

Focusing on Teaching and Learning

As we enter a New Year, we are encouraged to think about resolutions for changes: getting more papers published, spending more time with family, losing those “holiday pounds”... Whatever your areas for focus, I would suggest that you add a resolution about teaching. Let this year be the one that you experiment with a new teaching technique, learn more about learning theory, reflect on your course designs, talk to your colleagues more about teaching.

TRACE just ran our annual “Understanding the Learner” workshop in December. At this session, faculty member and graduate student participants together were introduced to key learning theories then came to better understand themselves as learners. Everyone completed the Soloman-Felder Index of Learning Styles (the link can be found at: <http://www.ncsu.edu/felder-public/ILSpage.html>), and learned about their own learning preferences, which can and do affect their teaching styles – we tend to teach in the way we like to learn. Participants worked on expanding their teaching repertoires to help balance their teaching styles and reach more students.

We’ve also restructured our TRACE Tips Sheets, as part of our overhaul of our office website. We

have tried to organize the sheets according to common issues that instructors may face to help you find suggestions more easily.

I would encourage you to consider one aspect of teaching and/or learning that you’d like to learn more about or work to improve this year, and let TRACE know how we can help you reach your goal. Sign up for a workshop, come in for an individual consultation, talk to a Teaching Excellence Council member in your Faculty, invite TRACE to a department meeting. At TRACE, we’re here to serve you with support that is professional, pragmatic, and respectful of diverse approaches to teaching and learning. Our contact information is on the back page of the newsletter. We look forward to hearing from you!

Donna Ellis

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Course Design Online

Starting this Winter, you can access the TRACE course design workshop online! You can complete the workshop exercises at your own pace, in your own space. There are also extra activities added in, thanks to the online tools available. You can engage in as many of the activities as you need. CUT participants may also complete this workshop, but need to do all of the activities.

So, whether you want a model to

help with course design or re-design, or you want to try out a short online course to get ideas for your own courses, please contact Donna Ellis at ext. 5713 to get access to the workshop. If you prefer to take the face-to-face version, it will be offered near the end of this term. Check out our workshop offerings on the back page of the newsletter. We hope to add more online workshops in the near future.

Student Visions of Course Concepts



Renée MacPhee's classroom is abuzz with student discussion, questioning, and sharing – not always a common sight in a class of 126 at 8:30 in the morning! One of her secrets? Images selected by students to help illustrate course concepts.

This graduate student in UW's Health Studies & Gerontology program recently taught *Concepts in Health*, a second-year health course for the Department of Kinesiology and Physical Education at Wilfrid Laurier University. In the class on 'healthy weight', they received the following short participation assignment: "For next class, bring back three images that represent weight. One image must represent an item of a desirable weight, one must represent an overweight item, and the last one must represent an underweight item. The images can be from newspapers, magazines, the internet, or they can be hand drawn, but they don't have to be human bodies." By the next class, students had brought in pictures and drawings of all

kinds of items: people, dogs, tires, fruits, vegetables, and even diamond rings! All pictures represented the three weight classes, and students willingly shared their images and discussed them while Renée marked their contributions. If there was doubt regarding the validity of an example, students were given the chance to explain their reasoning. She used a series of these short assignments throughout the term, and used the students' pass/fail marks as part of their participation grades.

Renée sees this type of activity as fitting with an experiential design model, something she first learned about while completing her diploma in Adult Education from St. Francis Xavier University in Nova Scotia. In the model, the instructor uses a series of learning activities that begin with an introduction to new material and end with an application of the newly acquired material. The idea of applying material really resonated with her because it allowed her to see if students really understood the concept discussed.

Her students also seem to appreciate the value of the assignments. They come in excited at the prospect of discussing their findings, readily talking to each other, discussing their rationale for their example, and responding to queries from Renée and the other students. Their enthusiasm for the assignment also comes out in the variety of examples that they bring to class –

Renée's favourite being a 'Coors Light' beer bottle embodying an underweight item, a 'Blue' beer bottle representing an ideal weight, and a 'Guinness' beer bottle representing an overweight item. This example illustrates that students went beyond the mere appearance of the item, and reflected on its content as well. The examples also give her immediate examples to draw on in her lectures, which reinforces to the students that their ideas are helpful for everyone's learning.

