



A Unit of the Office of
Academic Affairs

Teaching Notes

January 2009, Volume 6, Number 2

Editor: Tom Pusateri, CETL Associate Director for the Scholarship of Teaching & Learning

Make Plans to Visit KSU's Second Life Campus!

The official opening of KSU's Second Life Campus, scheduled for January 30 - February 1, will feature numerous presentations and performances by renowned educators and noted artists both in real life and from the virtual community. In addition to live musical performances, virtual art shows, DJ events, and dance performances, the weekend will feature a presentation and several panel discussions that demonstrate how to teach in a virtual world like Second Life. Explore the KSU Virtual Campus at slurl.com/secondlife/Kennesaw%20University%20Park/16/17/23. For more information, email Chris Randall, CETL Associate Director for Technology-Enhanced Learning, crandal2@kennesaw.edu, or visit KSU's eLearning portal <https://elearn.kennesaw.edu/secondlife>.

Recommended Web site: Student Assessment of Their Learning Gains

<http://www.salgsite.org/>

The *Student Assessment of their Learning Gains* (SALG) website allows instructors to gather **learning-focused** feedback from students. The SALG survey asks students to rate how each component of a course (e.g., textbook, collaborative work, labs) helped them to learn, and to rate their gains toward achieving the course goals. The SALG survey can be customized to fit any college-level course, and can be administered multiple times per course. A baseline instrument allows faculty to compare gains relative to incoming student characteristics.

Upcoming CETL Events Promoting Undergraduate Research at KSU

The **Symposium of Student Scholars** is an event to showcase undergraduate research that was conducted at KSU during the 2008-2009 school year. It will be held in the University Rooms on Monday April 13th from 5:00pm – 8:00pm.

The **Undergraduate Research Reception** is an event to honor undergraduate students and their faculty mentors who have conducted research during the 2008-2009 school year. It will be held in the University Rooms on Monday April 27th from 5:00pm – 7:00pm.

For more information on these events, contact Amy Buddie, CETL Fellow for Advancing Undergraduate Research, abuddie@kennesaw.edu

16th Georgia Conference On College & University Teaching

Friday & Saturday, February 13-14, 2009
KSU Center

The Georgia Conference on College & University Teaching is an interdisciplinary conference designed to provide college and university faculty with the opportunity to discuss and share experiences and innovative teaching techniques.

This year's Plenary sessions are "The Parable of the Dandelion" by Louis Schmier, Valdosta State University, and "Designing, Implementing, and Publishing SoTL" by Matt Laposata and Bill Hill, Kennesaw State University.

For more information and to register for the conference, visit www.kennesaw.edu/cetl/conferences/gaconf/2009/ga_conf.html

Personalized Numerical and Word Assignments, Quizzes and Tests using Mail Merge

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Assignments are used to encourage independent learning. The assessment of such learning takes the form of grading the assignments, quizzes and tests. Identical questions on assignments, quizzes and tests open the door for students to copy another student's work. Using the mail-merge feature of Word and Excel to create personalized numerical and word questions can improve student performance, deter copying, and allow students to apply knowledge to the questions on an assignment, quiz or test.

The concept of personalized assignments is not new, and sophisticated computer programs are available through publishers or large computing centers (Morrissey, Kashy, & Tsai, 1995). In large freshmen classes, students can improve their knowledge through answering multiple examples of similar questions provided by publishers. For smaller classes, personalized assignments can be created through the use of birthdates (Pendarvis, 1995) or random number generation (Hall, 1998). For classes that do not have random questions on publisher websites, faculty must generate their own questions. While this can be done via on-line homework management systems such as WebCT, these are really not personalized questions as the question may be given to any number of students, and the faculty member will not know which student receives a question before the student attempts the question.

With personalized assignments, the student's name is on each assignment and each question is given to only one

student (Hall, 1998). Other students have other very similar questions. Before hard copies are handed out to students, the faculty member knows which question is going to which student. There is no need to know birthdates or student numbers as the numerical and word assignments are associated with the name of the student using the mail-merge function of Word and Excel.

