

INSIGHTS

INTO TEACHING AND LEARNING

2005 - 2006

The William H. Koehler Center for Teaching Excellence
Texas Christian University

Insights: Into Teaching and Learning

2005-2006
Volume 1

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Suite 501, SWR Building
TCU Box 298970
Fort Worth, Texas 76129
817-257-7434
www.cte.tcu.edu

On the Cover: Photo by Kerrie Conover

Foreword



Teaching and learning activities are the cornerstone of education. While there are many other activities that take place on post-secondary institutions across the country, without teaching and learning, education cannot exist. Texas Christian University has a long and valued heritage of innovative and engaged pedagogy with inspired and passionate faculty who are dedicated to their disciplines, their students, and the learning process. This first edition of *Insights into Teaching and Learning* provides an opportunity for members of the TCU community to explore their thoughts on teaching philosophies, specific methods, and general approaches to sharing their zeal for education.

By honoring and celebrating the art and practice of teaching and learning, the William H. Koehler Center for Teaching Excellence hopes to facilitate the collaborative and ongoing conversations that will continue to engage students in the search for knowledge and understanding. Inspiring students to search for knowledge, to explore new areas, and to make a difference in the world are only some of the many reasons why we teach... and these reasons are as individual as the essays contained in this volume.

The insights into teaching, learning, and new technologies that you will read about in these pages are just some of the many at TCU. It is my sincere hope that you will be inspired by what you read and that the thoughts in this volume will move you to think about how your words and actions can impact the lives of our students and our future.

Catherine M. Wehlburg
Director, William H. Koehler, Center for Teaching Excellence
November 2005



Teresa Blackwell

Spanish Latin American Studies

An instructor's task can be divided into two fundamentals: the creative side and the managerial side. I am like most teachers in that I love the creative: the energy in the classroom, interaction with students, and thinking up interesting classes. The least attractive facet of teaching is what I call the managerial tasks, the "accounting work," which includes recording and averaging grades, figuring percentages, and giving an accounting to the students about the grades they have received. These tasks usually climax at the end of each semester, when instructors are especially busy composing final exams and winding up all the other semester's work. So, not surprisingly, my desire has always been to effectively manage the accounting/managerial side so as to free up time for the creative side of teaching that I love..

ECollege has done this for me. I clearly remember the first December I sat down at my desk, recorded my final exam grades, clicked "save changes," and within seconds had one hundred and four final grades averaged to the hundredths place.

Computing grades and figuring percentages is just the beginning of the benefits of using eCollege. A second component is "grade-to-date" information, which is available to the student twenty-four hours a day. STUDENTS LOVE THIS! My students know that the onus is on them to see that the grades are correct. If a student should notice an incorrectly recorded grade, or have a question about a grade, he can email me. Current and continuous access to grades prevents the end-of-the-semester cluster of students in my office wanting to know averages or wanting an explanation for a certain grade.

I use eCollege to post daily assignments. Instead of contacting me after missing class, students know to go to eCollege to check assignments. Using the "drop box" option, I can make an assignment, indicating the last date it will be accepted, and the students can send it to me via eCollege.

In irregular circumstances, such as school cancellation due to weather, I have effectively communicated to all of my students through the "email" component of eCollege.

I have utilized the webliography available to students through this program. I list sites which students may find helpful, and if a student should come up with a new site, I add it for everyone's benefit. This is such a time-saver, for I can quickly refer a student to the webliography which in some cases, is like referring him to a tutor.

Not knowing as much about computers as I would like, eCollege was initially difficult for me to set up. I was fortunate that the personnel at the Center for Teaching Excellence were always ready and eager to help me get started. My first semester with eCollege, I spent quite a few hours in the CTE office! Like most endeavors, once I was helped to create my first "course shell," eCollege was easy, and the time spent was well worth the convenience I enjoy today.



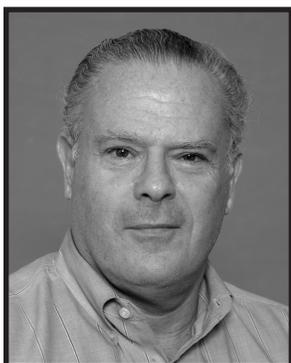
Mark Bloom

Biology

I have begun using eCollege this semester and it's changed how I manage my class. I teach two sections of Contemporary Issues in Biology and have about 180 students each semester. During every class, I pass out copies of PowerPoint slides for the students to take notes on. Historically, I've had to deal with students who missed class and wanted the packets, or lost their packets, etc. Things have changed now. With eCollege I post my PowerPoints under "Doc Sharing" and students have access to them from the day of the lecture until the exam (when I "hide them" from view again). It has made my life so much easier by cutting down on needless e-mails, phone calls, and trips to the copier.

In addition to the document sharing feature, I've made great use of the "Gradebook" feature. I now post the students exam grades on eCollege and no longer have students calling, e-mailing, etc. for their grades. They know as soon as I have them, they have them. Furthermore, by using the "e-mail the class" function, I can alert the whole class as to when their grades are posted; very easy!

eCollege has made my classroom management much easier.



Joe Bobich

Chemistry

Part I: What I think

Teaching and learning are human endeavors and, as such, they are very imperfect. Cheerful tolerance and acceptance are helpful. Knowledge that life is a transitory illusion provides solace, as does the knowledge that the student-teacher interaction can be enjoyable if you work at it. Be true to yourself, but understand that will probably bring you into conflict with administrators, who hold all of the high cards. It is not enough to do a good job. Like it or not, life is a popularity contest.

Part II: Advice to new faculty

At the start of the first class, teaching and learning are helped by grabbing the students' undivided attention immediately. Tell them that you want to create an optimal learning environment during the hours you all are together, and mean it. Explain that the greatest difficulty for learning is the constraint of time. Everyone is different, but time is constant, so some students will have to work harder than others to be equally successful.

Next, provide a detailed overview of all aspects of the course mechanisms, particularly grading. Make everything perfectly clear; leave nothing to interpretation.

Then you need to share your enthusiasm for your subject. Mine being biochemistry (the most interesting and complicated subject in the universe), sharing enthusiasm is a slam dunk. Sometimes I remind my listeners that we all actually are made from stardust (like the song says) and that the world is an illusion due to $E=mc^2$ and the particulate nature of matter. Elaborate on the stated (in your syllabus) goal of the course; what you hope they will take away by working hard. Then explain how and why you will be using the active learning techniques that you have figured out in advance will work best for you. [I used to lecture (for over 25 years), but I believe that a relatively painless transition from lecturing to an active learning format is allowing me to provide better conceptual learning.]

To finish the first hour and "let the students know where I'm coming from" I usually end with a brief harang about the current issues of the day from my godless, liberal viewpoint. Beyond that, try to have fun, but not too much.



Victor J. Boschini
Chancellor

I am convinced that you cannot speak of teaching without also thinking about learning. The two are inextricably tied. Teaching is among the oldest of professions and, in my estimation, the most noble. All of us are who we are because of — or in spite of — some teacher along the way.

There is something special — almost magical — about the connection between the student and an outstanding teacher. The best teachers are also the best learners: secure enough to learn something new from their pupils, yet insecure enough to be willing to experiment with new thoughts and ideas.

Each teacher has his or her own style — just as every learner does. The remarkable teacher capitalizes on the strengths of each student, because true learning takes place when the teacher’s strengths and the student’s strengths mesh. The best teachers serve not as omnipotent sources of new information, but as guides for their students as they are exposed to new ideas and concepts. They learn along with their pupils. They have the power to transform their students and touch their lives well beyond the borders of the traditional classroom and well beyond the hours and minutes of the actual class.

The very best teachers make it look so easy. Yet we know it is not. Remarkable teaching is both tiring and time consuming. That’s why I always encourage my education students to expend the effort and take the time required to identify both their own strengths and their students’ strengths. To commit themselves to learning with their students and from their students. To do whatever it takes to become a “because of” teacher instead of an “in spite of” teacher.



