What We Can Only Learn From Others

You know when you have an “a-ha” moment and two ideas from completely different contexts suddenly merge in your mind? I had this happen to me when I attended a recent faculty panel discussion in Math about the use of clickers. The panelists shared a variety of experiences and gave excellent advice to their colleagues. My “a-ha” moment arose when the panel facilitator declared how much she had learned about her students when she started to use clickers: “I thought I knew what they were thinking. Boy, was I wrong!” Her statement cemented for me the extreme value of asking others about their thinking rather than making assumptions and then devising plans based on those assumptions.

You may have heard that the CTE is going to have an external review in 2017. It’s time and it’s part of our institutional strategic plan for outstanding academic programming. Our Centre was launched in 2007; a merger of three existing units that supported teaching excellence. Many things have changed since then, including the structure of our leadership, our staffing, the breadth of services that we provide, and our location. Organic, evolutionary change is positive, but there is value in stepping back to see where we’ve been, what’s on the horizon, and how to get there. And this is where the “a-ha” moment comes in: my small CTE team working on this review cannot know what others think about where we are and where we could go. I’ve always known this, but it is one thing to know it, and another to do something about it.

And so we’ll be asking, both as we prepare for our self-study and during the external reviewers’ visit. We have already started to ask some different questions on our feedback instruments about our services, focusing on ways that working with us have helped to enhance your capacity and your community as teachers. These changes are part of launching a comprehensive assessment plan that connects to our Centre’s overall aims. But we have also begun to work on sets of questions for our external review about areas that we may just be too close to see clearly or cannot know because the responses needed are others’ perceptions. These questions involve topics ranging from our mission statement and organizational structure to our relationships with others and the quality of our work. We also need input on the possibilities for “CTE 2.0”: where could we be in another 10 years?

We’ll be starting this data collection with our own staff members by performing a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) this spring term. But we will be seeking input far beyond our own walls, and beyond UWaterloo. When we come knocking (literally, or by email, or by online survey), I trust you’ll answer and provide your honest feedback and insights. We believe we are a responsive organization that helps those who work with us to achieve their goals, and we have some data to support these claims, but we want more. We want your input. We want to be able to say: “We didn’t know that. We’re so glad we asked!”

If you have thoughts or insights into our external review plans, please let me know. You can reach me at donnae@uwaterloo.ca or at extension 35713. We want to make this external review activity as generative and useful as possible. I am optimistic that with your help, we can achieve just that.

Donna Ellis
Kanstantsin Tsedryk: Paradigm Shifts

The walk to the classroom on the third floor of the Modern Languages Building is quite plain and leads to an even plainer brown door. There’s nothing striking about this classroom – except for the energy and excitement radiating not only from the instructor smiling at the front of the classroom, but from the clusters of eager and bustling students. The instructor in question – Dr. Kanstantsin Tsedryk – looks to his students and sees a community, a family, a tightly knit group of people from all different backgrounds, yet with many similar ambitions.

Tsedryk is uncompromising in his determination to bring his students together to create an experience that doesn’t just teach them French grammar, but rather changes the way they approach their learning. Tsedryk eschews the traditional model of language learning where students memorize patterns and lists. Instead, he advocates that learning a language – and learning in general – is not about cramming, memorizing, and ultimately forgetting, but rather about creating a sense of academic excitement that motivates students to engage with the material. Tsedryk explains that in order to truly learn, his students must change their perspectives; instead of trying to make sense of French syntax using English principles, he pushes his students toward a more fundamental paradigm shift. The objective is to encourage students to take control of their own learning. How does he accomplish such an ambitious endeavour? The answer lies in the fact that Tsedryk’s enthusiasm in the classroom is rivaled only by his preparation outside of it.

Kanstantsin’s commitment to excellence in teaching extends to every facet of his professional life. Tsedryk’s preparation is analogous to that of a performer. He plans and constructs his props, he practices and rehearses for the classroom, and – most important – he delivers his lessons with gusto. Tsedryk starts with intricately timed presentations that make use of engaging visual design, transitions, and flow. Next, he organizes his students into groups and equips them with thoughtfully constructed activities to guide them through the lesson and consolidate their learning. Tsedryk emphasizes the importance of peer instruction, explaining that it is a critical step in his goal of changing his students’ perspectives. He points out that 20 individuals offer a much greater breadth and scope of experiences, contexts, and ideas than he alone can provide.