While it is very useful for varying numbers (Hall, 1998), the mail merge can also be used to provide individual word questions. The stem of a question can be written in the Word document but the end of the question can vary and this is found in the Excel document. For example, the stem of one question is "Write a complete, balanced equation to represent the" and the part that varies from the Excel spread sheet is "alpha decay of Rn-210". Many other choices of decay types and atoms to decay can be used and each one is preset next to the name of a student. The extra time it takes to grade the personalized "word" answers is well worth it as you know the student did not copy a neighbor. The method described here should be useful for all disciplines.

References

- Hall, R. G. (1998). Production of numerical chemical problems using a spreadsheet. *Journal of Chemical Education*, 75, 243-245.
- Morrissey, D. J., Kashy, E., & Tsai and I. (1995) Using computer-assisted personalized assignments for freshman chemistry. *Journal of Chemical Education*, 72, 141-146.
- Pendarvis, R. (1995). Personalized assignments. *Journal of Chemical Education*, 72, 40.

The following article is reprinted with permission from *The Tomorrow's Professor Mailing List* (Msg. #835) <http://ctl.stanford.edu/Tomprof/>

Why Introducing or Sustaining Peer Review of Teaching Is so Hard, and What You Can Do About It¹

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If you happen to meet a department chair who hasn't had to handle a complaint about student evaluation of teaching, chances are that she or he hasn't held the position very long. Whether they are pleased with their own ratings or

think of evaluation of teaching instruments as the root of all evil, faculty members sense that there is something missing in a teaching evaluation system that relies on student opinion alone. They find that the information they receive is not detailed enough to guide their improvement and protest (often in contradiction to research findings) that faculty influence these ratings in all sorts of ways, from "dumbing down" courses to inflating grades.

While scholars generally support the reliability of student evaluation of teaching when a good instrument is used and administered correctly, they also advocate multiple sources of information on so complex an activity as teaching. Given this advice and the widespread dissatisfaction with student ratings, why is it so hard to maintain peer review of teaching as an alternative and complementary system? Here are some reasons and some thoughts on how to address the challenges they pose.

Norms

Peer review violates norms of privacy and egalitarianism in teaching. First, teaching has long been an activity that is thought to be highly personal. When anthropologists want to test for the existence of a norm, they sometimes use a technique called "breaching," the deliberate violation of a suspected norm, to gauge the reaction to the action. Translated into the college teaching context, try walking into a class and sitting down to observe without asking the instructor in advance. It's highly probable that you will be asked what you are doing in his or her classroom. Although Lee Shulman and others at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching have called for teaching to be "community property," a public activity open to inspection and discussion on teaching approaches, the move to this state of affairs is likely to be uncomfortable for those who have been socialized into a system based on privacy in teaching.

Second, teachers are accustomed to being nonjudgmental about the performance of their peers. Whether from professional courtesy, the realization that teaching is difficult, or the conviction that there are many acceptable ways to teach, colleagues generally refrain from making suggestions or offering themselves to others as sources of expertise in teaching. This norm lies behind skepticism about teaching awards and merit increases, which often embarrass those honored and are devalued as meaningless by others. Linked to the previous norm of privacy and coupled with the natural human tendency to avoid being frank with others about their performance, the norm of egalitarianism renders faculty members uncomfortable in situations involving making judgments about others' teaching.

Practical Considerations

Effective peer review is too time consuming and involves knowledge and skills that faculty members don't have. Given expanded expectations for faculty productivity in recent decades, any idea that presents the possibility for consuming more time is likely to get a hostile reception. Since most people (incorrectly) regard peer review of teaching as synonymous with classroom observation, investing valuable time in scheduling peer visits and writing onerous reports does not seem like an attractive or efficient

¹ The article appeared in *The Department Chair: A Resource for Academic Administrators*, Fall, 2007, Vol. 18, No. 2.

activity - nor one that will be much appreciated. Peer review is thus seen as a time sink.

Most faculty members are also wary about their own capacity to make good judgments about teaching, as well as the ability of their colleagues to do so. Comfortable with discipline-based knowledge and practices, they are less sure of ways of viewing and talking about teaching philosophy and performance. To some, teaching is an art or personal trait that can't be analyzed; to others, it is perfectly straightforward - one knows good teaching when one sees it. Peer review thus either seems mysterious or much ado about nothing.

