



Teaching Matters

Great teaching... by design

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Working Together at UW

In a famous research study Hutchins (1995) analyzed the ways that people work together to manage complex tasks like navigating ocean liners. He pointed out that human knowledge and cognition are not confined to individuals. In fact, for complex organizations to move forward (like the ocean liners) cognition and expertise need to be distributed and shared not

only among individuals but across technologies as well. Other research has connected this insight to educational situations. Abercrombie (1993) reported, for instance, on the increased learning curve that occurs when medical students learn in groups. The collaborative activity of discussing and analyzing cases meant that all group members learned faster and more effectively than if individual students were assigned cases.

These lessons regarding the overlapping distribution of expertise and collaborative learning pertain not only to ocean liners and classrooms but also to organizations like the Centre for Teaching Excellence (CTE) and its larger context, the University of Waterloo. Like other units on campus the CTE has been asked to find areas of collaboration. The CTE has its own specialized expertise in areas such as instructional development, curriculum renewal and scholarship of teaching and learning. However, we also understand the need to collaborate with other areas such as Distance and Continuing Education (DCE), the Library, the Teaching Excellence Council, and Instructional Technologies and Multimedia Services. Each unit has its own areas of expertise and yet there is necessary overlap. For instance, DCE focuses on bringing courses fully

online. The CTE focuses on “blended learning”, assisting instructors in developing and combining online activities with classroom ones. Our collaboration with DCE enables us to share resources and best practices. In another instance, the CTE has been working together with Information Systems and Technology (IST) to create a registration system. Building the system has involved intense collaborative learning as all involved have worked for months to understand and then develop the system. This system will be of value not only to the CTE but also to other areas on campus as in the process of responding to our needs IST increased the capabilities of the system.

Like airplanes or ocean liners, complex organizations like universities move forward because of recognized expertise but also because of the willingness to share and distribute that expertise through instances of collaborative learning. Learning does not just happen in classrooms; it is an inherent function of all living, moving organizations.

Abercrombie, M.L.J. (1993). *The human nature of learning*. Open University Press.

Hutchins, E. (1995). *Cognition in the wild*. MIT Press.

Catherine Schryer

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2009 CUT Award Winner



CTE is pleased to announce that Mareike Müller, a PhD candidate in the Department of Germanic and Slavic Studies, has been selected as this year's Certificate in University Teaching (CUT) Award recipient.

This award, funded by an anonymous donor, is given annually to an outstanding CUT participant who has completed the program within the past three terms. Müller was chosen as a recipient because of her strong teaching evaluations, her commitment to active learning in the classroom, and her efficient progress through the CUT program.

Müller first became interested in teaching while pursuing her MA in German as a Foreign Language in Germany. She chose to come to UW because of its strong linguistics program, and is currently pursuing research in second language acquisition under the supervision of Dr. Barbara Schmenk.

Since coming to Canada, she has taught at both Wilfrid Laurier University and the University of Waterloo, teaching beginner and intermediate level language

courses as a TA and as a sessional instructor.

Müller's teaching philosophy revolves around the principle of active learning; she believes that "you cannot teach a language successfully without it." She encourages her students to participate in every class, structuring course activities around this objective. Müller has many goals for her language students. She is determined to get students involved in what they are learning by engaging each individual in conversation in every class of the term. Admitting that German has a reputation for being a harsh language, she also wants students to see past these stereotypes and realize that learning the language can also be fun. Finally, she says that it is important to her that students gain the confidence necessary to achieve success in a new language.

She describes her teaching style as a balance between authority and approachability; she strives to cultivate an atmosphere of respect in her classroom while at the same time encouraging her students to feel comfortable with her.

Although her MA degree involved some teacher training, Müller began the CUT program so that she could gain teaching credentials for the Canadian classroom. She recognizes that completion of the CUT program "underlines that you care about

your teaching." When asked which part of the CUT program she enjoyed the most, Müller was hard-pressed to come up with an answer, admitting that she enjoyed all three courses that comprise the CUT. She states that "everything is important in its own way," but if asked to choose, found the teaching observations that comprise GS903 to be especially helpful. Receiving feedback on your teaching, "opens up your mind to things that you'd hadn't thought about," Müller states. She appreciated that the CTE staff conducting her observations gave her concrete suggestions for ways to improve her teaching skills.