Technology offers us so much in the way of learning, yet much of it is either ignored or, worse, misused. Tsedryk has an exacting set of criteria for the technology he uses in his classroom, cornerstones of which are usability and accessibility. When adopting a technology, there must be a clear need for it. The selected platform must be a perfect fit to that purpose, otherwise it can become detrimental. Next, it must be free and available to everyone. Tsedryk stresses participation and involvement in his classroom, which is why he
may be seen handing his phone to a student so that he or she can participate in Kahoot! a learning platform that allows instructors to create their own “Kahoots”, designed for game-based learning. Tsedryk projects his Kahoot onto the main screen, and students interact with it and each other using their smart phones. He formulates his questions so that when students answer incorrectly they are not discouraged and bewildered but rather experience an “aha!” moment about some aspect of the French language.

Tsedryk’s devotion and enthusiasm for his students, along with his meticulously planned lessons, create an unforgettable classroom. Ultimately, Tsedryk hopes that his students will put to good use not only the language, but those crucial teamwork, communication, and learning skills he cultivates. As his student Jade Bedley observes, “His passion for the French language really shows through his teaching, and I think it's what makes him such a great professor.”

Teaching award nomination due dates for 2017
Tips on writing a persuasive nomination letter can be found in Trevor Holmes’ blog entry ‘How to Write an Effective Nomination Letter’.

Distinguished Teacher Awards are given in recognition of a continued record of excellence in teaching at the University of Waterloo. The nomination deadline is Friday, February 3, 2017. For more information, visit the Distinguished Teacher Awards webpage.

Amit & Meena Chakma Awards for Exceptional Teaching by a Student are given in recognition of excellence in teaching by students registered at the University of Waterloo. The nomination deadline is Friday, February 10, 2017. For more information, visit the Amit & Meena Chakma Awards for Exceptional Teaching by a Student webpage.

2016 CUT Award Recipient: Alexander Howse, Applied Math

The Centre for Teaching Excellence and the Graduate Studies Office are pleased to announce that Alexander Howse, a doctoral student in the Department of Applied Mathematics, was selected as the recipient of the 2016 Certificate in University Teaching (CUT) Award. This award is given annually to a graduate student who shows a strong commitment to their development as a university teacher and demonstrates the highest achievement on completion of the CUT program. Information about the award, including the list of past award recipients, is available on the CTE website. Congratulations, Alexander!
Distinguished Teacher Award Recipients for 2016

Jee-Hae Lim, School of Accounting and Finance

Since she joined the University of Waterloo in June 2006, Lim has been credited for taking a course that students approached with trepidation and turning it into a course that students love. She is known for establishing a personal connection with students, even in large classes – by learning names, doing homework checks in the classroom, and offering career advice during her office hours. One undergraduate described Lim as “dynamic in the classroom, supportive during office hours (regular and extended), and overall a great instructor and person to interact with.” Lim’s innovative assignments are designed to get students to extend their knowledge beyond the classroom and the textbook. An alumna commented that, “Jee-Hae is like an invisible hand, gently pushing from behind, [and] encouraging people to accomplish that which at first seems impossible, pausing and applauding as each milestone is reached before gently pushing again towards an even higher goal.” One of Lim’s colleagues wrote that, “She brings the same analytical and comprehensive approach to delivering her courses that she brings to developing her research. In both cases, her performance is exemplary.”

Robert McKillop, Civil and Environmental Engineering

McKillop is known simply as “Bob” to students and colleagues alike. Since joining the university full time in 1999, he has taught a variety of courses at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. McKillop is recognized for his one-on-one support of students, consistently high level of preparation, real world relevance in his courses, and setting demanding but realistic standards. These factors contribute to McKillop’s students being more successful. “It is noteworthy,” commented one of McKillops colleagues, “that in recent years, the Electrical, Computer, and Management Engineering programs have begun to implement Bob’s strategies in their 1A term so that their students can benefit from the ‘Bob Effect.’” As a current undergrad noted, “Dr. McKillop is one of the first faces they see, and he stays with them until they have successfully navigated their first year of undergrad.” An alumna elaborates, “In the 15 years that I have known him, there is one thing that has never changed: he is as excited each September to meet his new first-year students as he was the previous September. Bob is not only excited to meet his new students, he is hopeful for their future and what they can accomplish.”
Kathryn Plaisance, Knowledge Integration

