

# Teaching Matters

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## Happy New Year!



For faculty, New Year's Eve actually occurs sometime in September. With the change in the weather, cooler mornings and hot afternoons, comes

the preparation for a new academic year. In late August we start preparing for the New Year by frequenting office supply stores. With a sense of anticipation, we fill our baskets with things we probably don't need, but buy anyway...because we always buy these things in the fall: number two pencils, date books, a fancy new pen.

These days, we may find ourselves lingering wishfully over laptops or carefully scrutinizing the new i-phone that now promises to do nearly everything for us except calculate final grades.

On the night before our first class, New Year's Eve, there is a sense of new beginnings, excitement, and for me, even after nearly 30 years in teaching, I still feel a bit of nervousness. This unease comes from the stark realization that every academic year is different: I've had fabulous teaching years, and like all experienced teachers, I've had a few that weren't so stellar. Teaching is a complex process influenced by multiple variables: curriculum design, student demographics, organizational decision-making beyond one's control, and general life challenges that continue regardless of whom or what we are teaching. Still we come back every fall, to start our "new" year. Why? What is it about teaching that is so compelling?

David Hansen, author of *The Moral Heart of Teaching* (2001) describes teaching as "moral and intellectual practice," a profession not for the timid or weak of heart.

It seems to me that good teaching, at least in many cases, embodies an appreciation for both large and indefinable human possibilities and for ever present constraints... 'Tenacious humility' is an apt descriptor for this standpoint. Tenacity implies staying the course,

not giving up on students or on oneself... It means expanding and deepening one's person, one's conduct, and one's moral and intellectual sensibility. Humility is also an active rather than passive quality. For many people, or so it seems, humility does not come naturally. It has to be worked at, developed, and accepted. For a teacher, humility entails a refusal to treat students as less worthy of being heard than the teacher him- or herself. It means retaining a sense of students' as well as one's own humanity. (p. 167)

Parker Palmer agrees with Hansen. In his book *The Courage to Teach*, (1998) Palmer argues that the profession of teaching is unique because it not only allows, but *requires* us to continually engage in personal growth. He writes,

Teaching, like any truly human activity, emerges from one's inwardness, for better or worse. As I teach, I project the condition of my soul onto my students, my subject, and our way of being together. The entanglements I experience in the classroom are often no more or less than the convolutions of my inner life. Viewed from this angle, teaching holds a mirror to the soul. If I am willing to look in that mirror and not run from what I see, I have a chance to gain self knowledge – and knowing myself is as crucial to good teaching as knowing my students and my subject. (p. 2)

Whether you agree with Hansen and Palmer that teaching is a journey requiring rigorous personal and professional growth, the mere practical challenges of teaching are enough to cause nervousness on the eve of the new academic year. And yet, despite the many challenges our profession presents to us each year, we return in the fall for one more "go." So to all of you, to the courageous, tenacious, bright, and deeply committed teachers, I raise my glass, and say, "Cheers. Here's to a fabulous year!" — Kay



## CTLA Update

Centers for Teaching and Learning exist to support faculty in their continued efforts to improve the art and science of teaching. As Dr. Ed Nuhfer, Director of Faculty Development and Professor of Geoscience at CSU-Channel Islands recently wrote, "Typically, faculty development centers offer and sponsor workshops, provide resources, offer consultation and serve as advocates for good teaching. Faculty development centers are not in the business of judging faculty or entering into the evaluation of individuals for purposes such as salary, tenure or rank. A faculty member approaching a development center for help has every right to expect that help, as well as encouragement and full confidentiality."

This year, the Center for Teaching, Learning and Assessment (CTLA) will continue to provide support in the areas of course design, course revision, Blackboard training and consultation, the assessment of student achievement, and the alignment of course, program, and institutional outcomes. In addition, the CTLA has the following goals for the 2007-08 academic year:

- Further institutionalize the governance of the Center to provide systematic faculty and administrative input into Center activities.
- Continue to facilitate communication among senate curricular committees and other curricular bodies on campus (Community-based Learning, Disability Services, etc.) through regular collaboration and the dissemination of information.
- Provide technical assistance to departments in the collection and analysis of student achievement data.
- Support Department and Program chairs in promoting teaching excellence through the supervision and evaluation process.
- Regularly publish a university-wide newsletter that highlights teaching research, faculty excellence, resources, and university teaching and learning news. ■

## Academic Intervention



Adjusting to university life isn't easy. Students often struggle with balancing autonomy, establishing new living conditions, meeting academic

requirements, and managing their finances. In an ongoing effort to support our students, Student Affairs has created an easy-to-use process for faculty to identify students who appear to be struggling academically.