The main difficulty she encountered was ensuring that the students understood what was expected of them. The assignments were very open and the examples they brought were surprising at times (like Alvin and the Chipmunks!). Renée recommends that instructors who want to implement such assignments have a good understanding of the material they are covering so they can cement the connections between the examples and the main point of their lectures. They also have to be ready to relinquish part of their control to their students and be able to see the humour and creativity that some students' examples may hold. But overall, if you are open to new ideas and have the confidence that you have taught your students well, this type of activity may be a good energizer for your classroom too.

Geneviève Desmarais

New Options in the Certificate in University Teaching

TRACE is pleased to announce added flexibility to our CUT participants! As of the beginning of this term, you may replace one workshop with an in-class observation of a faculty member in your discipline. We have also revised the research paper component to allow choice between two options. Read on to find out more.

Observing a Faculty Member. If you choose to do so, you may ask a faculty member who is currently teaching a course to let you observe one of their lectures. The process will work very much like a normal observation but the roles are reversed. You should meet with the instructor before the class to discuss the plan and goals for the class. After you have observed the class, you should again meet with the instructor to discuss their impressions of the class. What went well?

What did not go as planned and why? What could have been done differently? The goal of this exercise is not to criticise or evaluate the instructor's abilities, but rather to expose you to a variety of teaching methods, and to help you become more aware of your own teaching philosophy. A 2- to 3-page response paper is due two weeks after the observation. You should review guidelines on the TRACE website before proceeding with this option:

<http://www.trace.uwaterloo.ca/tacertwk.html>

Research Project Options. Instead of the original research paper component, you now have two options available to enable you to meet the revised 'research project' component. You may still write a 20-page research paper, preceded by a 20-minute presentation on the

paper. However, you may now elect to do a 20-page research document followed by a 45-minute mini-workshop. If you choose this option, you will first be asked to submit supporting documents, which include a one-page synopsis of the mini-workshop, annotated slides, and an annotated bibliography. Once this document has been approved, you will deliver a 45-minute mini-workshop that should incorporate a minimum of 15 minutes of interaction with the audience. These mini-workshops, like the shorter 20-minute presentations, will be coordinated on an as-needed basis by TRACE. More information about the two research project options can be found on the TRACE website:

<http://www.trace.uwaterloo.ca/tacertres.html>

Geneviève Desmarais

Most Effective Items of a Teaching Dossier

Assembling a teaching dossier is a daunting and time-consuming task, especially for graduate students who may feel they lack evidence of their teaching effectiveness. It is therefore crucial that the time spent choosing and incorporating evidence be well-spent. What kinds of evidence will be most useful? In November 2004, I attended a Professional and Organizational Development Network in Higher Education workshop on developing teaching dossiers prepared by Kevin Johnston of Michigan State University and Dakin Burdick of Indiana University. They presented research on the kinds of evidence that were found effective by department chairs when hiring potential faculty.

The most effective element was a representative course syllabus. Graduate students should not panic if they have not yet developed their

own course. They should rather develop the syllabus for a course they are likely to teach in their upcoming career. TRACE has a Tips Sheet as well as books on course syllabus development.

Student ratings were another effective source of information, which suggests that TAs should collect feedback from students with whom they interact. One possibility is to ask for end-of-term TA evaluations from students, but you may also want to devise your own formative feedback form to use during the term. This form can incorporate specific questions that address aspects of your teaching on which you want feedback. The TRACE Library has books that provide numerous sample questions.

Another important source of information was descriptions of curricular revisions: course projects,

materials, assignments, etc. Though these refer to *changes* to an existing course, graduate students could develop possible projects and assignments for courses they are likely to teach, and incorporate them in their teaching dossiers.

Other effective sources of information included statements about teaching responsibilities and teaching awards, as well as statements from colleagues who have observed the instructor in the classroom. All students in UW's Certificate in University Teaching program receive observation reports as part of the program.

This research provides good guidance to graduate students (and their supervisors) about the data they will need to describe themselves as teachers to future hiring committees.

Geneviève Desmarais

Faculty as Teaching Observers

TRACE has been fortunate to have a few faculty members conduct teaching observations for graduate students in the Certificate in University Teaching (CUT) program. We decided to ask a couple of them about their experiences in doing this task. First, Barbara Schmenk, from the Germanic and Slavic Studies department, provides her perspective on how the students benefit from this process. Then Psychology professor James Danckert reflects more on what he has gained from the process.