Plaisance, who has been at UWaterloo since 2009, has been a valuable foundational member of the Knowledge Integration program, and has had a transformative impact on her colleagues. Along with many presentations to peers about her teaching practices, Plaisance created a workshop with her students to help other faculty members implement collaborative strategies into their teaching. Many faculty members who attended remarked that the experience would change the way they taught in their own classrooms (she and her students have been asked to run a second such workshop in April). Plaisance is known for being approachable to students and makes herself available to meet outside of class to discuss matters that are affecting them – both personally and academically. One undergraduate student commented that “Katie has the ability to challenge her students while simultaneously building academic confidence. Every student that takes a class with Katie grows as a writer, philosopher, learner, and listener.” To quote one of Plaisance’s colleagues, “Her pedagogy is rigorous and exciting at the same time. She is rapidly emerging as one of UWaterloo’s leading exemplars in teaching.”

Mark Pritzker, Chemical Engineering

Pritzker is the Teaching Champion for the Department of Chemical Engineering. Many nominators noted Pritzker’s natural ability to engage students, his organization of lectures, and his enthusiasm towards the course material – “it is impossible not to be impressed.” One undergraduate noted that “he’ll ask the students questions to prompt them into thinking, if he observes that they aren’t retaining the material well. He pays very close attention to the students’ body language and adapts his teaching accordingly.” An alumnus turned faculty member remarked that “Sixteen years after taking Mark’s course I still vividly remember his lectures on half-cell potential and corrosion.” Pritzker, who started at the University of Waterloo in 1989, is well known for going above and beyond the expectations of both students and colleagues. A faculty member raved, “His teaching packages and the notes for the courses he has taught are used by numerous other faculty members which is a testament to the quality of the instruction and overall organization and presentation of the material.” One student recognized that “Professors like Dr. Pritzker show students that post-secondary education is more than just getting a degree.”

Maggie Bradley
Amit and Meena Chakma Awards for Exceptional Teaching by a Student Recipients for 2016

**Tiffany Bayley, Management Sciences**

Tiffany Bayley is an Engineering PhD candidate in Management Sciences. She is recognized by students for her dedication and preparedness in her teaching roles for a variety of courses. In 2010, Bayley received a department award for her performance as a teaching assistant. In 2011, she received the Sandford Fleming Teaching Assistant Award. One student remarked that “Bayley’s passion for teaching and deep expertise of the complex concepts [were] evident throughout the entire semester.” Another undergraduate student commented that “her teaching clarifies concepts magically.” Bayley has been described by a faculty member as “a very valuable asset to me, enriching the course with her technical expertise and enabling me to more seamlessly manage different aspects of the course.” Bayley continues to make a difference in the lives of her students by going above and beyond their expectations.

**John Doucette, Computer Science**

John Doucette, a doctoral candidate at the David R. Cheriton School of Computer Science at the University of Waterloo, is recognized for being approachable, thorough, and passionate about teaching. When ranking Doucette’s teaching on a scale from 1 (unsatisfactory) to 4 (outstanding), one student asked, “Can I give John a 5? Because he deserves one. John is phenomenal!” And another student remarked that “even though it was an 8:30am lecture, his classes were always full.” A faculty member praised Doucette by expressing that he “is a top-ranked candidate, with an unmatched array of talents and experience.” Doucette began his undergraduate studies at the age of 15. Given his long and proven track record for exceptional teaching, Doucette is a very deserving recipient of this award.
Hadi Hosseini, Computer Science

Hadi Hosseini is a highly-motivated PhD candidate at the David R. Cheriton School of Computer Science. He is able to get his students actively involved in the classroom and encourages them to answer (and ask) questions. He shows students that he is genuinely interested in them by learning their names and entertaining “tangential conversations about Computer Science after lectures.” This personal engagement is reflected in Hosseini’s high course evaluations. One undergraduate student commented that “he clearly showed that he cared about his students and their success.” Along with his studies and teaching, Hosseini works at the Centre for Teaching Excellence as a Teaching Assistant Workshop Facilitator to help guide other Waterloo graduate students in advancing their knowledge, techniques, and skills as instructors. One professor remarked that, “As a teaching assistant, Hosseini has always done a phenomenal job.”