Müller feels that the CUT program offers many benefits to graduate students, including the opportunity to gain both theoretical and practical knowledge about teaching.

After she completes her degree at UW, Müller intends to pursue an academic career that she hopes will involve teaching. Since her current teaching experience has centred around language courses, she is eager to try teaching courses in linguistics as well as in second language pedagogy.

In recognition of receiving the CUT Award, Müller will have her name put on the CUT plaque displayed in the CTE's Library location as well as receive her own plaque and \$2000. Congratulations Mareike!

Sally Heath

NEW!

We have a new way to register for our events as of Spring 2009. Using [myHRInfo](#), you can register for CTE workshops and events (referred to as "courses" in this new system). You'll now have more control over your own records in a secure, anywhere/anytime environment.

Introducing the ISW to UW Faculty and Staff

Since last spring, nine CTE staff and two Distance and Continuing Education staff have gone through the formal process of the Instructional Skills Workshop (ISW). The idea was to give it a test drive, experience for ourselves what we were proposing for faculty members, and improve our own teaching and facilitation skills to boot.

This past March 2009 saw the first UW faculty members enrol in the ISW, which was facilitated by Nicola Simmons and observed by me. Anyone who goes through the ISW can then go on to the Facilitator Development Workshop (FDW), becoming a facilitator for the next rounds of ISW locally or beyond. I plan to do this in May so that Nicola and I can both offer this program, and we encourage any faculty members who have done the ISW to become facilitators too as the program takes hold here (we hope).

Responses to the ISW have been positive; Vivian Dayeh (Biology) saw benefit in finding “new ways to enhance the student experience through participatory learning” and recommends it to colleagues. All the participants affirm the experimentalism of the environment as much as its repetition of a process, speak of the new tools everyone leaves with, and appreciate

especially the feedback from peers.

As Bob Sproule (School of Accounting and Finance), who has also taken and co-facilitated our Teaching Excellence Academy (TEA), puts it,

The ISW is a great complement to the TEA. While the latter focuses on your course, the former focuses on what you do in the classroom. With the small number of participants, and the support of trained facilitators, there is an excellent opportunity for individual growth. Participants are expected to work hard and move outside their comfort zone.

Philosophy’s Shannon Dea praises the workshop for its total engagement:

I was really surprised by how quickly the ISW days raced by. The activities were so interesting and engaging that each eight hour day felt more like one hour. I loved having the chance to play with my teaching in a setting that allowed me to experiment and question all of my instructional habits. And I loved the interdisciplinarity of the ISW. It was really

helpful to compare notes with colleagues from other departments—all of them great teachers—and to watch them in action.

And Gord Stublely, Mechanical and Mechatronics Engineering, notes not only that it was “a lot of fun to work with a group of keen and open-minded participants,” but also that it “provided a safe environment in which to make mistakes and to learn from the mistakes” while teaching him “a lot about the impact my presence has on students and the classroom.”

Interested in the ISW? The three-day (24 hours in total) Instructional Skills Workshop (ISW) is a collaborative learning model that uses videotaped microteaching and peer feedback sessions to support participants’ teaching reflection and growth. The ISW encourages examination of teaching practices with feedback focused on the learning process rather than on the specific content of the lesson. At the same time, participants are able to work on discipline-specific teaching. To find out more, or to sign up for the ISW scheduled for August 6, 7 and 10, please contact Trevor Holmes at tholmes@uwaterloo.ca.

Trevor Holmes

Upcoming Teaching and Learning Conferences

Society for Teaching & Learning in Higher Education — “[Between the Tides](#)” conference, June 17-20, University of New Brunswick.