Barbara taught GER 603, Applied Language Didactics, in the Fall 2004 term, as well as coordinated TAs for an introductory German course. She observed a number of her students – many as part of the CUT program. She writes: “The prospect of my attending their classes and observing their teaching was at first a bit scary for them. However, I believe that after we talked about their lessons and their approaches to teaching, and after receiving feedback and further suggestions for their teaching, they feel that observations are not intended to be a means of control but of assistance and support. After all, they have never taught before, and the observations, the discussions and the suggestions make them realize how much they can improve once they focus on particular aspects pertaining to their teaching and lesson planning.”

“Personally, I think one of the most important results of observing TAs is that this triggers their interest in reflecting on teaching behaviour, methodology, and student-teacher interaction. As a group, our TAs

discuss matters of teaching much more often now, they exchange teaching materials, they construct quizzes together, etc. The observations seem to have sensitized them and helped them understand some important aspects of teaching and learning and relate it to their individual classroom practices.”

James conducted a number of observations last term for Psychology students participating in the CUT. He writes: “This term I was

“While I was observing the graduate students, I found myself wondering about my own performance... [and] saw ways in which I could improve my own teaching...”

responsible for two undergraduate courses in Psychology and was lucky enough to have four graduate students each present a lecture in one of those courses. From the point of view of a relatively nubile faculty member, this is an experience I would dearly have loved to have had in my own graduate years: a chance to give a lecture to a large group and have some detailed feedback on how I did. As it was, I was thrown into the deep end and had to learn to swim. I think the most difficult thing about giving lectures of this kind (to large groups of students) is being able to listen to yourself as you deliver your information. While I was observing the graduate students, I found myself wondering about my own performance. At times I think their organisation and delivery were better than my own, and in general I was greatly impressed with the skill of all presenters.”

“For me personally, this was an incredibly gratifying experience in that I was able to provide some (hopefully) helpful advice of the kind I desperately wanted but never received in my own early teaching days. I also saw ways in which I

could improve my own teaching, which should be taken as high praise to the students whose presentations I observed. In short, I think this is an excellent program and I intend to be involved as long as I am still teaching at Waterloo.”

The value of observations done by experienced faculty members within a student’s own discipline is significant. Thanks go to all of our faculty observers! If you would be interested in joining our ranks as a faculty observer for the CUT program, please contact Geneviève Desmarais at ext. 7110 or at gdesmara@watarts.uwaterloo.ca.

TEC Update

UW's Teaching Excellence Council had a productive initial year. Several changes to classrooms have been implemented, and input from Council members is being incorporated in the redesign of the classroom database. A report on Distinguished Teacher Awards was presented to Deans' Council in December, and many recommendations are already being implemented for the 2004/05 awards, with more to come next year. Watch for announcements about DTA liaisons in Faculties and UW's university and college affiliates, which will facilitate student, faculty, and academic leader nominations.

In 2005, several program initiatives will be developed by the TEC working group on faculty development: a pilot series of Course Enhancement Workshops for departments and schools, a prototype Teaching Excellence Academy to accelerate the progress of our good teachers in becoming great teachers, and a Presidents' Colloquium on Teaching and Learning. Check www.teaching.uwaterloo.ca for more details.

First Encounters with UW-ACE, UW's Online Course Environment

During the December 1st WatITis conference on UW's use of information technology, three professors shared their experiences of using UW-ACE during its inaugural Fall 2004 term. As panellists, they represented a cross-section of the 230 courses which ran in UW-ACE in the Fall term.

Patricia Wainwright of Health Studies and Gerontology used UW-ACE because her HLTH433 class size had doubled, and she felt UW-ACE could help deliver course activities that could no longer easily be done face-to-face. She had heard that UW-ACE was easy to use even for someone who is self-described as "technically challenged," so she jumped into the fray. She now uses it for course management (gradebook and announcements), student interactions (online discussion boards), and provision of course "process" (posting information on how to do data analysis, and subsequent notes on critiques conducted in class). Patricia emphasized that she uses the technology in ways consistent with her teaching values. She also stressed that she felt that if she can use it, anyone can!

From Environment and Resource Studies, Mary Louise McAllister has used technology for a number of years, primarily focussed on providing an alternate forum for discussions for her larger classes. She makes use of other facilities in UW-ACE, including drop boxes for assign-

ment uploads (she uses almost no paper!), announcements and course emails, course material postings, and peer evaluations. Mary Louise finds the online system most useful in walking students systematically through a task, such as thesis proposal writing. She told the WatITis audience that once you start using such a system, you do not go back, but that it can be addictive and time consuming when you begin to use it more.

