students are in the midst of the teaching-learning process. I could provide other examples to add to Bruce's, but he gets it across: the bottom line is NOT the slickness of the presentation, the student-teacher ratio, or even whether the students are happy and enthusiastic during the process; the bottom line is how much the students gain in terms of capability and attunement to knowledge. The students remain the best judges of teaching effectiveness, but I trust their judgment better at some remove, when the gloss has worn off and real life has intervened to test the validity and usefulness of what they have learned and of how they have learned it.

Allen Moore, Biology

The Master Teacher

Then Jesus took his disciples up the mountain and gathering them around him; he taught them, saying:

Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven,
 Blessed are the meek,
 Blessed are they that mourn,
 Blessed are the merciful,
 Blessed are they who thirst for justice,
 Blessed are you when persecuted,
 Blessed are you when you suffer,
 Be glad and rejoice for your reward is great in heaven.

Then Simon Peter asked,
 And Andrew asked,
 And James asked,
 And Philip said,
 And Bartholomew asked,
 And John said,
 And Matthew said,
 And Judas asked,

"Do we have to write this down?"
 "Are we supposed to know this?"
 "Will we have a test on this?"
 "I don't have any paper."
 "Do we have to turn this in?"
 "The other disciples don't have to learn this."
 "I have to go to the bathroom."
 "When are we ever going to use this in real life?"

Then one of the Pharisees who was present asked to see Jesus' lesson plan and asked Jesus, "Where is your anticipatory set and your objectives in the cognitive domain?"

And Jesus wept.

received and passed along by Jeff Neff, Geosciences & Anthropology

Responses to Bruce Henderson

continued

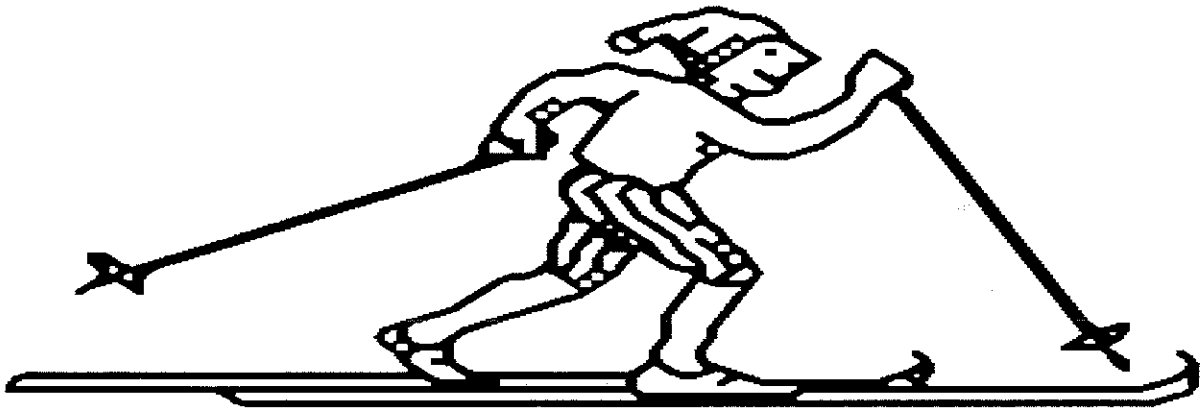
In response to Bruce Henderson's article on teaching, I agree that just as faculty have different presentation styles, students have different learning styles, and no one faculty member will be able to reach all students in the same way. In one of my graduate courses years ago at a North Carolina University, I had an example of a teacher just opposite of the type that Bruce mentions. This professor was scholarly, polished, and could have been an actor. His classes, in fact, reminded me of a theatre production in that he entered the classroom on the stroke of the hour, delivered an inspiring oration, and left very shortly thereafter. It was very obvious, however, that he did not want to be interrupted by student questions and that he did not really want to deal with students if he could possibly help it. He was a top researcher in his field, and he went on to become the president of a prestigious, national, scientific organization--which was probably where he belonged rather than in the classroom. I certainly learned the subject matter from his well-organized and orchestrated classes; but due to his cold and aloof attitude, his was not effective teaching for me.

I do, however, take issue with the notion of having to "trap" students into learning. I prefer to give the students more credit than that and would like to believe that the atmosphere we create in the classroom motivates them to make a conscious choice to learn.

Perhaps, however, we really don't know what students are looking for in effective teaching. For the past three years, I have done a short experiment in my Principles of Precepting class. In one of the first classes of the semester, I divide the students into groups and ask them to come up with a list of characteristics for a "good" teacher. The four traits that stand out in importance are: (1) organization and preparedness, (2) conveying a sense of enthusiasm, (3) showing concern for students, and (4) communicating on the student's level of understanding. Thus, students are not necessarily looking for showmanship but for someone who has something to offer and who is genuinely interested in them.

As faculty members, each of us brings a unique style to the teaching-learning relationship. I would like to think that by setting the example of excitement and immersion in scholarship we can inspire rather than trap our students into learning.