MERLOT — “[Teaching and Learning in a Networked World](#)” conference, August 13-16, San Jose, California. CTE wishes to acknowledge Bob Sproule from the School of Accounting & Finance for being selected to receive the 5th annual MERLOT Volunteer of the Year award. Congratulations Bob!

New SoTL Conference at UW



Nearly 120 members of the research community involved in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, or SoTL as it is commonly called, converged at UW for our first annual “Opportunities and New Directions: A Research Conference on Teaching and Learning.”

The conference was held at Conrad Grebel University College on May 6, 2009. Conceived by a subcommittee of the Teaching-Based Research Group (TBRG) and the Centre for Teaching Excellence, the event was supported by Geoff McBoyle, Associate Vice-

President, Academic.

Dr. Gary Poole gave the keynote address, “The Promise of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning: Fulfilled or Unfulfilled?” to help us in focusing on the directions our scholarship is taking and opportunities we might yet explore. Gary is the Director of the Centre for Teaching and Academic Growth (TAG) from the University of British Columbia as well as the new President-Elect for the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISSoTL).

More than 40 sessions were delivered by researchers from UW and across Canada, and they stemmed from research questions such as: What are the benefits of using clickers in the classroom? Do podcasts make students more or less likely to attend class? Should university education directly prepare students for jobs or

focus on discipline scholarship? What are various forms of assessing student learning? and How can we integrate authentic writing and reflection tasks into the curriculum? A combination of 25-minute and 50-minute sessions as well as roundtable discussions were used to engage conference attendees over the full-day event.

A print publication stemming from the conference program will appear later this year, with the call for proposals asking for submissions by July 15, 2009.

If you were unable to attend, you may still view the [program](#). If you’re interested in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, you may also want to join the Teaching-Based Research Group (see TBRG article on page 7). For more information, please contact me, Nicola Simmons, at ext. 32940 or nsimmons@uwaterloo.ca.

Nicola Simmons

CTE Launches Revamped Website

The Centre for Teaching Excellence has revamped its website over the last term, making it more attractive, interactive, and easier to navigate. Our co-op student, Varun Bhardwaj, deserves much of the credit for developing the new site’s templates and cascading style sheets. Here are some of our site’s enhancements:

An RSS feed from UW Events

This feed, which appears on our home page, automatically displays and updates CTE’s upcoming events.

New sections, including two devoted to Blended Learning and Integrated Learning

These sections feature numerous detailed examples drawn from the teaching practice of UW instructors.

A WordPress-based blog

A new blog posting appears every Tuesday and Thursday, in which CTE staff discuss issues and share resources pertaining to teaching and learning.

A flash-based banner on our home page

The banner feature rotating photos of CTE staff, CTE events, and UW faculty.

Web pages with expandable panels

These expandable panels use Adobe’s new “Spry” technology, which makes it possible to present detailed information without cluttering the web pages.

Integration with UW’s new event registration system

Faculty and graduate students now register for CTE events via a portal in myHRinfo, which allows an individual to review or track the events that he or she has attended – helpful for updating CVs.

Take a look at our new website at cte.uwaterloo.ca – we welcome formative feedback!

Mark Morton

5th Annual TEA: A Time of Rethinking



From April 22-27, 15 faculty members from across campus came together for the Teaching Excellence Academy (TEA) to work on the design of one of their courses.

Over four days, we engaged in brainstorming, discussions, and planning activities to help work through the various design decisions needed to create a course that demonstrates alignment among intended learning outcomes, assessments of student

learning, and teaching methods. Much of the work was done within smaller working groups, each led by two TEA facilitators: Gord Stublely from Mechanical and Mechatronics Engineering, Judi Jewinski from English and the English Language Institute, Aldo Caputo from Distance and Continuing Education, and Trevor Holmes, Jane Holbrook, and Donna Ellis from CTE. We also enjoyed meeting with participants from previous TEAs to

see the products of their work. The capstone event, at which the participants showcased their work at a poster session, captured their creativity and diversity in a very memorable way.

Thanks to all participants and facilitators for their contributions and commitment to this event. The call for nominations to participate in next year's TEA will appear next winter.