Todd Davis

Accounting

“Do they get it?”

This question was the thought running through my mind as I was wrapping up the third session of my fall Principles of Accounting class. I had heard that a really good instructor can assess a student’s level of understanding without verbal feedback. Being as this was my first class as a university instructor, I was finding it challenging enough just to stay on top of my basic responsibilities: not moving too fast, not moving too slow, not assigning too much homework, not assigning too little homework, and, of course, being sure I could explain the homework!

So, evaluating individual students based on facial expressions did not seem to be quite within reach just yet. While I had a pretty good handle on the level of understanding of the students who were SLEEPING, what I found to be rather intimidating was the challenge of connecting with the students who were STARING. Where were the smiles? Where were the wide-eyed “ahas” and the nods of appreciation? And more importantly – behind those staring, non-smiling, non-aha-ing, non-nodding faces – was any LEARNING taking place?

During my faculty orientation, Dr. Catherine Wehlburg, Director of TCU’s Center for Teaching Excellence, gave a presentation on active learning. One of the concepts she described was the “muddiest point” paper, an end-of-class exercise providing students with an opportunity to communicate in writing specific questions or concerns relating to the class. I had tucked this concept away in the back of my mind as something that might be useful once I started teaching. Obviously the time had arrived to break out this gem of academic creativity and give it a whirl. After experiencing the epidemic of terror which I quickly discovered is the reflexive response to, “Okay, close your books and take out a blank sheet of paper,” I explained to the class that we were NOT having a pop quiz, but that I was looking for some feedback.

As Dr. Wehlburg suggested, I requested the students to provide one specific question or concern relating to the information we had covered up to that point. After the class completed the exercise and I collected all the responses, I quickly packed up and left the classroom. Due to a mixture of excitement and anxiety regarding the students’ feedback, I read the responses in my car before heading home. While the responses ranged from the verbose “no concerns” to the (presumed) sarcastic “How late can you legally hold us in class?”, I did gain valuable insight into what was working, what was not working, and what concepts required clarification. Perhaps more importantly, this activity (and the follow-up discussion we had during the next class) sent a strong signal to the students that I care: about the students individually, about the class, and about ensuring that the teaching methodologies I use produce a dynamic, engaging, and effective learning environment.



Kenné Connor

Blaise J. Ferrandino

School of Music

For me the essence of good teaching lies in ignorance. As preposterous as this statement might seem, it is to say that when a class enters the room for a session they are somewhat in the dark as to what is to follow. Given the human predilection for wanting to decipher, to understand, and to be in some control of a situation, the energy is palpable. I always presume, regardless of any signs of fatigue, disinterest, or fear emanating from individuals, that the group walking into my classroom wants “to know” and that it is to this motivation that I must direct my attentions.

I know that this need to know is what inspires me as well as many of my colleagues. It drives me to better understand and explain that which I encounter; even if that encounter is with material I have seen many times over. It is exhilarating to me each time because you see, I am too am ignorant. My understanding of the material grows greater with each new turn of the familiar cycle that is the academic year. If this is so, then it follows that I must still be ignorant of new discoveries that are yet to come. It would be the height of hubris to think otherwise.

With these things in mind I feel that we all, students and instructor, start together in relative ignorance. I do not presume theories as if they are natural law, but look to generate them together with the students. Sometimes, along the way, we find flaws in these conventional generalizations. Such flaws or exceptions can be disturbing to the novice learner. If I am successful in my approach, however, the student soon realizes that it is the process that I am teaching. As the semester evolves students not only learn to appreciate this, but feel a kinship with learners who came before and put forth the aforementioned theories.

When at my best, I model enthusiasm for learning as well as methodologies that will lead the students to greater understanding. In the final analysis, the factual information that I impart is not my greatest gift to these people. What I can give is an example of how a reasonably intelligent individual generates a new sense of knowing from that which was previously unknown, not understood, or in need of synthesis. We all become learners, teachers, and theorists able to reason through situations able, at times, to critique our approach as we go. By the end of the semester we know much more than we did when we started but, if I have done my job well, we remain aware, grow comfortable with, and even embrace the extent to which we remain ignorant.



Andrew O. Fort

Religion

After nearly twenty five years, teaching is still a fundamental part of my identity and remains a primary passion in my life. It is a particular privilege to teach about matters of ultimate concern to humans, especially (in my case) about peoples and worldviews of Asia to which most of my students will never otherwise be introduced. I am convinced that understanding religion and those in other cultures are central parts of the liberal arts enterprise of enlarging human horizons.

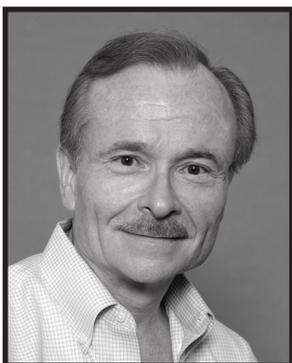
In all my classes, I aim both to challenge and affirm, and to illuminate diverse worldviews that offer new understandings of ourselves and others. I hope not just to inform, but also to “create worlds” for students to enter and find plausible. One of my catch-phrases is the necessity of empathetic “mental migration” into others’ mindsets, to recognize other ways of inquiry and knowing. This is an especially tall order for one freshman level class, but the effort is worth making, even if our reach exceeds our grasp.

My upper level courses cover a wide array of religious traditions found in South and East Asia. Students here have the opportunity to consider important material (textual and visual) and long-standing ways of thinking that they might never see or hear again. Teaching these courses entails the profound responsibility to communicate well and to represent others accurately and sufficiently. With Asian traditions, there are special problems of definition and appropriate categorization, demanding careful and patient inquiry and a willingness to bridge from the familiar to the unfamiliar. For example, there is no consensus among scholars of Hindu traditions about exactly what constitutes “Hinduism.” I am keenly aware that I must make choices about what to include and exclude, and what agendas these choices reflect; there is always more to say about, and another way to look at, the religious traditions I present. I want students to learn that one shows respect for others by recognizing and affirming difference as well as similarity. The critical self-awareness I bring (and work to engender in students) is magnified by the postcolonial critique directed at those in the West who study cultures long dominated by others. This awareness requires close attention to the context of my teaching and the interests imbedded in our social location.

I also offer experiential opportunities to students as a means of more accurate representation of what is important in the traditions under inquiry. We utilize both in-class exercises and visits to worship sites in the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex. I have also worked to have first hand experience of the cultures I present, taking opportunities to attend programs or seminars in Pakistan, Turkey, Japan, and China, as well as numerous trips to India for research and gathering teaching materials. Most recently (2004), I visited Taiwan and Singapore to learn more about Hinduism and Buddhism “in diaspora.”

I have also taught the departmental senior seminar, which requires looking at issues of defining and understanding religion in my own “civilization of origin,” the West. In addition, I have taught courses on world hunger and the Honors colloquium Nature of Values, in which we compared values from the Buddhist and Western traditions. Finally, I recently have been teaching a first year seminar on Confucius, Buddha, and Jesus, the founders of three great (Asian) religious traditions. I want to show students here that there are certain fundamental questions for humans cross-culturally (such as where we come from, why we are here, and where we are going), but radically different answers in different times and places; they also learn to recognize that both they and these thinkers are historically situated beings.

Beyond TCU, I had the privilege to co-lead the teaching workshop for the Southwest region of the American Academy of Religion in 1995-96, sponsored by NEH, The Lilly Foundation and the AAR. I was president of the regional American Academy of Religion in 2002, and, through that position, organized and participated in two teaching workshops for younger scholars in the region in 2001 and 2002. This March, I received an AAR regions grant for organizing a panel called “Teaching Religion in Troubled Times: When Practitioners Meet (and Challenge) Professors,” to which I invited both professors in the region and some well-known figures in our field who have had their books banned and even received threats of arrest or death.