Christine Stevens, Health Sciences





Faculty Forum

From the Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence

WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

CULLOWHEE, NORTH CAROLINA

Vol. 6, No. 4

December 1, 1993

Are We Throwing Away Too Much Talent? And If So, Why?

In the past year or so, we have heard more and more about the "brain drain" from UNC, UNC-Charlotte, and N.C. State because those institutions, under the constraints of the state budget, cannot pay the salaries high-quality faculty can command elsewhere.

Is this a problem at Western? Maybe, especially since our salaries tend to be lower than salaries at those UNC schools. But what I have seen in my fourteen years of faculty watching is that we often throw away high-quality faculty who want to stay. Why? Sometimes it's because they are too creative, too individualistic (don't fit in, don't play our games), or too good at doing something a little different. Maybe we don't know how to judge their quality because they are the only ones who know their particular fields.

Sometimes we just don't fight to get them a real position on their own merits. Although the decisions must be made on a case-by-case basis at the department level, a certain philosophy crosses departmental and school lines. I could cite cases of several men, but here are four women from four departments whose situations we have mishandled:

- * One had taught here on a year-to-year basis for years when her position was finally made tenure track and advertised nationwide; she applied and got the job here, but only after she got an interview at Appalachian State. Why did she have to threaten to leave before we found her a position? Now she's ours and she's widely recognized for her expertise in her field. We're glad, but success stories like hers are all too rare.
- * Another woman of obvious quality, inspiring to students and bringing grant money into the university as well, was teaching on a part-time, year-to-year basis and was told to go get another offer if she wanted a more equitable situation here. She wanted to buy a house and settle down here instead. Now she's not on our faculty.
- * Another highly creative woman with a national reputation in her field was forced out of a tenure-track position (our program in her field was eliminated) because of rumor, innuendo, resentment, and ill-feeling. People in her department didn't know how to handle a person who was "different." Now she's somewhere else, and we don't educate professionals in that specialty.
- * Still another--a woman publishing in nationally esteemed periodicals--was told to apply for other jobs so that we could argue to make her three-year position tenure-track. She got an offer from Penn State with a lighter teaching load, teaching in her specialty only, a higher salary, and sabbaticals. We couldn't begin to compete with that. Now she's tenured at Penn State (and has taken her first sabbatical).

I call this shooting ourselves in the foot.

STEERING COMMITTEE: FACULTY CENTER FOR TEACHING EXCELLENCE

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Not only does job hunting and interviewing at other schools drain faculty energy and undercut morale, but we stand in danger of losing someone who would "rather be in Cullowhee" and has much to offer us. If we push out creative or different faculty members--maybe just because they speak their own minds--how do we maintain the vitality and energy of our scholastic life?

What is it in our university culture (the deep-down, underlying assumptions about ourselves that influence what we do) that makes us want people more when someone else wants them, too? Isn't it like the toddler who shows no interest in a toy unless another toddler picks it up? Sure, an interview or offer from another school helps confirm our judgment in hiring the person in the first place, but why do we need that external confirmation? Don't we have the same paper evidence another university would have, plus our experience with the faculty member at Western? Can't we trust our own judgement?

In its research, documented in 1988, Western's Task Force on Teaching Effectiveness found that university culture is one of the hardest things to change. The climate for creative teaching at Western changed as a result of the Task Force's work, but in how many ways does this culture still hold us back?

In the world outside the university, of course, vital cultures are constantly adjusting and incorporating change in response to new ideas and changing conditions. Those who speak out or who rock the boat often bring the innovations that help us survive. At Western, we call ourselves a university community based on scholarship--the discovery and propagation of new knowledge--and we advertise our acceptance of a diverse student population. Can we embrace a more diverse faculty population as well? Can we appreciate, without crippling resentment or ridicule, those who are gifted differently from ourselves? Can we realize that we, and they, give Western itself much to offer and make it a valuable place for valuable people to work--a place, in fact, that valuable people may prefer to work?

To stop shooting ourselves in the foot, maybe we need more explicit standards for personnel and TPR decisions or more accountability from those who make them.

What we more crucially need, however, is a change in our own deep-down, underlying assumptions about ourselves, individually and collectively. We need to be clear enough about our own worth that a different worth is not a threat but an opportunity. We need to be generous enough to acknowledge the value of that different worth and not to hold a grudge against a difference of opinion or a difference of skill.

Maybe I'm asking for a change in human nature. In any case, I know I'm asking for a shift of consciousness not easy to make. But as long as too many of us assume that the best people need to go elsewhere--to save us from questioning ourselves, or to protect our egos, or even to get what they (we) deserve--Western will never be the best that it can be. Surely we can celebrate, as a scholarly community, the diversity within our common endeavor, changing to improve our chances for growth. Our future depends on it.