James "Skid" Skidmore of Germanic and Slavic Languages has a fairly extensive history in online course systems, having used WebCT at Laurier, created his own course Web pages, and used the previous UW course system, UWone. His objectives in using the online environment are to increase student interactions with the course materials, communicate better with students, and keep organized. He uses most of UW-ACE's many features in these aims, and also uses some locally developed templates (through LT3) to design his task-based lessons in UW-ACE, providing students with a very contextualized presentation of the material, their tasks (often pre- and post-class) to consider in addressing the content, and additional resources. These templates are available to anyone through the HTML editor in ACE.

All three panellists noted some technology glitches (e.g., browser issues, problems in e-

classrooms), and some general impediments (e.g., transferring print and film materials online, including copyright considerations, and in some disciplines, student "shyness"). However, they all recounted positive experiences and thanked their support team of LT3 Faculty Liaisons, Jan Willwerth of IST, and Laura Briggs, the LT3 Library Liaison who assists with some Library use modules.

Anyone wishing to use UW-ACE can contact their LT3 Faculty Liaison who provides the first line of support for instructors: <http://lt3.uwaterloo.ca/who/liaisons.html>

IST hands-on courses are offered at the start of the term:

http://ist.uwaterloo.ca/cs/Course_Registration/welcome.html

UW-ACE itself is found at:

<http://uwace.uwaterloo.ca>

Andrea Chappell, IST

New Faculty Lunch and Learn Event

Watch for information about this term's Lunch and Learn session: "Documenting Teaching for Tenure and Promotion." At this session, you will learn about best practices used on campus and elsewhere to help you decide how best to document your teaching practices. Faculty members hired within the past three years will receive an email invitation to this event.

Acting Associate Director

Tracy Penny Light is pleased to return to the TRACE Office in January, 2005, as Acting Associate Director. For the past four years Tracy has worked in LT3 managing instructional innovation projects. In this role, Tracy designed and implemented a number of learning object design programs and taught ARTS 303 - Designing Learning Activities with Interactive Multi-media. She has also been conduct-

ing research on the use of instructional technologies to improve student learning both in her own courses (she teaches history and instructional design) and with other faculty members. She is excited to bring her love of teaching and learning (back) to the TRACE team and looks forward to working with graduate students and faculty members in January.

Returning TA Developer

Guillermo Ordorica-Garcia is an enthusiastic, passionate, and fun person. As a returning TA Developer, he wants to share and apply the teaching skills he learned during

his previous terms at TRACE. He is also looking forward to further expanding his knowledge of teaching in the upcoming year. Guillermo is close to completing the CUT and has worked a number of times as a TA in the department of Chemical Engineering, and more recently, in the School of Accountancy. He has gained extensive experience training new TAs in the Faculty of Engineering, through his involvement with the bi-annual ExpectATIONS workshop in his role of organizer and, previously, mentor. Some of Guillermo's hobbies include read-

ing, videogames, photography, and fitness.

TRACE Teaching Matters

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Announcing Winter 2005 TRACE Events

TRACE will be offering many workshops this term, which are open to all UW faculty members, staff instructors, and graduate students.

<i>Facilitating Effective Discussions</i>	January 18	12 - 1:30 p.m.
<i>Teaching Dossiers</i>	February 3	12:30 - 2:30 p.m.
<i>Designing Multiple-Choice Questions</i>	February 14	12 - 1:30 p.m.
<i>Professionalism in the Classroom</i>	March 2	12 - 1:30 p.m.
<i>CVs and Cover Letters</i>	March 23	12 - 1:30 p.m.
	OR	March 29
		12 - 1:30 p.m.
<i>Course Design</i>	OR	April 6
		9:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.
		April 14
		9:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

For more specific details, watch for notices in your department and via the Workshop and Certificate listservs. To join either listserv, email trace@admmail.

Certificate in University Teaching (CUT) participants, please note that all of these workshops partially fulfill CUT requirements for GS 901 and 902. **The teaching dossier workshop is required for the CUT and will be offered every term.**

To register for workshops, go to:

<http://www.trace.uwaterloo.ca/workhp.html>