Donna Ellis

“...But will that be on the test?”

On May 4 and 5, UW was fortunate to host Dr. Gary Poole from the University of British Columbia for our annual Learning about Teaching Symposium. Dr. Poole delivered a provocative keynote address to more than 140 members of UW's community for our Presi-

dents' Colloquium on Teaching and Learning. He challenged us to consider how we view surface learning: as a problem or an opportunity? He asked us to consider the meaning of learning and teaching, and he asked us to contemplate developing assessments that give students more

choice. So when students ask “But will that be on the test?”, the answer would be “That will be up to you.” Gary also provided two follow-up workshops on May 5 to 60 faculty and staff members to help us uncover key concepts within our disciplines and promote deeper learning.

Donna Ellis

Look for Enhanced Discussion Forums in UW-ACE

At 7:00 am, Tuesday, April 28th UW-ACE went offline for a day while our fearless UW-ACE support team installed an upgrade from version 7.2 to version 7.3. Although most users will not notice any radical changes to the look or the functionality of the system, there are some changes that will enhance navigation through courses and increase the range of activities that we can offer students.

In particular the discussion forum tool has undergone some significant changes. It is now easier to implement the “Hot Seat” mode of discussion, which is designed to simulate a classroom situation where one or more students are asked to research and defend a particular topic. The class can post questions to the Hot Seat members; however, only designated Hot Seat members can respond.

Another option is fishbowl mode, where users who are designated as being “inside the fishbowl” can view, post, and reply to messages, while users who are designated as being “outside the fishbowl” and can only view the posted messages and replies. This mode is also one of the standard discussion forum settings.

It is now easier for users to choose to see postings in a threaded or a nested view, and instructors or discussion facilitators can tag postings as a spe-

cific type (e.g. debate, summary, etc.) with an icon or through colour coding.

Although these new features are exciting and will help us set up a more effective environment for online discussions, there are some teaching strategies that we can implement, as instructors and discussion facilitators, to support online discussions that promote critical thinking and debate in a collaborative environment.

For example, the discussion should be facilitated by the instructor, or a teach-

ing assistant, who sets the tone of the conversation and monitors the discussion. Facilitators can foster the development of a good discussion by weaving the ideas from several postings together, summarizing long threads to move a conversation forward, or asking “trigger questions” to stimulate the discussion. The trick is to be present to guide the discussion, but not so present as to stifle the students’ creativity and independent thinking.

Another key component to an effective discussion is a relevant and discussable topic: something that has no black and white answer and that enables students to take different stances or perspectives and to learn through creating arguments or collecting evidence to support their discussion contributions. Of course the students need to see that the activity is a valuable part of the course,

so the discussion should fulfill an intended learning outcome and be valued appropriately with marks.

Ideally, discussions should also be evaluated through a clear, well-defined grading scheme or rubric, so that students know what is required and can participate in a way that enhances their learning but also fulfills the assessment requirement.

The resources listed below can be of great help to any instructor who is introducing online discussions into a course. For more information or assistance, please get in touch with Jane Holbrook jholbroo@uwaterloo.ca, ext. 35931, or your CTE Faculty Liaison.

Resources:

Bender, T. (2003). *Discussion-based online teaching to enhance student learning*. Sterling: Stylus.

Centre for Teaching Excellence. [Online Discussions](#): Tips for Instructors. *CTE Teaching Tips*. University of Waterloo. Retrieved on March 30, 2009.

[Facilitating and Moderating Online Discussions](#). *Documents & Online Tutorials*, Leeward Community College, Retrieved on May 4, 2009.

Salmon, G. (2000). *E-moderating: The key to teaching and learning online*. London: Kogan Page.

Jane Holbrook

“The trick is to be present to guide the discussion, but not so present as to stifle the students’ creativity and independent thinking.”

TBRG: Investigating our Teaching Practice

The Teaching-Based Research Group ([TBRG](#)) is a multi-disciplinary community of researchers from all Faculties at the University of Waterloo who engage in the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL). Our research examines student learning processes and outcomes. As a group, we share information about our ongoing research, including methodologies, key findings, and relevant SoTL literature. Two communication tools that support this are our listserv and our new monthly TBRG Digest.