Anonymous

••••• **•Editor's Call for Responses•** •••••

If you would like to respond to this opinion piece, please send your comments by the 8th of the month to the FCTE. If possible, send to TNienhuis by VAX or by WP Mail. Please indicate whether you are willing to be quoted or prefer to remain anonymous.

Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence

Responses to "Are We Throwing Away Too Much Talent? And If So, Why?"

12/1/93

In response to the piece in the December 1 **Faculty Forum**, I am sure that the author has good reason to remain anonymous, but I would like to shake that person's hand because we all know that she/he is right on the money. I would like to add my own observations on tenure, promotion, and reappointment procedures.

Isn't it true that in the "real world" when a person is turned down for a contract, a job, or a promotion the person has a legal right to know why? Many law suits have answered the question in the affirmative. Also, isn't it true that whenever we ask students to respond to a judgment question which may be answered yes or no we require a logical explanation justifying the answer given?

So why do we not require as much when it comes to TPR decisions? Why do we treat (mistreat) our faculty in this manner? I would really like to know the answer to this question. If you were turned down for promotion, would you not want to know what parts of your record were judged substandard and by how much? This is the only way you can know where your colleagues expect improvements. Also, without this information, there really is no appeal process.

Finally, why do we allow faculty to be judged (accused) through anonymous responses by students through the various evaluation forms used across campus. I fear that these evaluations are often misused in a very negative and harmful manner. Have these instruments been tested for validity and reliability? If any of these instruments have been shown to be accurate indicators of teaching effectiveness, what other methods of determining teaching effectiveness were they correlated with? (Not other student evaluation forms, I hope) And, why don't we just use these other methods?

This response probably should have been written during the year of WCUnique since according to the information I have obtained from other institutions, we seem to be somewhat unique in the way we handle TPR. If the procedures I have questioned do not need to be changed, then I really need an open explanation of why they are fair to faculty and good for the University. Will someone please enlighten us all in this regard?

Richard Stephens, Math & Computer Science

Why God Never Received Tenure

1. Because He had only one major publication.
2. And it was in Hebrew.
3. And it had no references.
4. And it wasn't published in a refereed journal.
5. And some even doubt He wrote it himself.
6. It may be true that He created the world, but what has He published/done since?
7. His cooperative efforts have been quite limited.
8. The scientific community has had a very rough time trying to repeat His results.

Clearly, His credentials leave something to be desired.

Source unknown. Passed along by **Richard Beam, Communication & Theatre Arts**

Responses to "Are We Throwing Away Too Much Talent?"

continued

It seems to this typist that Anonymous is becoming an all-too-frequent contributor to your publications. Not to say that Anonymous wasn't right on target in the most recent issue of Faculty Forum. But why should Anonymous be given space at all, much less the lead piece, in a publication supposedly committed to the free and open exchange of ideas? Is the climate around here so repressive that Anonymous--in this case a tenured faculty member, apparently--appears instead of an actual name? If not, are there other reasons why Anonymous should not only be allowed, but encouraged, to contribute to any nonfiction publication? Just thought I'd ask, not so anonymously.

Ben Anderson, Communication & Theatre Arts

Editor's note:

We appreciate Ben's reminder that we must be scrupulous when deciding whether to publish something without personal attribution. We honor a writer's request for anonymity unless there seems to be compelling reasons for not doing so. If it seems obvious that the request for anonymity comes from a desire to hurt a particular party or to hide from responsibility we will refuse the request for anonymity, but we generally assume that there are as many good reasons for requesting anonymity as there are bad and that our colleagues generally know what is best for their situation. In the case Ben is responding to, the writer is not a tenured faculty member, but the main reason for requesting anonymity is quite idiosyncratic and has little to do with either tenure or the fear of a repressive academic culture. We feel that anonymity is an important ingredient in a "free and open exchange of ideas," and as a "forum" we are more interested in the ideas we publish than in the personalities that might be connected with those ideas. Sometimes we don't ourselves know who the author is. That makes our decisions more difficult, and sometimes we will certainly make mistakes in this matter. We depend on feedback like Ben's to put us on our proper guard.

What is ICUT and How Can I Be Involved?

Many faculty have raised questions about the activities and future plans of ICUT, the new Institute for College and University Teaching.

Question: What is the Institute and what does it do?

The mission of the Institute is to promote excellence in teaching among faculty members and higher education institutions in North Carolina and across the Southeast. Expanding on the programs WCU has been offering North Carolina universities, the Institute will also serve community colleges and private colleges and universities, eventually offering its services nationwide. In addition, the Institute disseminates a newsletter that promotes dialogue on post-secondary teaching and supports faculty research projects on effective teaching strategies.

Question: How is the Institute Organized?

Currently, the Institute has a Director, Judy Stillion; an Associate Director, Ben Ward; and an Assistant Director, Kay Hill, who have taken on these positions in addition to their regular duties. We have a half-time person for this year only who is helping to write grants and to coordinate planning for summer programs. Various secretaries have devoted part of their work-load to helping with the work of the Institute. Finally, a state-wide Advisory Board meets twice a year to advise the staff of the Institute on future directions and on programming for the Institute.