If you notice that a student is not attending class, appears unwell, seems unusually disengaged... or is simply not performing at the expected level, help is available. To notify Student Affairs of the need for an intervention, go to **Quicklinks for Faculty/Staff** on the SOU home page and select the link for the **Early Intervention Report Form** (<https://www.sou.edu/stureport/>).

Log in, then enter the CRN for the course and the student's ID number. Check boxes are provided for standard academic problems such as failed quizzes or exams, excessive absences, and failure to submit assignments. You may describe the nature of your concern in the comment box.

The Student Affairs office screens reports as they come in to determine what campus resource would be most appropriate for the student and immediately refers the notice accordingly. The referral might result in additional academic advising, tutoring, personal counseling, health and wellness screening, or a mental health evaluation.

Early intervention is designed to prevent students from falling through the cracks. While it may take time to identify the root causes of the student's challenges and to implement strategies to overcome them, faculty may be confident that someone is attempting to work with the student to enhance his/her possibility of success. For more information about early intervention, call Student Affairs at 552-6221 or email [student\\_affairs@sou.edu](mailto:student_affairs@sou.edu). ■

## Call for Proposals – Scholarship of Teaching

The 2008 Lilly Conference will be held February 8-10 at the Koury Convention Center in Greensboro, NC. The conference theme is *Learning by Design*. Additional information about the conference is available at <http://www.uncg.edu/tlc/lilysouth/>.

The deadline for proposal submission is November 16. Proposals may be submitted at <https://utlc.uncg.edu/conference/lilysouth/form.jsp>.

## Supporting Student Success

In a recent review of data by our Bookstore staff, we discovered that SOU students spend significantly less on textbooks than other OUS students. SOU students spent a *yearly* average of \$539 in 2003-04; \$519 in 2004-05, and \$523 in 2005-06. OSPIRG estimates the average OUS student spends approximately \$500 *per quarter*. This differential may be due in part to the fact that SOU faculty tend to require fewer texts than other OUS faculty, but a major contributing factor is SOU students' open admission that they routinely don't buy required texts. Why don't they?

When asked, some students responded, "I can pass this course without reading the text." Others said they chose not to buy the text because they could get similar information off the Internet for free, "Why buy a \$50 text when I can read a review of the book on Amazon?"

### **Tips for Inspiring Students to Purchase – and READ – Required Texts**

1. Paint the big picture for the students about why the text matters; explain why you chose the text and how its content is critical to their academic progress.
2. Explain how original sources and research are different from the Internet – millennial students are often unaware of these differences. Many of our students do not understand how a scholarly publication differs from an Internet source – we have to explicitly teach them this.
3. Hold students accountable for reading content during class time through small group discussions and short assessments: "On page X of our reading, the author makes a claim about Y. Explain how this compares to what we discussed yesterday."
4. Assign homework that requires students to interact with the text: "After reading chapter seven, create a flow chart that shows how this [system] works from beginning to end."
5. If the text you require costs more than \$100, the SOU bookstore will purchase a copy and put it on reserve in the Hannon Library as part of the Bookstore Library Textbook Share Program. (Packets are not included in this program.)

6. If students say that they cannot afford to purchase texts, refer them to Student Affairs or Financial Aid for assistance.

Textbook purchases can be facilitated as well by placing textbook orders with the Bookstore on time. Tannia Shewman, SOU Bookstore Director, explains, "Timely requisitions allow the Bookstore to purchase used textbooks from our students during textbook buyback which saves time and resources. In addition, it serves the students to have as many books as possible on the shelves when we process online web orders prior to the start of each term. Organized students get frustrated when they discover that one or more of their required books are not included because they were ordered late by the professor and are not in the bookstore when the orders were processed." ■

### **Web Sites of the Month**

Frustrated that you forgot how to do something on SiS web? Check out this great resource provided by SOU's Information Technology Department:

<http://www.sou.edu/it/howtodocs/>

Wondering what quality to expect in students' writing assignments? Check out these writing rubrics that can be used both instructionally and for assessment purposes:

<http://www.sou.edu/ctla/Writing.html>

Here's an extensive resource for all aspects of higher education teaching from Honolulu Community College:

<http://honolulu.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachtip/teachtip.htm>

Visit this site for suggestions on teaching writing from Evergreen University:

<http://www.evergreen.edu/writingcenter/suggestions.php>

*The Critical Thinking Community* offers articles on teaching and assessing critical thinking at:

<http://www.criticalthinking.org/resources/assessment/index.cfm>