Fear of Bias and Reprisal

Personal or professional rivalries will contaminate the process and create deep divisions or recourse to legal remedies. In addition to fears about the skills of reviewers, faculty members often wonder if their past relationships with peers or differences in style or disciplinary thinking will influence the peer review process. A proponent of qualitative research in a highly quantitatively oriented department might be anxious about whether this difference in perspective will affect a teaching review. An instructor who prefers to lecture might feel that a peer reviewer who supports active learning will view the teaching from only this perspective. And faculty members often wonder if they are legally vulnerable if conflict escalates.

Dealing with These Reservations

With concentrated attention, even these powerful reservations against peer review of teaching can be addressed. Three approaches can help:

- * Present rational arguments, but don't ignore the affect.
- * Create a practical peer review process.
- * Embed peer review in the culture of the unit.

Arguments. The most powerful arguments for peer review of teaching incorporate both rational and emotional qualities. The rational approach to the reservations just discussed stresses the importance of quality teaching to the unit - for increased student retention and success, for attracting more majors, for garnering awards, and overall reputation. It highlights the fact that an extremely high percentage of the unit's budget is devoted to faculty salaries and that personnel decisions have lasting consequences on the health of the unit, especially when tenure is involved. The rational approach argues that investing an extra three hours each year in a faculty member's assessment is worthwhile, given the possibility of a lifelong employment decision or the use of a substantial amount of the unit's budget on the faculty member's salary. It points out that training for reviewers is part of a good process and that mutually agreed-upon criteria can be identified as the basis for the judgments.

Emotionally, it is important to address distrust of evaluation, violation of personal style and space, insecurities about performance, anxieties about time, and fear of bias. All these feelings require reassurance and as non-threatening a start as possible. For these reasons, it is often helpful to begin a peer review system by focusing on the formative aspects stressing coaching and affirmation. Reciprocal exchange teams, with voluntary choice of partner, are an excellent way to begin. Given a practical system (see

below), these exchanges will be based on a faculty-constructed process, prepared reviewers, and time-conscious procedures. They will be introduced in the spirit of inquiry about student learning and how faculty can better facilitate success, rather than being tinged with overtones of establishing a teaching hierarchy or weeding out poor performers.

Practical process. Key to the development of a good process of peer review is clarity about goals and procedures, but a highly important consideration is practicality. Emphasis should be placed on engaging peers efficiently and only at key times. Practicality also means sharing the work equitably and allocating resources and rewards to get the work done. For example, rather than calling for every course to be peer reviewed every time it is offered, a staggered schedule of reviews can focus on regular coaching reviews early in the career and fewer as the teaching is established. Checklists or short focused response forms can be developed for use by the reviewer. Reviewers can work from teaching materials such as syllabi and tests rather than incorporating visits in every review. And the process of peer review can be folded into other procedures, such as teaching award nominations or annual reviews, so that it is efficient. Examples and ideas that can help in the development of a process are included in *Peer Review of Teaching: A Sourcebook* (Chism, 2007).

Embedding in the culture. Long term, the most important consideration for implementing lasting peer review of teaching is to make sure that the culture of the unit is in accord with the values of peer review. Alignment of the criteria and sources of evidence used in peer review with other processes in the unit is one way to strengthen peer review. The articulation of a short list of principles of good teaching by colleagues in a unit, for example, can serve as the basis for a peer review process as well as other teaching activities, such as new faculty orientation. Creating routine occasions for talking about teaching also helps to dispel the notion that teaching is a private activity rather than a team enterprise. At a department meeting, it is important to consider a discussion of student retention or graduation figures from the perspective of how learning can be better facilitated as equally important to a budget decision if a culture of teaching is to be cultivated. Asking faculty to report on peer review activity (either as a reviewer or as one being reviewed) on an annual report acknowledges its importance as well.

Conclusion

Peer review of teaching is a professional responsibility that is vital to teaching excellence. With focused attention, good systems can be introduced and flourish. Over the long term, the investment can reap substantial rewards for the health of academic units.