William Graham

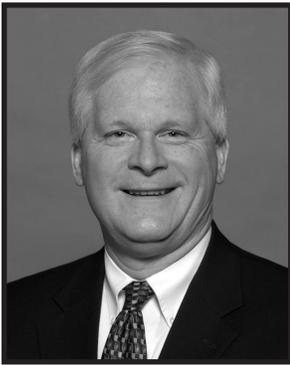
Physics and Astronomy

Although initially skeptical about the effectiveness and ease of implementation of eCollege Companion, after a year of using it in three different courses, I'm a convert. In teaching today's computer savvy students it's the way to go.

At the most basic level, an eCompanion provides an effective way for the timely delivery of course materials to students. For my courses, which include both introductory lecture and seminar classes, notes, complete PowerPoint lectures, and assignments are all made readily available. Most students take the opportunity to print out the lectures, which include a large number of illustrations, graphs, and tables, using the PDF versions provided in e-Companion and bring them to class as a basis for their own notes taken during the lecture. A few even incorporate their own notes into the original files on their laptops during class. Most students report using the class notes and PowerPoint lectures as their primary study aids in preparing for tests. Students may not read the text before a lecture but there has been a lot of evidence that they've looked over the notes and lectures prior to class.

Assignments given through eCompanion can include graphics, illustrations, and links to websites to encourage further exploration of the material or related topics. Judging by the questions I am asked concerning material on other websites and by its integration by students into their assignments, this "directed surfing" has been surprisingly effective. Submission, grading, and the return of assignments through the Dropbox feature are easily managed. The procedure seems to result in more timely completion of assignments since the submission time is logged, as well as more thoughtful and careful work. Students react favorably to having the more personalized comments on their work (perhaps, because they no longer have to decipher my handwritten comments). Using the Dropbox feature, it is easy to quickly return an assignment to a student for correction and multiple revisions, if necessary, over a short period of time. In general, e-Companion facilitates rapid and efficient communication with students.

Since the current status of their grades is available in the Gradebook feature, it is easy for students to continuously monitor their progress in the course. Two of the courses require oral presentations in PowerPoint to the other members of the class. The Doc Sharing feature enables presentations or papers to be shared with other students prior to delivery. This has had the apparent effect of encouraging questions during the actual oral presentations, as well as, quite unexpectedly, stimulating competition and creativity among students to produce the best presentation. On the few occasions that I've experienced a problem in the implementation of e-College, an e-mail or phone call to Romy Hughes and her staff at CTE has led to a quick solution. Students report good support from both local staff and e-College. Implementing e-Companion has been far easier than running my own website for courses and offers a versatile set of additional features, some of which I'm still learning to utilize. Highly recommended.



C. David Grant

Religion

Call me archaic, but I think the lecture can be a powerful teaching medium. It can only be so, however, if we recognize that it involves drama. Delivery, timing, inflection, choreography—all these things go into a successful lecture.

When watching a good drama, the viewer is sucked into the plot, the characterizations, and the scene in such a way that the viewer forgets that one is at a play or movie. As lecturers we must accomplish the same: we must strive to set a classroom stage such that students forget that they are in class and instead get lost in the drama of the subject under discussion.

A good lecturer will use props—I often use a simple coffee cup to illustrate abstruse points of theology; sometimes I use a sign that says “Devil’s Advocate” as a way of highlighting different sides of an argument. Sometimes I break out in song during a class to make a point. A little surprise goes a long way in keeping students attentive.

A good lecturer will use vocal techniques to enhance students’ engagement. A pregnant pause at an important point, a drop in pitch at another, heightened volume at a transition—these add drama to a lecture. Nothing has sullied lectures more than monotone deliveries of a read script. If one reads from a script, then it should be heard as if there were no script. One doesn’t want to be like an actor who delivers his or her lines such that you know the lines are memorized.

Vocal inflections also increase drama. I once had a student comment on a SPOT form that she loved the way I used different voices when I was reading a passage from the Bible because it made the passage come alive. I wasn’t trying to use different voices; I was just reading the passage with inflection and feeling. Varied vocal inflections and volumes keep the lecture lively and increase the students’ attention to the material.

Humor is another way that one can engage students in lecture material. Let’s face it; a good joke goes a long way in keeping folks’ attention. Sometimes I even intentionally make corny jokes; when you hear the students sighing at the corniness, you know they’re with you in the lecture.

Choreography is also part of a good lecture. (I use choreography here in a loose sense, simply meaning the movements that take place during a lecture.) I find that I lecture best without a podium because when I’m behind a podium I tend to stay in one spot. But to walk about a bit during a lecture, going up and down the classroom aisles, looking into individuals’ eyes, using hand gestures and laser pointers to PowerPoint presentations projected on the screen behind me—all these things increase the dramatic dimension of a lecture.

I know what some of you are thinking. Sometimes I too ask myself: What would my graduate school mentors think if they saw me now. I’m not sure. But I do know that I am passionate about the discipline I teach and if a bit of drama in a lecture can ignite undergraduate students to be engaged with the subject matter and, maybe, even develop a passion for it, then I’ve been successful at enabling students to enjoy learning. It just stands to reason if students can enjoy what they are learning, they’ll be more engaged, successful learners.

Long live the lecture!



Rhonda Hatcher

Mathematics

I teach mathematics, a subject about which very few people feel neutral. A small minority of students truly love mathematics and excel in it; but most find mathematics boring and irrelevant or beyond their ability, or both. In some ways this makes the teaching of mathematics a challenge, but I have found it to be a challenge that can be met.

It is vital to help all students understand the importance of mathematics in today's society. This is not something that they necessarily learned in their high school algebra and geometry classes. High school mathematics classes often consist of a series of techniques and skills to be learned and then tested on. It is quite common for students to think that the only thing you can do with a mathematics degree is to teach mathematics. Unless students see the importance of mathematics, you should not expect them to be excited about learning it. There are innumerable applications of mathematics to economics, science, political science, and business. It is fun to show students, often for the first time, how mathematics can be found in other disciplines, and to see how this sparks their interest.

The problem of dealing with the lack of confidence students have in their own ability is a bigger hurdle to overcome. It is a common belief that people are either born with the ability to do mathematics or not. I have found that, while natural ability plays some role in how well students learn mathematics, hard work, confidence, and interest play a bigger role. Through constant comments and reinforcement, I try to make sure students understand this.

Although I teach a subject that is required of all TCU students and dreaded by most, I have found that at the end of each semester most of my students leave with a more positive attitude about mathematics and their ability to do it. In time, students will, most likely not remember all of the specific skills they learned in my class, but I feel content in knowing that they will have a better attitude toward mathematics.



Kerrie Conover

Romy Hughes eLearning

The Center for Teaching Excellence and eLearning Initiatives developed a blended approach to technology training and faculty development to improve teaching and promote greater student engagement. CTE developed a unique three-day faculty development/training workshop using faculty mentors to focus on how to use technology in the classroom and how to use technology to improve teaching and student learning. This workshop is different, because many current workshops on technology and teaching focus on the technology and do not emphasize how to use the technology for the purpose of increasing student learning. Results of assessing current online courses, surveys and face-to-face discussions with faculty and students also indicated the need for such a workshop.

CTE first started with the creation of a two-day workshop, “eLearning Boot Camp”, which addressed both faculty development and technology training. Upon completion of this workshop, faculty have new ideas and concepts on how to improve the management of online or web-enhanced class using technology. In addition, they can better promote student engagement and improve teaching methods in order to enhance student learning.

This workshop allows faculty to experience successful approaches to displaying content because they begin the workshop enrolled as a student. In addition, this workshop gives participants the opportunity to work with faculty mentors as they share both their positive and negative experiences in online classes and learn a variety of approaches. This allows them to decide on what “the best” approach is for delivery of their content.

The first “Boot Camp” was offered May 2003 with 7 faculty completing the training. As of August 2005, the eLearning staff has trained 80 faculty. Out of the 80 faculty trained, 74 faculty have continued to utilize the training, which has resulted in the creation of 254 fully online and web-enhanced courses.