Question: How is the Institute funded?

Currently, the Institute has a small state budget to support on-going costs. We also received a one-time only allocation to purchase needed equipment and furnish the office this year. Each of the programs of the Institute is designed to be self-supporting through registration fees and institutional membership dues. We are in the process of writing grants to underwrite the costs of some continuing programs. With the help of a volunteer, Gordon Mercer, we are also planning a fund-raising campaign. Finally, we plan to use the strategic planning process at Western as well as to approach General Administration to request funds for the administration of the Institute.

Question: How can Western faculty be involved in the Institute?

We hope Western faculty will want to be involved in the Institute in many ways. First, our faculty are invited to all the general programs offered by the Institute. However, because enrollment in some activities may be limited, early registration is always a good idea. Second, we will continue to use Western faculty as presenters at many of our programs as we have in the Carolina Colloquy and New Faculty Seminars in the past. Third, all faculty at Western recently received the second copy of our newsletter, *The Cutting Edge*, and were asked to return a card if they wanted to continue to receive the publication. This is one way in which we hope communication with interested faculty will be continued. Finally, we are always interested in hearing from Western faculty who have ideas for the Institute. The ideas and energy of Western faculty helped shape the vision for the Institute and we hope that we will never lose that close connection. You can begin your involvement by asking questions or making comments about this essay and sending them to the FCTE for publication in *notes & quotes*.

Question: What does the Institute do for Western Carolina University?

The presence of the Institute has already assured that Western is the one university in the state that has programs and facilities devoted to promoting excellence in teaching on a state-wide level. In response to a proposal from the UNC Faculty Delegate Assembly, General Administration has designated WCU as host site for a 1994 conference on evaluating and enhancing teaching. Particularly at this time in history, any university that becomes known for promoting excellence in teaching has distinguished itself. We think that the Institute has the promise of helping Western Carolina University develop a reputation rooted in a very real interest in promoting post-secondary teaching excellence.

Question: What are the future plans for the Institute?

The Institute will be moving to the Camp Laboratory School facility at the earliest possible date. We also have a series of programs planned for the spring, summer, and fall of 1994 as listed below. We hope many of you will be involved in one or more of these programs and we want to issue an open invitation to become a part of the Institute by sharing your ideas and letting us know of your interest in being a part of it.

Future Programs

<u>Name</u>	<u>Constituency</u>	<u>Dates</u>
Multi-Campus Retreat	Faculty from all Universities	May 16-19
New Faculty Seminar	Carolina Colloquy Members	May 30-June 4
New Faculty Seminar II	Non-Carolina Colloquy Members	June 6-11
Carolina Colloquy	Carolina Colloquy Members	July 21-24
Humanities Conference*	All Post-Secondary Institutions	August 6-13
State-wide Conference on Evaluating and		

Rewarding Teaching

All UNC Institutions

TBA

*Tentative--Depending on Funding

**Judy Stillion, Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Director of the Institute
for College and University Teaching**

Comments or Questions?

If you have comments you would like to make about this essay or further questions about ICUT you would like to ask Judy, please send them by the 8th of the month to Judy (HFR 535; phone: 7495; VAX: StillionJ) or to Terry Nienhuis (FCTE; phone: 7196; Vax: TNienhuis). Please indicate whether you are willing to be quoted or prefer to remain anonymous.

Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence

Response to "What Is ICUT and How Can I Be Involved?"

by Judy Stillion, 2/1/94

Questions from **Steve Eberly, English**: How is the Institute for College and University Teaching related to the Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence and the North Carolina Center for the Advancement of Teaching?

Answer from **Judy Stillion**: The Institute grew out of the same roots as our Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence and currently shares some of the same personnel in leadership roles. However, these are separate entities. The Faculty Center will continue to serve the needs and interests of the Western Carolina University faculty while the Institute will be state-wide and perhaps, eventually, cover the southeast region in its impact. As for ICUT and NCCAT, they are not officially related, but the Director of NCCAT, Richard Thompson, has recognized that we have similar missions and has been most cooperative and generous in sharing facilities and visiting scholars as well as in co-sponsoring a grant proposal written for the Institute. He has also appointed Dan Fredericks to serve as an official liaison between NCCAT and the Institute.

MTV

On Christmas Day I read the Asheville Citizen-Times. I'm sure many of the faculty missed that edition, and even if you read the paper, you might have overlooked the "Generation X" column written by Jennifer Weiner, a student at Penn State. Here are some excerpts:

"The 1993 Yankelovich Monitor found that among the 60 percent of the nation's households with cable, 62 percent of all 16 to 29 year olds watch MTV regularly.

Among the same group, only 4 percent are reading weekly news magazines regularly, and MTV beats out the networks' evening newscasts by 3 to 1.