References

- Chism, N. V. N. (2007). *Peer review of teaching: A sourcebook* (2nd ed.). Bolton, MA: Anker.

Teaching Notes is a publication of the Kennesaw State University Center for Excellence in Teaching & Learning.



The Nitty Gritty of Government in Action: Off-Campus Academic Engagement as an Effective Learning Experience

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Student generated experiential learning has been an important component of my American Government classes at KSU, and before that in selected courses I taught at the University of Central Florida. My experiences address one aspect of the learning process that has broad application across numerous academic disciplines.

Very unscientific surveys suggest students look for and want to experience real-life application of classroom academic preparation. So, long ago I decided to include off-campus academic engagement as a component in courses where such engagement is appropriate. The results at both UCF and KSU were and have been once surprising, predictable, moving and extraordinarily successful, with most students reporting the off-campus learning component as the one exercise that not only tied the course segments together, but also gave the students new and deeper insights into government process in real-life application, into themselves, and into their communities.

Specifically, students are required to spend not less than 2.5 hours observing government functions in full operation. The teaching strategy is to first provide students with several weeks of theory, how theory is put into practice, and government trends. Every effort is made to give student an academic and realistic, but not complete, overview of what they will observe.

The observations of different government functions in operation result in a variety of student reaction. Although the student self-generates the observation component, several suggested governmental functions are provided. They include various court procedures at a variety of county levels (these are spelled out in detail for the students); administrative agency hearings at the federal, state, and local levels; school board meetings; planning sessions of various state local boards; Board of Regents meetings; and other governmental activities with my prior approval.

Students choose their own observational experience, but after the academic preparation, the process begins with what they expect to observe and what they expect to learn. This usually stems from the student's personal background, and their preconceived notions about what happens in their chosen observation. At some point the process, most students move from their comfort zone to their discomfort zone, with a few even moving into their alarm zone. For some, just entering the building where the observation will take place is a daunting exercise. In any event, the concept is to begin the experience before arrival, and to integrate preconceptions into the understanding gained so that the student's effectiveness as a community participant, and later in a chosen career, is enhanced.

In short, students are expected to not only have the experience, but also to grasp its meaning. Failure to grasp the meaning of their chosen experience results in lost opportunity to grow, to change, and to shift perspectives. Emphasis in class is placed on shifting perspectives as new information is presented.

Students are then expected to generalize their own debriefing into concepts. (What do I make of what I observed? How might I apply these insights into future situations? How do others apply their insights?) Lastly, they are expected to apply their learning to real life. (What will I do as a result?)

An examination of the experience from an academic perspective is also essential. In so doing, students should be able to compare and contrast theory with what actually happened in the observation environment (usually not the same), and to identify which elements of the course materials are relevant to the experience. They should also be able to identify the similarities and differences between their perspective on the observation as discussed in the class and as the experience actually unfolded. Lastly, the student should be able to identify challenges or reinforcements to prior perceptions and understandings.

Since most of our teaching is at the knowledge and comprehension level of Bloom's Taxonomy, this experiential opportunity allows students to move the higher levels within the taxonomy, with the brightest students writing and learning at the synthesis level.

I supply the knowledge and comprehension base and some of the nuts and bolts of government in action. Students will observe the balance of the action component and bring their own attitudes to the table. This direct involvement and resulting conclusions are the lessons.

The lessons learned are as diverse as the students. Perhaps a few student quotes will sufficiently summarize:

- This assignment was great. It tied the whole course together.
- At first, I thought this was just another insignificant project. Little did I know how my life and future would be so enormously impacted.
- The judges were able to see right through the lawyer maneuvering.
- The attorneys were good.
- The attorneys were horrible.
- The way things are handled in court bear no resemblance to TV.
- I came to realize how important my family is.
- I learned why I hated my father for so many years and what I have to do have a better relationship with him.
- I came away with a new understanding and appreciation of citizen participation in government.
- The Assembly was all about staying in power, not helping the people.
- The Board as a whole seemed genuinely interested in student.

The experiential learning component is easily implemented in a variety of academic settings, and I am confident equivalent benefits will be realized in these settings as well.