Boot Camp graduates and their success

Dates of Camp	# of Faculty Attended	# of Faculty using eCollege	# of eCollege shells created by boot campers graduates since May 2003
May 2003	7	5	36
June 2003	7	6	41
January 2004	11	10	34
May 2004 Session 1	10	8	31
May 2004 Session 2	6	6	17
August 2004	8	8	20
January 2005	7	7	16
May 2005	8	8	21
June 2005	7	7	18
August 2005	9	9	20

Boot Camp evaluations and feedback from faculty indicated that the two-day workshop was working well but there was a need to add one additional day. In January 2004 Boot Camp became a three-day workshop.

Assessment of eCollege course shells being used by boot camp graduates indicates the following eCollege tools are being utilized as a teaching tool.

Webliography	47%
Threaded Discussion	53%
Online Quizzes	32%
Chat	26%
Document Sharing	79%
Dropbox (Electronic assignment online submission)	74%
Gradebook	68%
Announcements	89%
Groups	26%
Other	26%



David Jenkins

Social Work

My philosophy of teaching is something that has evolved as I have learned more about my students, my content areas, and myself. All facets of my philosophy build or interact with the other aspects to make me the teacher that I am today. Since I am constantly striving to improve my teaching, I have a working document called a teaching portfolio that I update on a regular basis. This document provides an outlet for evidence that supports my efforts in teaching. In my teaching portfolio, I offer letters, scores, and goals that enact my teaching philosophy. This statement will not offer much of that evidence, but it is available if desired.

To be a good teacher, I believe one should:

1. Constantly strive to improve your teaching. Improvement can come from advancing your knowledge of the material, updating and altering the methods used to share the material, and learning more about yourself and your target audience. As an instructor, I gather information from various sources. These sources include, but are not limited to, attending workshops on content areas and methods of teaching, and formal and informal feedback from students, colleagues and yourself.
2. Make the classroom a friendly, non-threatening learning environment. Students need a safe, supportive place to risk making mistakes and to share various opinions in order to maximize learning. I often begin my classes with a discussion of things that will make the classroom more or less safe for them to take risks and push themselves to see things in a more complete manner. With this discussion, both student and I take responsibility for keeping the area safe and open to feedback and constructive learning. Since Social Work is a value-laden profession, students have to become aware of how their personal values fit or do not fit within this profession. Furthermore, students have to be free to struggle with these value differences and then make the commitment to honor the values of the profession. I make myself available both inside and outside the classroom to discuss material and dilemmas that arise for them.
3. Be well prepared. I want my course to be structured in a manner that makes objectives clear and maximizes their learning opportunity. I strive to make lectures, activities, and examinations well organized. I want the structure to be clear in my class, so they are then more able to be creative within these guidelines to show mastery of the material.
4. Be a role model for the profession. As an educator, I am helping students become future social workers. I believe students are watching how I treat them and others in and out of the classroom. I am “living out” the values of my profession and showing them how to handle clients. I may not always do the “correct” thing and will make mistakes. However, I believe I can even role model how I handle these mistakes for them to be better educated in how to interact with clients.
5. Make the subject interesting so that students are likely to learn it. I enjoy Social Work and want students to hear and see my passion on the topic. I strive to appreciate the various learning and teaching styles of students and incorporate these differences in my classroom.
6. Understand that learning is an active experience. Students need to be exposed to the material and then given opportunity to interact with the topic. A major responsibility of mine is to help the student translate theory and knowledge into practice. Certain classes will lend themselves more to this experience than others. As often as possible, I use various activities and projects to let them show their mastery of the material.

Efforts to Improve Teaching

I continue to improve my teaching through attendance at workshops, discussion groups, and conferences. One summer I attended a workshop entitled “Peter Seldin’s Four-day Teaching Portfolio Program” which allowed each participant to rigorously consider all aspects of one’s teaching and how they might further their endeavors in this process. The following summer, I served as a facilitator for this program.



Larry Kitchens

Center for Instructional Services

I guess I have always wanted to teach. One of my earliest childhood memories is sitting in a one-room school in west Texas (Yes, it was red!) watching as my mother taught grades one through five. I have been blessed by having through out my life teachers who truly inspired me, both as a student and as a person. They instilled in me a passion for learning, cared deeply for me as a student and made an otherwise mediocre school day incredible.

During my days in the classroom, I realized the importance of finding something in every student to respect and through this, I came to love every student I had. This wasn't always easy, but to do this, to genuinely love and respect every student, I knew it would be necessary to get to know my students on an individual level, and I took every opportunity to get to know them.

To achieve this, I knew students needed to be in an environment in which they felt safe enough to share a personal part of themselves with their peers and me. With this in mind, I strove to create a safe classroom environment in which every student knew I respected him or her. I tried to show them it was okay to take risks in the classroom. I sought ways for them to express their understanding and comprehension of American History, sometimes in a less than traditional way. I was willing to take the risk in the classroom with them.

Alongside with my love and respect for each student, I shared with them my genuine enthusiasm and passion for American History, and most importantly, them. "I love teaching," I'd tell them, "I love doing what I am doing." I still do.

I remember from my own days as a student, the power of a teacher's enthusiasm was infectious, and one of the traits all of my favorite teachers shared was an unembarrassed passion for what they did. I took the risk of looking like a fool to share with them my love of history and the people behind the events that made history. And though I could sense that my enthusiasm and passion occasionally touched the students, I didn't always realize to what extent it had until I am given the opportunity to visit with some of my former students. What a joy it is to hear them reflect upon their experiences they remember from their days in the classroom. Most of their memories have little to do with any lesson I may have taught but more with the interaction that we all enjoyed as we explored history together.

As important as love and respect, enthusiasm and passion are, student learning is ultimately the goal. Of course, student learning is successful when students know they are loved, respected, and have an enthusiastic passion for what is being done in the classroom, but I believe there should also be an aspect of discovery which is included in my final teaching core value – awareness and empowerment.

Just as through my teaching I hope to "know even one life has breathed easier," I wanted students to know that they are empowered not only in terms of their being in control of their learning, but that they are empowered as citizens of society, as people. To reach this empowerment, students must first be helped to become aware of important issues that go beyond the classroom. With this in mind, I centered many of my lessons on what I believed are life-changing issues: empathizing with others, understanding that they, as citizens, play an important role in society, they would feel empowered to make a difference. In class we talked more than just events and dates in history. We talked about causes of events, the effects of decisions upon people, different perspectives of the same event. I wanted students to know it wasn't my classroom, but our classroom.

In some way, I hope to have touched every student, maybe not everyone profoundly, but I hope that I'll have touched each student by letting him or her know that I cared.



Glenn Kroh

Biology

The eCollege teaching system has improved and revolutionized my teaching program. It allows one to organize and modify lectures for online use by students. Once the course shell is created, it is a very smooth process to modify course material. One aspect of the shell that works well is the use of Doc Sharing. This tool allows term papers and student powerpoints to be posted for perusal and comment by the class. An additional benefit of the shell, is the ability to assign and facilitate group projects. This promotes bonding among students and is especially important in completely remote online classes. Threaded discussions also bring a class together. I usually ask for at least two entries per student on each assigned topic; one a statement and the other a response to somebody else's statement. In a traditional class, there usually is not enough time for discussions that would include all students. Doing it online as a threaded discussion involves all students. This allows otherwise timid students to participate. Putting lectures online prompts the professor to be more organized than in a traditional classroom. Online lectures provide a downloadable baseline of information for the student, allowing the professor to focus on critical points during class time. Students can then think about the material rather than furiously taking notes. Using the eCollege approach also allows creative use of imaging in the online lectures. I am now inserting complimentary powerpoints with each lecture which will enhance the learning experience for all students; especially visual learners. The eCollege system allows a complete assessment of student performance which is based on a greater diversity of tasks than is possible in the traditional classroom. These include threaded discussion, webliographies, group projects with powerpoint, term papers, and exams. Student – professor communication is also enhanced by the eCollege system. At the touch of a button, the professor can email individual students, specific groups of students, or the whole class. Announcements using course home also contribute to a smooth running course. An eCollege course shell captures every aspect of a course and preserves it for review. As a result, professors can easily modify and improve the course. In addition, the configuration of the course allows it to be used as a review document when professors are being reviewed by administrators. In summary, the eCollege approach allows the development of a well organized course that is completely accessible to the student and promotes communication with the professor and among students. Finally, the eCollege approach allows complete facilitation and coordination of course goals with the ability to fully assess the outcome.