Translated, these numbers mean that the average twentysomething in a cable-equipped house is finding out what matters in the world not from starchy white guys behind desks, but in five-minute chunks between the latest offerings from Pearl Jam and Prince. Off Jennings, off Rather, off Newsweek, and Time! (To say nothing of daily newspapers, which probably raised not a blip on the Yankelovich radar). We want our MTV!

To read a newsmagazine at twentysomething is to leaf through a catalogue of irrelevancies.

There has to be more: more information about the lives and times of the under-thirties, more information presented in a way that spells out how it matters to us. More borrowing of the techniques that work on MTV: shorter, topical pieces, younger, more diverse commentators with better clothes and better hair. If these strategies lured twentysomethings into the house of Madonna, they just might bring us back out."

In the same December 25 edition was an article headlined "Partying Questioned as Campus Debates whether Duke is Intellectual Enough." In this article Reynolds Price, professor of English, is quoted as lambasting students for their "blank faces" in class. Price apparently believes fraternities and the lack of coed dorms at Duke are the cause. Others believe a more demanding curriculum is the answer. The Rev. Willmon, dean of Duke Chapel, says, "most Duke undergraduates seem to believe the university is merely a step on the way to law school, a necessary evil to be endured before Wall Street."

Of course Western Carolina is not Duke, and few of our students envision a career in law or on Wall Street--but they probably seek analogous "futures." Similarly, I doubt there are any significant differences in MTV-watching between students at Western, Duke, and Penn State.

What does all this mean for teachers at WCU? Can we compete with MTV? Should we try? If we are in some kind of "competition" with MTV, how can we win when network TV and national newsmagazines are already "losers"? The students probably see us and MTV as two different things--MTV is amusing and interesting and we aren't. But I teach cultural geography and get mostly "blank faces" in class when I ask students where Bosnia is and what is the cultural basis for the war. Most of them don't know and, furthermore, couldn't care less. I don't get much more response when I bring up the subject of Somalia--a place where the USA is militarily involved.

It's not all students, of course. This problem of "blank faces," ignorance, and apathy is most pronounced in general education courses. In my upper-division courses (about one a semester) the ratio of "blank faces" to "interested faces" is reversed. But in general education courses there are just so many who couldn't care less about what we are doing, and this poses a real problem for faculty who spend most of their time teaching courses that many students think are "irrelevant" to their goals in life. I am inclined to believe that there's a certain group of students who are going to be interested, whatever we do, and perhaps another group that we won't be able to reach, whatever we do. But I also believe there may be a large group in the middle that we may be able to reach if we do the right things. But what can we do? One thing I have been able to come up with so far is to try to find interesting, out-of-class assignments for my students.

For example, I have had some success in my Geography 103 course with a research assignment that asks each student to write a research paper on a country that I assign at random. The student reports on the dominant culture and one minority culture in the country, discussing how the two groups get along. The students seem more interested in this assignment than in lectures and text readings and do better than they do on tests. Perhaps when we lecture too much we are entering into a direct competition with MTV and other commercial entertainment media, a competition we cannot hope to win. Perhaps we need to do something different. But what is it? Perhaps we need smaller classes. But is that feasible? Perhaps we need more discussion and more writing and fewer tests. But can we do that with large classes? I have more questions than answers and no easy solutions, so I invite comments. Also, if you want the complete articles I quoted from, I can provide copies.

Ralph Triplette, Geosciences & Anthropology

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Comments or Questions?

If you have comments you would like to make about this essay or questions you would like to ask Ralph, please send them by the 8th of the month to Terry Nienhuis (FCTE; phone: 7196; Vax: TNienhuis). Please indicate whether you are willing to be quoted or prefer to remain anonymous.

Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence

Response to "MTV" by Ralph Triplette, 3/1/94

A little over a year ago I was passing through the University Center on my way to a class and I saw a young man sitting alone watching a typical sitcom on one of the UC televisions. As I entered the room, he belted out a laugh in response to some joke I did not hear. I was immediately curious about how this individual could laugh so loud at any sitcom joke. Whenever I watch those programs with their four-laughs-a-minute "jokes" I begin to feel uneasy at my apparent lack of humor because I never laugh as heartily as those audience participants on the laugh track. Sometimes I might exert a smile or two but very rarely do I experience a laugh. Instead, I experience annoyance that the sitcom laugh track is trying to convince me that the program is funny and wonderful when I know it is not.

Now that my attention was focused on that student I saw him laugh again along with the sitcom laugh track. Still curious, I found a seat in the room where I could view him for a few minutes without him being aware of me. In the five minutes that I watched him, I saw him laugh at every situation. He sometimes laughed with the audience and sometimes a fraction of a second before them. He always seemed to know when to laugh. But the most disturbing thing about this whole episode was that this young man laughed without emotion, without humor, if one can envision such a laugh. Then, as though he had a script of the show, he would cut off his laugh at the exact moment one of the characters was supposed to speak. No lingering smile remained on his face. He reassumed the same poker-faced stare his face had displayed just before the joke.