Laura Sauder, Biology

Laura Sauder, a PhD student in Biology working with the Neufeld Research Group, is recognized by students for her unconventional but effective teaching methods. She taught BIOL 240, a course she never took as an undergraduate student, for Josh Neufeld during his sabbatical, and “exceeded his highest expectations.” When her students recall their time at UWaterloo, they will think of her interactive class demonstrations, microbiology art contests, personal anecdotes, and her microbiology Twitter account (@Biol240_2015). Multiple undergraduates commented that Sauder made students in her 300-plus student lectures feel like they were sitting in a class of thirty. On the last day, she provided her students with tips for long-term success in Biology. One undergraduate student remarked that Sauder was “really dedicated and passionate about the material she was teaching.” A Biology professor commented, “Laura Sauder is a rising star of Canadian academia and demonstrates a perfect storm of research and teaching excellence.”

Maggie Bradley
Teaching Squares Program

For those of you teaching in the upcoming term and looking for a manageable teaching development opportunity, consider participating in the campus wide Teaching Squares Program. The aim of the Teaching Squares approach is to enhance teaching and learning through a structured process of classroom observation, reflection and discussion (leading to a plan for revitalization of one’s own teaching). The total time commitment over the term is approximately 6 hours. All interested instructors are invited to email Monica Vesely (mvesely@uwaterloo.ca) indicating the term you would like to participate (the coming term – Spring 2016 or later in the year) and the course you will be teaching.

Monica Vesely

A Day Dedicated to Learning from Challenge and Failure

It was moving and inspiring to witness over 300 colleagues gather on April 28 for the eighth annual University of Waterloo Teaching and Learning Conference. Over 275 people from across the Faculties at Waterloo, as well as numerous colleagues from neighbouring universities, participated in over thirty-five research-based and practice-based sessions. These numbers tell an important story about the thriving community of people dedicated to teaching and learning at Waterloo. What they do not adequately capture, however, is the prevailing ambience at the Conference which was one of unmistakable enthusiasm, positivity, and commitment to honest exchange about a topic that lies at the periphery of our comfort zones.

The theme of this year’s Conference was “Learning from Challenge and Failure.” It is a theme that acknowledges the deeply human dimension of teaching and learning – the courage it takes to teach and learn – and the resilience needed to learn from challenges, mistakes, and failures. It was an opportunity to explore with our colleagues, our students, and ourselves the beliefs we hold about challenges, setbacks, and failure in the context of teaching and learning at the University. Sessions addressed thought-provoking questions, such as “What strategies do you use to teach or communicate that it’s acceptable to make mistakes?”, “How can we foster resilience in our teaching and learning community?”, and “How do we work to cultivate a culture that encourages risk-taking, growth through experimentation, and learning from earnest attempts that could lead to failure?”.

Presidents’ Colloquium Keynote Speaker, Dr. Michael Starbird, explored this theme in his session, “Make Mistakes: Fail to Succeed.” Michael is a University Distinguished Teaching Professor of Mathematics at the University of Texas at Austin and a self-described “teacher of effective thinking.” During his session, Michael engaged us in an exercise that allowed us to discover for ourselves that making mistakes may be essential to moving forward. That is, for problems that initially seem beyond our ability, an initial attempt to solve them, even though incorrect, may eventually lead to more complete and correct responses.

During the “Igniting our Practice” session, two inspiring and award-winning Waterloo professors, Troy Vasiga from Computer Science and Greta Kroeker from History, recreated the learning spaces they design for their students and drew us into the ways of thinking and practicing of their disciplines. Troy taught the fundamental computer science concept of recursion by first using illuminating examples of recursion from the artistic, philosophical, and literary realms. Greta’s creative approach to addressing the challenge of helping students connect with primary sources in a large lecture class led us to engage in the unexpected activity of creating a Facebook page for Julius Caesar. Through their animated sessions, Troy and Greta demonstrated that the situations that pose challenges to student learning may be the very situations that allow us to explore the most creative approaches to teaching.

The commitment and efforts of many people are required for a day such as this to come to fruition. At the Centre for Teaching Excellence, we’re particularly grateful for the vision and financial support of the Associate Vice-President, Academic, Mario Coniglio. This support enables several CTE staff members to
dedicate themselves to designing a Conference that keeps participants’ experiences at the heart of all decisions. The Teaching Fellows are vital in helping to shape and promote the Conference. Presenters’ experiences and expertise contribute to a program that is rich and varied. We are also grateful to staff from ITMS and Creative Services who enable the day to be documented. And we thank Catering Services for providing delicious food for participants year after year, which includes a lovely breakfast generously sponsored by FAUW.