Carrie Leverenz

English

As any writer knows, having a real audience to respond to your words makes all the difference. Writing teachers know, too, that if you can give students a real audience—even if only their classmates—students will be more invested in their writing. Students also say they learn a lot from reading how other students handle an assignment.

There are many ways that eCollege facilitates this exchange between writers and readers. Of course eCollege makes it easy for students to submit their writing for response from the teacher. They can post drafts to the Drop Box, where a teacher can respond to it, and both teacher and student have a record of the exchange. Document Sharing has made it infinitely easier for students to exchange writing among themselves. (When students were required to bring hard copies to class, it was difficult to keep track of who brought drafts and to deal with students who were absent.) With Document Sharing, I can set up an area for each assignment and check to see who submits drafts and when. Students easily download copies of their peers' drafts and print them out or respond digitally. One writing teacher I know asks students to respond to each other's drafts using the Threaded Discussion feature. Because he also posts his responses to student writing there, everyone in the class can learn from everyone else's suggestions for revision, thus maximizing the reader-writer exchange.



Robert M. Maninger

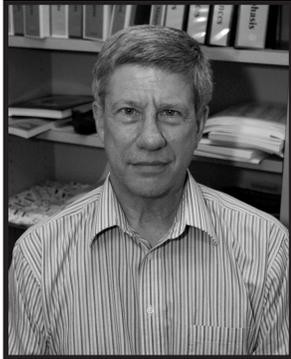
School of Education

The benefits of using an eCollege course shell are hard to define, as the creative dimensions are as fluid as the shell itself. Most professors start small and advance at a slow pace as they ease into the concept of the course shell. Some get involved in the course shell at first for a specific focused reason, however, most grow into additional use as they see the advantages and the opportunities.

I was “thrown into the fire” as I inherited a full course shell from my wonderful colleague Dr. Sue Anderson (SOE). I learned the many intricate uses of the shell as she had designed it. As time progressed we found ourselves involved in a multitude of changes and upgrades. Soon, we launched into other courses and developed them to a greater magnitude. As I was assigned other courses in the school of education I gained confidence and adapted course shells to match each of the courses I developed. The ease of moving a course shell from one semester to the next allowed me the opportunity to develop it to deeper levels without having to spend time re-inventing it. This flexibility also allowed me time to focus on my pedagogy and my assessment with my students as my syllabus, calendar, and basic content only required minor adjustments from semester to semester. The fluidity of the course shell allowed me to be more creative and more in touch with my students.

Support for the course shells is so automatic that it is easy to take for granted. With an online form the shell can be copied to the next semester at the professors appointed time. Students are loaded into the course shell for my use and for their use without any concern to any of the participants. They are just placed into the shell by agents at eLearning without a need for any labor on the part of the professor. Additions to the class list such as teaching assistants can be handled with a simple email. The physical process of transfer from one semester to the next is flawless from the professor’s perspective. The eCollege course shell is intricate and multifaceted. However, this should not be confused with complicated. The design of the shell is very user friendly and is complete with multilayered support. The website itself offers a help area. The eCollege system website offers another layer of help. Plus, the eLearning staff is always available for consultation and offer frequent “boot camps” which are designed to give the professor a deeper knowledge of what is available and offer additional software to assist in the preparation of files to be used in the pieces of the shell.

TCU students are select dare I say elite? They are the brightest and the best. Professors at TCU are also the brightest and the best, would you not agree? It only seems logical that the students would expect the best education possible, and that the thoughtful, progressive professor would desire the opportunity to advance his or her pedagogy. The time that I save using eCollege affords me the time with preparation, and amplification of my classes and my students benefit from this. More of my time can be spent with research and writing. More of my time can be spent searching the literature that will in turn make me a better teacher.



Ed McNertney

Economics

My goal in teaching is to help students learn how to learn. I want to provide the opportunity for students to develop analytical thinking skills that will help them cope with unexpected problems in their future careers and lives. Economics is a discipline that lends itself nicely to this goal because, as a social science, its primary goal is to search for order in a seemingly chaotic world.

“Searching for order” means searching for connections between seemingly disparate entities. How does one help students begin to make the connections? The most important step is to get students beyond the rote-feedback learning mode with which they are most familiar. This is quite difficult, as anyone who has tried it is well aware. I have developed a computer simulation model for one of my courses that allows students to make parameter changes and experience the results of these changes graphically and numerically. I then ask students what they discovered in the experiment and then to use the evidence to think about how the variables might be connected. I have them write down their hypotheses and their reasoning and then ask them to tell me and the class what they written. I try not to indicate whether any possible connection is correct or incorrect, just continue the dialog until we reason out what we can discover and what we can’t. I have found this to be a useful technique.



Linda Moore

Social Work

I believe that teaching is a journey, not just a one semester destination. It is always a revelation and in many ways a struggle but there is no greater joy than teaching. Teaching is a constant, reciprocal learning process that gives me as much as or more than I provide to students.

Teaching is about empowerment. It links students to resources, provides critical thinking skills, and emphasizes effective decision-making so students will be able to seek and find information appropriate to their needs. They will also be able to challenge issues independently. Facilitating that process is exciting.

Courage is an important component of teaching and demands that teaching be honest. We must allow students to know when we do not have all the answers. It takes courage to challenge systems that may not be responsive to students or to the learning process. Students need to see courage in action so they can model it and gain it for themselves. It takes courage to maintain standards in the face of opposition from students and peers, to demand the best from students yet, invariably, they perform to the level of expectation. Students should leave a class with a sense of achievement and pride in the effort made, not just the grade earned.

Teaching involves reciprocal learning. One cannot be a truly good teacher by only providing information. Competence also requires the ability to present material in such a way that students can grasp it and use it. Because students have different learning styles, sharing our knowledge requires the ability to assess a class and determine the most effective techniques to use to present the material and to evaluate learning. The use of a variety of teaching strategies and tools allows each student to perform in areas of strength and helps all students learn to stretch in areas of difficulty.

Good teaching is ethical teaching. Students must be allowed to express their ideas and beliefs without fear of retribution. There must be openness to the ideas and experiences of students. A good teacher grows from every classroom experience. Students can provide insight, awareness of diverse points of view, and challenges to complacency. They also can provide enthusiasm about the learning process that can be energizing.

I believe that teaching should be exciting and fun. I once read that without enthusiasm, nothing is accomplished. Bringing excitement and even laughter into the classroom personifies the material, helps students make applications to real life, and makes the learning process exciting. Students notice how much we care and are easily caught up in our excitement about the material. We serve as role models for our students. They also need to see us stand up for our professional standards and beliefs and adhere to a code of behavior that respects others and ourselves.

Knowing that students leave my classes equipped to deal critically with real life issues is the greatest reward possible. My students have made an impact on TCU in many ways – social action, leadership, community service and role modeling - and have demonstrated that you can make a difference if you work hard and stay focused on your goals. They have shown me that there are many ways to learn and many ways to demonstrate that learning. They have responded to my teaching by performing effectively and ethically in the professional arena. They also taught me that learning never ends and that gaining the tools to continue the learning process throughout a lifetime is a crucial goal of education.

For all that, I gladly teach!