OK, so this was one guy, one weird-responding human. But I began to think, "is it catching?" "Could others be made to become human laugh tracks?" Or worse, "is TV watching so mind numbing and hypnotic that it turns some susceptible individuals into corporate-controlled zombies?" Is it possible that TV will turn out to be the technological nightmare that a growing number of opponents say it will be? I am not in

a position to predict such a disaster, but this incident has remained to haunt me whenever I read about the negative aspects of TV watching.

Andrew A. LaTorre, Industrial & Engineering Technology

To a certain extent, I agree with the newspaper article cited by Ralph Triplette which said if we want to lure the younger generation out of the house of Madonna we will have to have better clothes, better hair, and more topical pieces presented in slicker segments that match more closely the current 18 to 21 year old's MTV addict's attention span. If we do nothing but stand before our classes and lecture, we invite the competition of MTV and will suffer from the very disadvantages alluded to in the article that Ralph cites. However, if we involve our students in the learning process rather than simply throwing facts at them, we have an unbeatable advantage over all media currently available to them, including Madonna in her underwear. We appear in living, breathing color, and we have interactive capabilities that MTV, at least currently, cannot possibly compete with. And this is the difference we must use to our advantage. If we involve our students in the learning process we can make our classes both exciting and fun in a way that no television screen ever can. Of course, most of us already do this, even though it is considerably more work than straight lecture, and we all have class sizes that make it quite difficult, but we need to realize that this is the edge we have that current media stars cannot match; we are LIVE and the students are DIRECTLY INVOLVED! All this may not lure students to watch Dan Rather or Jim Lehrer when they watch t.v., but it will allow us to accomplish our goals in our classes; and maybe our interest in and enthusiasm for boring, starchy media, whether electronic or in print, will spill over and we can accomplish both our job and Dan Rather's in the course of our classroom work.

Bill Hyatt, Criminal Justice

Responses to "MTV"

continued

I have read the articles that Ralph cites and it seems to me that Ralph is correct in just about everything he has said. Furthermore, I think his effort to create more interesting and relevant assignments is good, and I agree about that middle group of students that we can reach if we create the right set of experiences.

Dale Carpenter, Human Services

As Ralph Triplette's Faculty Forum article spoke of problems in our general education courses, he got me thinking about a recent experience I had as a student rather than as a teacher. One "joy" of parenthood is getting to revisit your general education as you help your children with their homework. My older daughter, a high school junior, struggled through her first semester of chemistry, so I volunteered to take the next course with her on a day-to-day basis.

Each day she tells me what she was supposed to learn, I read the textbook, and then I work problems with her. In my naivete, I thought someone who scored in the 99th percentile on the GRE and actually survived a full year of college organic chemistry would find this an easy task. Instead, I find myself spending many hours trying to figure out what is going on. One problem is the textbook. It is written from the "discipline" point of view, by insiders, for insiders. Over-arching concepts and meanings are rarely mentioned. Another problem is that there is no effort to provide the bigger picture of the scientific enterprise.

My daughter will leave this course with little knowledge that she will ever use. Perhaps more important, she will leave the course with no appreciation of what science is about, no feeling for why educated citizens who are not scientists should support science, no curiosity about the role of chemistry in particular or science in general in the natural world, and no desire to read about the findings of science. Instead, she will leave the course with a negative attitude about science and science courses. I am trying to attenuate these effects, but too often I am struggling to see the bigger picture myself. Worse yet, I find myself thinking, though not

uttering, the very notion that I hate to hear from my own students: "why does anyone need to learn this?" I don't blame her teacher for this. The problem is systemic.

I have to wonder how much our own general education program suffers from the same malady. Are we losing our students by getting them lost in the details of our disciplines instead of stimulating curiosity and creating a culture of truly general education? Are we assuming that what general education students need to know is what we know in our disciplines? Or, do we need to completely rethink how we present the findings from our disciplines to non-specialists? In theory, our general education courses were supposed to be independent of "major" requirements. But has the content of the general education courses been moved to the level of the "bigger picture"? Moreover, have we created an intellectual climate in which reading, writing, and thinking have become the normative activities of the WCU campus? As Ralph asks, can we do this in large classes? Perhaps the most disconcerting thought of all: I have two more children who have yet to enter high school!

Anonymous

Cooperative Learning: An Alternative to Song and Dance

In response to Ralph Triplette's "MTV" article we would like to share a comment written by a Cal Poly student to all faculty at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo. "It is not enough for the professor to be well prepared for class; you have to remember that we were brought up on Sesame Street."

What is the inference here? Songs and dances? A change of topic every two minutes? Today's class was brought to you by the letter B? To what extent does the responsibility for learning lie with the student and to what extent does it lie with the teacher? What encourages students to be self motivated and to delve into a subject area after they have finished the course of study that we have delivered? Can the students be more involved with the delivery? Cooperative learning is one avenue for addressing these questions. It creates an environment in which students must become more responsible for and more involved in their learning.