My hope is that people will continue to share their stories of learning from challenges and failures at the many levels at which we engage in teaching work at the University.

For further details about this year’s Conference, please visit the Conference [website]. We look forward to seeing you at the University of Waterloo Teaching and Learning Conference in 2017.

Julie Timmermans

Staffing Updates in CTE

We are fortunate. Our superb team of staff members has remained fairly stable over the past few years. But change is inevitable and comes with new opportunities. In this article, our key staffing changes to date are highlighted.

Pictured (left to right): Veronica Brown, Trevor Holmes, Monica Vesely, Stephanie White, Samar Mohamed, Monika Soczewinski, and Jane Holbrook.

- **Veronica Brown** assumed a newly created role of Senior Instructional Developer, Curriculum & Quality Enhancement, as of February 1. In this position, Veronica provides oversight and facilitative support for departmental and Faculty-wide curriculum planning initiatives. She also guides the Centre’s assessment plan for understanding the impact and quality of our work.

- **Trevor Holmes’** position title changed to Senior Instructional Developer, Faculty Programs and Research, also as of February 1. With the curriculum work moving primarily to Veronica, Trevor can focus more on planning and managing faculty programs, including our research support area.

- **Monica Vesely’s** position title also changed as of February 1 to Instructional Developer, Faculty Programs and Consulting. Monica’s work focuses on providing instructional development support for faculty members, and her title change reflects this.

- **Stephanie White** joined CTE in mid-February in a newly created position of Instructional Developer, TA Training and Writing Support. Stephanie is involved in the delivery of teaching development programs for graduate students and postdoctoral fellows, and also supports discipline-based writing initiatives at the course, department, and faculty levels. This position was created in relation to the Academic Programming strategic plan.

- **Samar Mohamed**, our Faculty Liaison in Engineering, is taking a one-year leave to travel with her family. We will hire contractually to fill her position during her absence.

- **Monika Soczewinski**, our Program Coordinator for Graduate and Postdoctoral Programs, will be away in Fall and Winter terms on parental leave. We will hire contractually to fill her position during her absence.

- **Jane Holbrook**, Senior Instructional Developer, Blended Learning, is retiring as of October 1. We are currently working on our plans for replacing her position.
With these many comings and goings, CTE will be a dynamic place this year. We welcome our new staff and wish well those taking time away from us. We are especially sad to see Jane leave, but wish her all the best in the next phase of her life! She has brought much wisdom and leadership to CTE, and we will miss her.

**Donna Ellis**

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**Congratulations to CTE Winter 2016 grads!**

The following six students completed the Certificate in University Teaching program in Winter 2016: Amin Ganjidoost (ENG), Alexander Howse (MAT), Ned Yao-Te Huang (ENG), Kimberly Lopez (AHS), Carolina Silveira (AHS) and Kajan Srirangan (ENG).

In addition to CUT graduates, 57 participants completed the Fundamentals of University Teaching program in Winter 2016. The numbers by faculty are as follows: Applied Health Sciences 6, Arts 12, Engineering 19, Environment 6, Mathematics 7, and Science 7.

**Monika Soczewinski**

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**A Message from the CTE Graduate Student Team**

The Centre for Teaching Excellence also welcomes new members to the graduate student team – Laura Williams (AHS) joined the TA Workshop Facilitator team starting in the Spring 2016 term; and Tommy Mayberry (ART) has moved to the Graduate Instructional Developer role as of Spring 2016. We would also like to welcome back Maxwell Hartt (ENV) and Dave Guyadeen (ENV), who are returning for an additional term at CTE, in the TA Workshop Facilitator and Graduate Instructional Developer roles, respectively.

We would like to thank our past graduate student staff Marcie Chaudet, Hadi Hosseini, and Dylon McChesney, for all of their hard work and contributions made during their time at the CTE, and wish them the best of luck in their future endeavours.
The workshop facilitators are doctoral students who successfully completed CTE’s Fundamentals of University Teaching program. They were hired based on their interest in university teaching, strong communication skills, and interest in supporting teaching development of graduate students.

Monika Soczewinski

Teaching Matters is published by the Centre for Teaching Excellence at the University of Waterloo. At the Centre, we foster teaching and learning of the highest quality at Waterloo.

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Previous Teaching Matters newsletters can be viewed in CTE's newsletter archives.
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