Dan Powell

School of Education

After 31 years as a teacher, principal, central office administrator and superintendent of schools, I returned to my alma mater, TCU, in the fall of 2004 - this time, as a faculty member in the school of education.

The experience was so rich! So much about the campus was broadly reminiscent of my collegiate life in the early 70's: the campus layout, the prominent buildings that have graced the landscape for several generations, the chimes on the hour, the great oak trees, so many sidewalks tracing my footsteps from three decades past. The Bailey Building, save for the elevator apparatus, new technology and the faces of a different generation of students, faculty and staff-was the same-down to the scent of the three floors of short hallways and rectangular classrooms.

The university's investment in new facilities, gardens and monuments altered the familiar feel of my youth. The campus of the first decade of the new millennium was even more tranquil and beautiful a setting than it was when the class of '74 roamed the grounds.

Having spent a career in public education, I was amazed at the resources available to new faculty on the TCU campus. The Center for Teaching Excellence offered every variety of assistance to those hoping to hone their instructional skills, from technology support and tremendous software to the writing center to topical presentations made by campus faculty or guest presenters-teaching was supported in a way that would astonish a public school educator. The library resources and the technology tools used to access information so quickly were really incredible.

For all this tapestry of familiar places and new faces, the most marvelous aspect of my return to the TCU campus were the students in my graduate education classes. For more than 20 years there have been scathing criticisms of our nation's schools and school teachers and administrators in print and electronic media. From 1984's A Nation at Risk to much more recent public discourse, one has been led to believe that those who taught our children and those who sought to lead elementary and secondary school organizations were incompetent and uncaring individuals who stood in the way of our children's success. While my personal experience with public school personnel has, for the most part, been greatly counter to such an assessment, my experience with the students who populate the graduate classes in the school of education has been nothing short of wonderful.

A huge percentage of graduate students in our program work on a full-time basis as teachers, coaches, counselors and assistant principals. They attend a couple of three-hour classes each week after what I would describe as most challenging workday. I have found them to be serious in their studies, proud of their work; excited about their futures, refreshingly dedicated to collegial collaboration, and most importantly-absolutely devoted to the children they serve.

Far from the expressions of doom we encounter so often from pundits of public education, my experience as a TCU faculty member gives me every confidence that those who will lead our community's schools of the future will be just the type of folk we would choose if we had our druthers.



Sherrie Reynolds

School of Education

I think of teaching as a dynamic relationship between a body of knowledge, the students in my class, and myself. It is a lot like bringing new and valued friends into a relationship with someone I have known well and for a long time. I have to remember that my students do not have the history together that my old friend and I have. As David Grant once taught me, almost none of my students will get a Ph.D. in Psychology, which means that almost none of them is like me. My undergraduate experience is not a good indicator of my students' undergraduate experience.

Teaching is a messy process. I spent years trying to organize my classes in a variety of ways, using a variety of technological devices. I finally realized that I can organize materials like the syllabus and such, but I can never organize the class because as soon as the students walk in the door it becomes their class, too. They have ideas and they participate in ways that change the plans I have made to a certain extent.

I also had to give up trying to figure out a magic answer for every class. Different classes require different approaches and different kinds of assignments. I try to think about the purpose of the class in terms of the ways that I hope students will be different at the end of the class and I spend a great deal of time thinking about the design of the class, assignments, assessments, etc. in light of that.

My teaching has improved considerably over the years, primarily because I sought out good professors and asked them what they were doing. Of course, the best feedback is from the students themselves. I use "quick writes" as a source of ongoing feedback, asking students to write to me about how things are going. (of course I mean how things are going in the class, but one semester a student started writing to me about how things were going in his life. I wrote back and he continued to write about it even during the weeks that I did not ask for a quick write. Later he told me that he had been suicidal and the notes we exchanged had helped him to hang on). I read quick writes carefully. I respond to them and, when warranted, I make changes to improve the class. I also get valuable feedback from working with students who do not understand or who are struggling. I often find that I change what I am doing in class based on the insights I get from working with these students.

I am excited about my classes and my students this semester. I hope, if I ever have a semester in which I do not feel that way, that I will consider leaving TCU. I think one of my greatest gifts is the passion I have for TCU, my discipline and my students.



Claire Sanders History

“How do you know what they learn?” asked my father, a retired college professor, when I told him that I had moved to discussion-based classes. He was clearly either dismayed or bewildered. Like most, I suspect, I began teaching, as I had been taught, lecturing to students. But at the end of my first semester of teaching, I discovered, while grading the final exam, that most students had misunderstood a fundamental and important bit of information in the textbook. And it was too late; the semester was over, there was nothing I could do to address students= misunderstanding.

Now, I require my students to send me at least three discussion questions concerning the current week’s reading, and those are the questions that shape the way the class approaches the material. I still “lecture,” but students spend a part of each class discussing questions and issues with each other and with me. The benefit is that it’s easier for me to discern what students are struggling with or have misunderstood. It’s easier for students to ask me questions about the material, and, what is most important, students have to engage, however minimally, with the material every class period. Students also learn that often one of their peers knows the answers to their questions, or that they can at least begin to answer their own questions. The other benefit is that I get to know my students better, students interrupt my lecture with good questions and respond to the questions I ask while I’m lecturing, and I’m never bored. In other words, I also stay engaged with the material and with my students. That’s especially important because I teach the same survey course every semester.

Students have told me that they work hard in my classes, and that they have fun. These remarks have come from “C” students, as well as “A” and “B” students. What more can a teacher ask for? I still don’t have a complete answer to my father’s question. I don’t know, absolutely, what students learn in my classes. But I do know that discussion-based classes help me be a better teacher, and that my students do learn.



John Singleton

International Student Services

Access is one of the most powerful words in the English language, and without education, there is no access. For me, education becomes nothing more complex than identifying barriers to access and removing those barriers. Noam Chomsky and Paulo Freire are traditional names associated with both the formal questioning of systematic barriers as well as the practice of community engagement which might eliminate those barriers, and my academic underpinnings are based on their writings.

As someone who rarely works in the formal classroom anymore, I must practice my education beliefs in other ways. Indeed, my work becomes the “practice” or application of the values I believe in. Whether in creating and designing programming that allows our various communities to express what is important or in making sure that our events reflect the absence of barriers, the things we do hopefully exist in harmony with the ideas of my theoretical beliefs. Access for international students at all community and University levels is a commitment of this office.

Using Kinomonda Foreign Cinema as one example, my office works hard to present cinema not easily accessed at local film stores or on television, and then we invite local restaurants to present food in harmony with this. This provides not only an interesting cultural setting from which to observe the film, but also creates an opportunity for engagement between the foreign cinema audience (often associated with “high art”) and the larger ethnic community that might have seen such film within the tradition of their own homes and first or “mother culture.”

We steer clear of showing foreign cinema that is solely associated with “high art”, and in exchange we try to create the opportunity to see what someone might see if they were going to the cinema in their country. Such cinema may be critical of traditional US worldwide activities but firmly rests within the definitions of free speech, and the fact that there is no charge means that obvious barriers in the form of a cost are eradicated. Other cultural barriers—location, message delivery, advertisement, etc—still prevent the existence of a “free” audience. Kinomonda still practices an educational message that attempts to err towards freedom of thought and belief.



Jeffrey Todd

Modern Languages

What can we do to motivate our students? One idea that often works well is to let go of the apron strings of a class text and latch on to a current topic. That was the approach I took this term in teaching my third-semester German course. German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder had called for new parliamentary elections and so, everyone interested in Germany suddenly had new elections to think about in what would normally be a non-election year.

This, I thought, would be an ideal topic for my German students. They could learn about the process whereby the German Parliament, then the Chancellor, are elected, and about basic differences from the American presidential system. In the process, they would acquire a working vocabulary of the political process, parties, and their positions.