Teachers compete for student time and attention both in and out of the classroom. How can we more effectively capture the attention of this MTV generation? TV is typically non-interactive, but the traditional college lecture is also non-interactive. Although there is a very clear place for the lecture as a teaching strategy, it may be time for a change. Should the delivery and communication of information change from the primarily passive lecture to more interactive methods? Should cooperation be taught and practiced more instead of the competitive format of the traditional classroom?

Interactive techniques such as cooperative or collaborative learning have been introduced in universities across the country, and some employers are requesting that we teach interactive skills so that prospective employees are able to work more effectively in project teams. Working and communicating in teams requires the use of social skills and an understanding of group process. Achieving these skills requires considerable practice, but cooperative learning teaching techniques that require students to interact with the material and with each other can raise learning retention levels significantly. Johnson, Johnson, and Smith document this thoroughly in Cooperative Learning: Increasing College Faculty Instructional Productivity (1991), and the North Carolina Effective Teacher Training Program published by the N.C. Department of Public Instruction shows through its Pyramid of Learning that discussion groups raise retention rates to 50%, "practice by doing" raises retention levels to 75%, and the teaching of others or the immediate use of learning raises retention to 90%. Cooperative learning teaching strategies can approach these levels of retention and teach the social skills of collaboration at the same time.

Often when we try interactive learning projects, students are placed in groups that are too large and students have no prior knowledge or practice in social interaction, group communication, or group process. The groups experience frustration and failure, some of which we don't see if we are not monitoring the group process. Without the ability to communicate in teams this frustration can also happen in the work place, so cooperative learning differs from "group work" in that group process and social skills are integrated with content into interactive learning exercises to enable the groups to function more effectively. Without these components most groups will become dysfunctional. There are five elements required to make Cooperative Learning successful: positive interdependency, individual accountability, face to face interaction, social skills, and group processing. Various techniques are required to make sure all these elements are included.

This method of teaching requires that the teacher becomes more a facilitator of learning than a well-spring of information (though the teacher needs to be well informed as more searching questions naturally arise). There are potential pitfalls to the method. If any of the five elements are neglected, problems may occur. However, once students accept the method, their team skills improve, they study together after class so their motivation improves, they become more cooperative (a benefit to society in general once this becomes a norm), and according to a considerable amount of research they understand concepts more fully and retain more knowledge than from traditional lecture style instruction. It is possible to apply cooperative learning with large groups of up to 70 and, with adaptations, even more.

Because the method differs significantly from more traditional teaching approaches and because there are possibilities of pitfalls on initial application, teachers should receive thorough training in cooperative learning techniques. Teachers should also create support groups for themselves (much as the students do in this type of learning) to help with unfamiliar ideas. There is such a support group at WCU--the Cooperative Learning Project Team supported by the FCTE. If you have any questions or an interest in this project team please call Maurice Phipps (3844) or Susan Kask (7401) for details.

We should note that this method is not for everyone, but if you think it might suit your teaching style, look at some recent literature (available in the FCTE*) or chat with someone practicing this type of thing before "jumping" into it. Universities need to change from passive teaching methods as the most commonly used method in the classroom at this moment in time. As they say in cooperative learning circles, in an interdependent group we sink or swim together so support would be a necessary ingredient for change--don't start without it (including whoever will be evaluating your teaching!).

Maurice Phipps, Parks & Recreation Mgt. and Susan Kask, Econ/Finance

**There are two books in the FCTE library on Cooperative Learning: Cooperative Learning: Increasing College Faculty Instructional Productivity by David Johnson, and others; and Cooperative Learning by Spencer Kagan. Check these books out by visiting the FCTE.*

Comments or Questions?

If you would like to make comments about this essay or ask questions of Maurice or Susan, please send your questions or comments by the 8th of the month to Terry Nienhuis (FCTE; phone: 7196; Vax: TNienhuis). Please indicate whether you are willing to be quoted or prefer to remain anonymous.

Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence

Responses to "Cooperative Learning: An Alternative to Song and Dance"

by Maurice Phipps and Susan Kask, 4/1/94

Cooperative learning techniques provide an excellent alternative to traditional, passive approaches to teaching; and, soon, more of our students will be coming to us with experience in cooperative learning from their public school days. The University of Aalborg, Denmark's newest university, is designed around cooperative learning. At the University of Aalborg, most student learning is based on collaborative work on projects, often in connection with community agencies and businesses. Even the physical plant at Aalborg was constructed with collaboration in mind. They have over 1,000 rooms dedicated for use by student project groups. We do not have all the advantages of the dedication Aalborg has made, but certainly we could do more to involve students than we do. One impediment to the use of such approaches is our obsession with "covering the material." We will have to realize that involving more students in "deep" learning will require a sacrifice of breadth. Maybe we should seriously think about an end to "survey" courses. The tradeoff may be worthwhile in terms of the long-term education of our students.