The research of many members is supported by [LIF and PIF grants](#). These grants provide

funding for the investigation of research and improvement of practice around student learning. Project topics are wide ranging, and include community service learning, the assessment of learning objectives, use of online tutorials, and other technology uses such as e-portfolios. Geoff McBoyle, AVPA, announced last week that there will soon be a Call for Proposals for 2009/2010 LIF and PIF funding. Details will be available shortly and will be widely circulated.

The TBRG group meets 1-2 times per term, usually for a research-related workshop. For example, in March we welcomed Kathleen McSpurren from the

Survey Research Centre to give a workshop on Survey Design; in April Tim Ireland and Nancy Collins from the Library helped us use library databases to conduct literature reviews for grant applications.

May 6 saw our first conference on research into teaching and learning: Opportunities and New Directions. See the article on page 4 for more details about this event.

If you are interested in conducting research about teaching and learning and would like to join this group of like-minded scholars, please contact me, Nicola Simmons, at ext. 32940 or at nsimmons@uwaterloo.ca.

Nicola Simmons

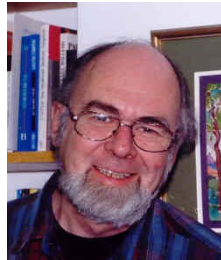
Award-winning Teaching at UW

CTE would like to recognize the winners of our two university-wide awards for this year. You can read the citations for these teachers to learn more. Please join us in congratulating these recipients!

Distinguished Teacher Award recipients:



Kerry Lappin-Fortin
Italian and French Studies
St. Jerome's



François Paré
French Studies



Ian Rowlands
Environment and
Resource Studies



Gord Stublely
Mechanical and
Mechatronics Engineering

Award for Exceptional Teaching by a Student recipients:

Sara Ashpole, Planning; **Kaitlyn Lankin**, Germanic and Slavic Studies; **Richelle Monaghan**, Biology; and **David Takacs**, Architecture

Did you know that CTE can assist departments at the curricular level? We can facilitate activities regarding the Undergraduate Degree Level Expectations in relation to program reviews or accreditation, or we can lead discussions on teaching and learning issues. Contact [Trevor Holmes](#) or [Donna Ellis](#) to learn more.

Graduate Student Programming Updates

With a new term, the Certificate in University Teaching program has a few changes in staffing. Svitlana Taraban-Gordon returns to us from her maternity leave and will resume her role as the Senior Instructional Developer, CUT and Internationalization, which includes our International Teaching Assistant (ITA) programming. Many thanks to Sally Heath for filling the CUT part of Svitlana's role in her absence. We are delighted that Sally will remain with us in the Spring term as a TA Developer, along with her colleagues

Sheila Hannon and Sara Ashpole. We thank Amanda Clark for her work this past term as a TA Developer. We are also pleased that Walid Omran remains with us through the Spring term as our International TA Developer to help us offer our ITA programming.

The CUT was very busy last term, with 12 more students completing this program. Congratulations to Atef Abdrabou, Electrical & Computer Engineering; Osama Al-Kwif, Management Sciences; Mark Bramwell, Computer Science;

Jacqueline Dawson, Geography; Karen Gallant, Recreation & Leisure Studies; Meng He, Computer Science; Julie Kim, Management Sciences; Lauren King, Kinesiology; Jessica McDonald, Combinatorics and Optimization; Mareike Müller, Germanic & Slavic Studies; Erin Skinner, Psychology; and Rehan Waheed, Planning.

Congratulations also to Hajar Sharif, Mechanical & Mechatronics Engineering, for being the first to complete our ITA training.

Donna Ellis

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Teaching Matters is published by the Centre for Teaching Excellence and edited by Donna Ellis. At the Centre, we provide leadership in advancing skilful, informed, and reflective teaching.

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Remember to login to [myHRinfo](#) to register for CTE events