One of the advantages of doing a unit on this subject is the wealth of information placed online by German government and news organizations. This material includes visuals illustrating every aspect of the election: election results, overall and by individual district, for this year and for all previous elections, figures on voter participation (77% this year, fairly apathetic by German standards, but still about 17% higher than the latest American figures), etc. One item I absolutely had to incorporate into the course was the “Wahl-O-Mat”, an award-winning computer program that asks the prospective voter questions, then gives visual feedback on the parties that best represent their opinions.

Many students responded to the shift to the elections as I had hoped: with heightened interest and the sense that they were learning about something tangibly real. But after a couple of classes, another reaction became equally clear. Regardless of the importance of the event, some of the students just weren't interested in the politics. Lo and behold, the political apathy that causes American voters to turn out in such relatively small numbers had made its way into my classroom.

I was faced with a dilemma. The tactic I had chosen to motivate the students was motivating some of them, but not all. So I should go back to the original plan, right? I wasn't so sure: if some students would, for instance, rather learn how to say the German equivalent of “See Spot run!” than learn about German politics on an important occasion, should I give in to that? Should one give in to apathy concerning political issues? Isn't that the kind of phenomenon education is supposed to combat in some way? Since it was clear that some students were getting a lot out of the political theme, I resolved to forge ahead for the time being.

After a couple of additional class days on the topic, I perceived that the apathy of the apolitical students had not abated. Very reluctantly, I decided to fold and forgo my ambitions of having them use the “Wahl-O-Mat.” Oh well, I thought, they were now in a position to orient themselves to some extent in the German political scene, even if not as well as I would like.

Did I, in the immortal words of Spike Lee, “do the right thing?” I'll let you decide. Part of me thinks I chickened out and gave in to tendencies I ought to be combating in a more effective manner. On the other hand, the drag of even a small minority of unmotivated students is a classroom reality that one cannot ignore. I struck a compromise: we learned enough about the politics to give orientation, but for the sake of the apolitical among us, we have moved on to the main topic of Chapter 3, the cultural differences between East and West Germans. Of course, I couldn't resist relating these differences to the recent elections.



Mark Toulouse

Brite Divinity School

As I think about my use of eCollege, and how it has changed my teaching or affected my approach to the classroom, I end up thinking along the lines of four categories:

Enhancement. eCollege for me is always used in a “companion” kind of way. It serves students in ways that the normal classroom experience does not. When I began use of eCollege, my assumption was that I could provide a “value-added” kind of experience for the advanced student. All students are not created equal. Some students possess the ability, the time, and the inclination to go “above and beyond” expectations associated with the class. With eCollege I could provide additional materials, easily accessible, for those students who were interested in pursuing avenues beyond the stated requirements of the class, either due to a personal interest or to satisfy strong academic curiosities. For each class session, I began to include extra materials students can explore on their own time. These often consist of “links” to reliable web-sites (either popular or scholarly), editorial cartoons or pictures or other illustrations, lectures on various topics, and essays written by me or by others. As I tracked actual use, I found my presuppositions have not always been accurate. It is true that some among the so-called “best students” in the class regularly use these materials and explore them at length. But students who, in various ways, have struggled with the required materials are also exploring them. In many cases, they have found in the “value-added” materials just the right thing to trigger greater understanding of the required materials.

Preparation. My extensive use of the threaded discussion feature associated with eCollege has affected my personal preparation for the classroom. Threaded discussions preceding classes always enable me to see how well students have engaged the readings, what they seem to be catching and/or missing. Their engagements with one another enable me to tailor my approach to lectures in important ways. Occasionally, planned lectures can be abandoned altogether. At other times, I shift the content of lectures to address material completely neglected in threads – or, material addressed in threads leads lectures and discussions in class in new and more advanced directions. Threaded discussions also allow students, in more advanced seminar sessions, to assume some level of responsibility, in response to assignments and their original research, in setting the agenda for how we utilize our class time. This strengthens both my preparation for the seminar and that of students.

Engagement. I have found that threaded discussions have greatly increased the level of student engagement with course material and with one another. In some cases, threaded discussions have actually provided some students with a “voice” they are simply unable to assume in the classroom. Some students are more comfortable at the keyboard than with speaking in a class setting. Further, with threaded discussions, I can gauge the level of student engagement with material much more quickly. Before my use of eCollege, I usually had to wait until the first written assignment (weeks into the term) to gain a sense of who possesses significant analytical skill among students and who needed help to move beyond elementary abilities providing not much more than simple summary, and not always an accurate summary at that. Threaded discussions provide early indications of the level of student abilities to engage material. And, as students respond to one another, they push each other to greater levels of engagement. Rotating responsibilities among students for leadership in these threads, and for responding to those who provide leadership, has motivated students to be more engaged in reading materials prior to walking into class. That has increased the quality of the time we spend together, and the quantity of material we are able to cover in class.

Feedback. Finally, eCollege has provided me with the ability to offer a higher quality of feedback to students, especially through use of the “dropbox” for receiving and returning assignments. For a few years preceding my use of eCollege, students had begun to express their desire to e-mail assignments, instead of delivery of “hard copy.” I resisted, mostly because I did not want to download and print from a number of different e-mails. With the dropbox, student papers don’t clog up my e-mail, and I have learned to resist the impulse to print everything. Though it has taken some adjustment on my part, I have found, once I developed some techniques and skills related to the task, that I can evaluate and respond to electronic papers more efficiently and effectively than is true of papers I receive the “old” way. I can insert feedback directly into the text, rather than scribbling on margins.



Kerrie Conover

Julius Tsai

Religion

Exploring new technologies has provided me with valuable opportunities to reflect upon the myriad processes involved in teaching and learning. For example, I have been struck by the way that technology can work to extend interpersonal interaction beyond the confines of the traditional classroom (as both a bounded physical as well as temporal space). One particularly helpful tool in this regard is the threaded discussion, which I have used at both the introductory as well as the upper levels. These can be used as open forums to discuss class readings, presentations, films, or other materials; in more directed ways in which I might give my students certain questions to reflect upon or passages of the reading to decipher; or even as a virtual gathering place for students as they help each other prepare for exams. Students gain because they are able to have more channels through which to ask questions and express themselves. As an instructor I also gain because I am able to get a behind-the-scenes look at how the students are learning, and be able to conduct a more extended dialogue with them throughout the semester. In many cases what the students are writing on the threaded discussion boards serves as an anticipatory springboard for structuring in-class presentations and discussions. In terms of using the threaded discussion board most effectively, I've found that a fairly conscientious effort at the outset in providing students with concrete guidelines and models for effective posts goes a long way, for example, in asking provocative questions that offer them a concrete yet open-ended place to begin their engagement with the readings, in structuring posts so that students are asked to respond to each other, or providing feedback in class that affirms and guides the ongoing nature of their writing. In quite fundamental ways, threaded discussion and other online tools and formats are not simply exercises in technical mastery, but invitations to pedagogical discovery.



Keith Whitworth

Sociology/CJ/Anthropology

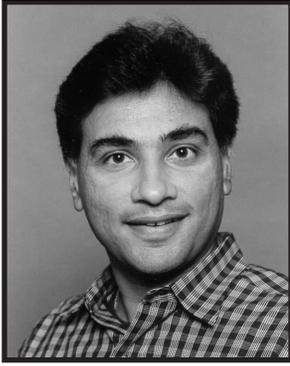
My role as a sociologist is to examine society in order to better understand the culture, social structure, and people within it. My role as a sociology instructor includes that I also understand the student culture within the university in order to effectively communicate the intended material. There are three unique societal and cultural elements which impact how I deliver the material to Millennial (Generation Y) university students: social speedup, connectedness, and instant gratification. First, social speedup describes the fast paced American society. We are on the move constantly and the pace is a fast jog instead of the stroll which I experienced twenty-five years ago during my university experience. Second, connectedness is a characteristic which depicts our dependence upon technology to maintain connections with others. Students are connected to others by cell phones, instant messaging, and email. Even within the classroom, students are prone to text messaging. Upon exiting the classroom, students (as if by reflex), instantly reach for their phones to check for messages or to connect with a friend or family member. (During my university experience, I rationed my long distance phone calls to once a week when I called my parents. “Disconnected” better characterized my university experience in contrast to “connectedness.”) Third, instant gratification is a characteristic exhibited by Generation Xer’s and Millennials. This cultural norm is firmly embedded within our society and embodied by microwaveable constructs. Our fast food nation and 24/7 mentality characterize our desire to have it “our way” at any time of the day or night.