Bruce Henderson, Psychology

Some form of cooperative learning can be a useful component for many classes. Many of the theatre classes which I teach include some cooperative experiences--some outside of class time, some within. Often the "within class" opportunities take the form of encouraging other students to critique the work of others. While the individual student always gets my comments, if the important points are covered in class discussion, I often don't say much. This may be easier to do in an area like theatre because it is a cooperative art form, but the idea would seem to have application in a number of areas.

Richard Beam, Communications and Theatre Arts

The question of whether or not to use cooperative learning in the classroom is addressed like many instructional issues. Those professors who believe they ought to help their students learn the material try multiple approaches. Those who believe it is the student's responsibility to learn on their own see no need to alter the way the teach--if the student does not understand, it is the student's fault.

It appears to me that WCU has many professors with the first philosophy. My students tell me they are experiencing many different instructional approaches in their classes, some of which involve cooperative learning and other kinds of group work. As a university, we may be doing better than we think in this area.

It is likely that those professors with the second philosophy, however, see no reason to try different instructional approaches. Their philosophical position insulates them from the question of whether or not some instructional approaches may be better than others.

Casey Hurley, Administration, Curriculum, & Instruction

Scholarship in Teaching

Like those at other colleges and universities, faculty members at Western engage in the perennial process of determining tenure and promotion using criteria that are ozone-like (there's at least one hole in it isn't there?). We seem to have endless discussions about teaching, service, and research, discussing their relative value and how to assess each of them. My impression is that service generally is slighted at WCU while teaching is measured with a very rough yardstick. Most faculty are considered adequate in teaching and teaching is sort of checked off as "okay." Research then becomes the critical factor. After all, it's relatively easy to count publications and to sort them into their various categories, such as articles in refereed journals, chapters in books, reviews, and so forth. Maybe there's a better way.

I am not satisfied with the way research seems to be evaluated by me and others. Counting publications seems inadequate. A few years ago a committee on campus reviewed the term "scholarship" and how we defined "scholarship." Maybe "scholarship" is a better term than "research" for what we want in faculty members. However, I don't think that it is a matched substitute for research (leaving us with "teaching, service, and scholarship"). I think that if we valued scholarship more in all we do, research (as we have considered research) would not be the critical component of tenure and promotion decisions that it currently seems to be.

I would like to see scholarship be an important part of teaching in particular. If we value teaching as we say we do in our mission statement and elsewhere, scholarship should, I think, be an important part of it. Teaching is enjoying new popularity across the country. Several institutions, large and small, are touting their renewed commitment to teaching. Our institution is on the leading edge of this movement with the active Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence and the new Institute for College and University Teaching. We ought to find a way to really value teaching, and scholarship is the ingredient that can make teaching substantial. The problem is how to do it.

Evidence of scholarship in teaching would raise teaching above our current standards, which seem to be based on how popular a course or instructor is with students. Evidence of scholarship in teaching might include the following:

1. Syllabi that show careful development and understanding of content,
2. Readings or other resource material that demonstrate currency in the field,
3. Relevant assignments and exercises that require higher level thinking and application,
4. Examinations that require students to demonstrate application of skill and knowledge,
5. Methodology that is varied, appropriate, and consistent with current best practices, and
6. Program development that includes reviews, revisions, and changes in program components such as courses and admission standards.

Others can certainly add to this list. I'm not certain how each item above can be applied to every discipline or instructor, but I am certain that scholarship is important and ought to be recognized.

What would this mean in operational terms? A colleague of mine in the College of Education and Psychology provides a good example of a "teaching scholar." Each course she teaches uses a different method or mode. Lecture/discussion is used for some courses, but not all; the approach to each course and even each class is reviewed and changed to fit current thought in her field, which means the textbook, readings, and even the seating are subject to change to fit the goals of the course. Assignments and exams are carefully developed to encourage problem-solving and reflective thought; outside resources are often used, and students are connected with other individuals who are experts in a particular project on which the student is working. Working in this way, my colleague takes risks by trying a book, an assignment, a unit, or an approach that she has only heard or read about. Since her involvement in program development influences the way her program is structured and since she is responsible for innovative approaches to evaluating the work of graduate students, these activities seem to be strong evidence of scholarship in teaching. But her scholarship appears in course materials such as syllabi and through the observation of her teaching rather than in publications. Her work might also not be reflected in student course evaluations, but her activities are authentic manifestations of scholarship because they result from her currency in her academic field.

Now might be an opportune time to highlight the role of scholarship in teaching and subsequently reduce the burden of producing publications that can be simply counted. Research that adds to and complements teaching but doesn't result in a publication can therefore be acknowledged. Published research can and does complement teaching and we ought to expect it and reward it. However, we should also expect and reward scholarship wherever it occurs and certainly in teaching.

Dale Carpenter, Department of Human Services