Therefore, I recognize the need to adjust my pedagogy to reflect the societal and cultural elements of the current generation of students. How can I effectively deliver the content of the course to students who are seemingly in a “fast forward” mode? How can students stay connected to the course 24/7? How can I deliver the material upon demand? These monumental tasks have led me to reexamine how I deliver the course content. My ruminations resulted in decisions to embrace the societal and cultural elements rather than contest the social forces.

My first decision was to develop web-enhanced courses which allow students to connect to the course content via the Internet at their convenience. Each course still offers the traditional classroom experience but provides added value through the course web site. Students have the option of connecting with their classmates via threaded discussions, email and chatroom features at any time of the day or night. In addition, I have chosen textbooks which include publisher content that is uploaded to the course web site. The publisher content includes online practice quizzes, crossword puzzles, flashcards, and a host of other supplemental material. This material allows students to access the course content on demand. In addition, student feedback indicates the publisher content is an effective tool that engages them in the course.

A recent decision to incorporate an audience response system within the classroom has proven to be an effective means of providing instant feedback, thus addressing the need for instant gratification. Students respond to written or verbal questions using a transmitter the size of television remote control. The results of the poll are instantly projected on the screen. Feedback from students indicates the audience response system connects them to the lecture. This new technology enables me to quickly poll students to determine if they understand the material presented. If the results reveal students do not comprehend the material, I quickly assess how I can retool and redeliver the material. The instant feedback potentially improves the quality of the lecture due to the real time evaluation.

Through the above technological enhancements to my courses, I have attempted to address the issues of social speedup, connectedness, and instant gratification. Students have the opportunity to access the course content at their convenience, connect with each other through email and chatrooms, and gain instant feedback during a lecture. My attempt to apply these concepts within the classroom may not necessarily improve the course outcomes, but it does satisfy my desire to be culturally sensitive to Millennial students. In addition, it has allowed me to create a classroom environment that I would have enjoyed if I had been provided the opportunity twenty-five years ago.



Zach G. Zacharia

Information System & Supply Chain Management

Introduction

This essay focuses on the value of utilizing specific team based learning techniques to address two problems I have found in my teaching, namely poor group projects and students not completing assigned readings before class. Poorly designed group projects can encourage student loafing where some students feel they do not have to work as hard as everyone else in their group or in the class. When students do not complete their readings, the class discussion tends to be much poorer as we have to cover material that is found in the readings, limiting the quality of discussion. In my experience I have found team based learning techniques such as proper team formation, individual accountability, and group accountability help ensure good group projects and readiness assessment tests (RAT) ensure assigned readings are completed before class.

Team Formation

Instructors should decide before class starts on the number of students per team and the composition of the different teams. Group learning is facilitated by ensuring the groups are different, large (5-7) and diverse (Michaelsen 2004). Increasing the number of group members encourages more interaction and reduces the effect of a single individual. In the past groups were formed by the students through self selection. To facilitate team based learning a preferred method is to have the instructor select the team members based on some important criteria. For example, arrange the students according to their work experience with starting with students with lots of experience on one end and students with very little experience on the other end. The students then count off 1, 2, 3, 4 and students with the same number will be in the same team ensuring a mix of work experience. By forming the group in this way prevented friends who are sitting together to end up in the same team, no student felt left out and there was a greater perception of fairness. Another benefit of the instructor selecting the teams is the encouragement of diversity of opinions and the need for the team to develop its own cohesiveness as the term progressed.

Individual Accountability

An important component of team based learning is the need for accountability both at the individual and group level. Individuals must feel that the effort they put into a group project matters. One of the risks of group projects is the problem of social loafing where students do not contribute equally and some students are forced to carry their less willing and/or less able peers (Michaelsen 2004). This process can be avoided by including a peer evaluation form that is part of the grading system.

Group Accountability

Accountability should also be maintained at the group level. There are a number of important characteristics to making groups accountable (Michaelsen 2004). The first step is to have all the groups deal with the same project and the importance of this step can be illustrated by comparing my past experience. In a course I taught several years ago as part of the group project, students were encouraged to select a company of their choice and evaluate their logistics practices and provide recommendations for improvement. The presentations made by the teams in this course had very little interaction or questions by other teams. Using team based learning techniques for another course I decided to have all the teams work on solving the same problem with the same company. Having the same project increased the interaction level in the final presentation as students now challenged the assumptions and recommendations presented by each group. The groups understood they were competing with each other from the beginning of the project and this resulted in greater group accountability as members realized their own success is tied to the success of the group.

Readiness Assessment Test (RAT)

The Readiness Assessment Test (RAT) is a test, typically 10 questions based on the reading material that has to be done at the beginning of class. When a new topic or chapter is to be presented, the first ten minutes of the class is spent in individually answering a multiple choice test using a standard scantron form. After the students complete the individual RAT they then get into their teams and retake the same exam as a team using a special Immediate Feedback Assessment Form (IFAT) developed by Michael Epstein (Dihoff, Brosvic, Epstein, and Cook 2004). This process typically takes about another 10 minutes using the IFAT form. This IFAT form is a multiple choice form similar to a scantron except the answers are covered by an opaque coating that has to be scraped off to indicate an answer selection. Correct answers are indicated by the presence of a star. In the IFAT form, students answer the question till they get it correct. Students received 4 marks if they get the correct answer in their first choice, 2 marks if it is their second choice and 1 mark if it is their third choice. IFAT forms also help provide timely performance feedback. Students tend to remember the last response for a test question even if the response is an error. This is contrasted to remembering the last response using an IFAT form, which always results in remembering the correct answer. IFAT forms also encourage all the team members to participate. Team members who are not as vocal or perhaps a minority in some fashion but know the correct answer will gain confidence as they get immediate feedback on the correctness of their answer. In the same sense, dominating personalities learn to listen to team members who are not as vocal. As teams become more cohesive over time there is a more intense give-and-take as students are asked to voice and defend their choice on every question. At the beginning of the term students vote on the best answer, but over the course of the term, students start to learn who has prepared and who is good at answering the test questions. It is important the questions used in the RAT are challenging enough that students will have some discussion in the group RAT exam. Trivial questions will not encourage discussion or encourage the students to prepare for the exam.

Conclusion

This paper discussed a number of team based learning techniques that faculty can consider using in their classes to enhance student learning. These techniques include forming student teams, individual and group readiness assessment tests, common group projects and accountability at the individual and group level. By incorporating these team based learning techniques it is hoped there will be increased learning and greater satisfaction for both students and faculty.

MEET THE CTE STAFF



Dr. Catherine Wehlburg,
Ph.D.
Director



Romana Hughes
eLearning



Wade Couturiaux
Instructional Design Assistant



Lori Stowe
Administrative Assistant

Mission Statement

The mission of the William H. Koehler Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE) is to support teaching and learning at Texas Christian University (TCU). The resources and activities of the CTE are focused both on honoring the present needs of instruction and informing the TCU community of the increasing possibilities brought by changing pedagogical theory, innovative practice, and new technologies. The staff of the CTE is dedicated to working with individuals, departments, and programs to design and implement meaningful learning opportunities and to facilitate ongoing, reflective participation in the conversations regarding teaching and learning.

The William H. Koehler
Center for Teaching Excellence
Texas Christian University
Located in Sid Richardson, Suite 501
TCU Box 298970
Fort Worth, Texas 76129
Phone: 817.257.7434
Fax: 817.257.7393
www.cte.tcu.edu