

Th'Ink Well

Center for Teaching Excellence

An occasional Newsletter from the Center for Teaching Excellence

❖ From the Director

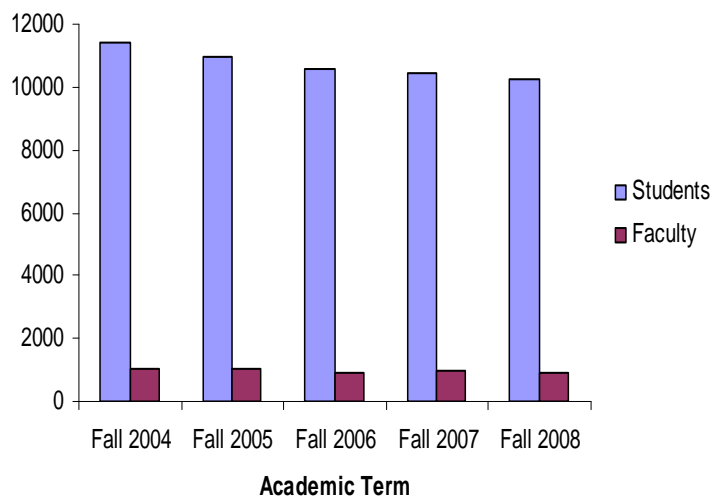
Welcome to the *Th'Ink Well*, a digest of news and ongoing discussions about academic life at WPUNJ. Our current issue highlights certain five-year trends that we thought might be of interest to you, shares student's and faculty's views on sound teaching practices, and provides a few teaching tips for large classes. Finally, it summarizes our discussion at our February 19th seminar where faculty reminisced on the changing demands of our job during the last five decades.

We invite you to join us on Thursday March 26th, 2009 during Common Hours at the Paterson Room in the Library. We plan to discuss the outcomes of the 2008 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) at WPUNJ. Come see what our students think of their interactions with faculty and their educational experience at WPU!

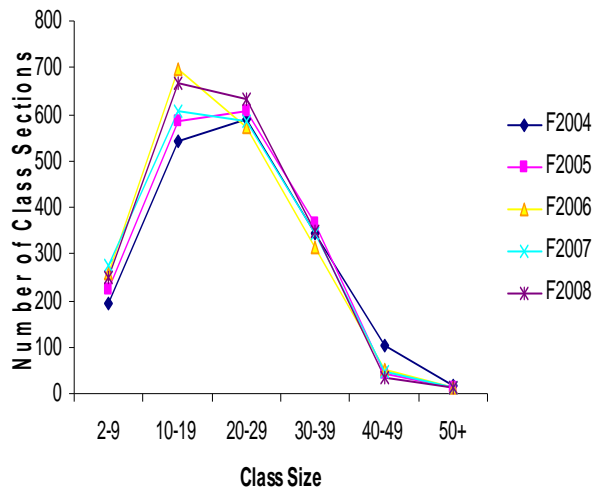


❖ Trends of Interest

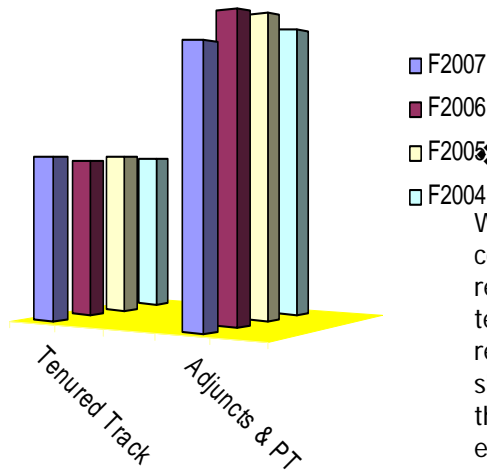
In WPUNJ, probably like in many other Universities, faculty frequently observes that times are changing. Among colleagues we often hear that teaching and service are increasing, classes are become larger, and adjuncts are teaching more courses. But what does the evidence tell us? Have things changed much at WPUNJ during the last five years? Reports from the Institutional Research Office suggest that some patterns have changed very little during the last five years, at least at aggregate levels.



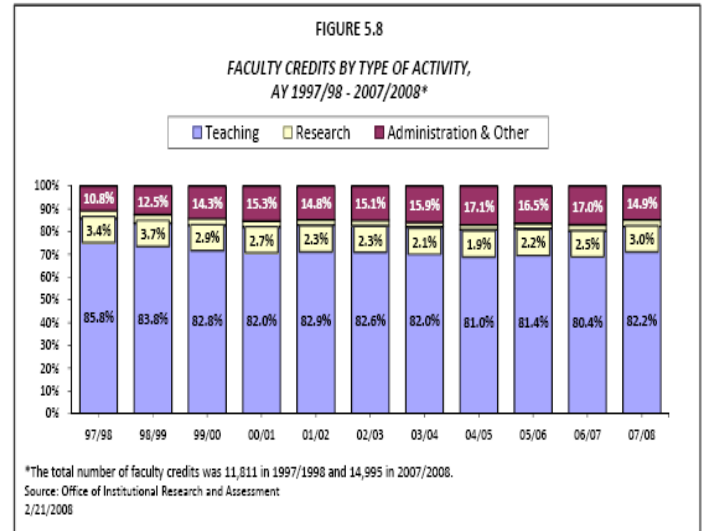
The faculty-student ratio has been relatively stable, hovering around 15.1 students per faculty member. Both the number of students and number of faculty has slightly declined during the last five years, from 11409 to 10256 and 1048 to 940 respectively.



The distribution of class sizes has remained fairly constant and relatively “small”. The University has scheduled an average of 1869 undergraduate sections each Fall since 2004. More than 3 in 4 sections enroll under thirty students.



The number of adjuncts and full-time faculty has been rather steady, with adjuncts teaching about 40% of the courses. An average of 372 tenure-track faculty and 672 adjuncts have been teaching at WPUNJ during the last five years. This is a ratio of 1.8 adjuncts per full-time faculty member.



<http://ww2.wpunj.edu/ira/FACTBOOKS/FB08/F5.8.pdf>

Faculty research activity has steadily increased, but teaching remains the highest commitment.

Insiders' Views

What makes a lesson effective? I asked a colleague and an alumni (both of whom I respect greatly) if they could share a teaching practice that they thought had a real positive learning impact. The colleague shared a simple and powerful class activity that stresses the importance of student engagement and faculty feedback. The student shared a personal anecdote that few of us would see as “practice,” yet reminds us that “relationship” is perhaps the most vital component of memorable teaching...



A Faculty Voice * Dr. Janet Pollak, Professor of Anthropology

Students can be nervous and unsure of themselves in the first week or two of a semester. Yet, they frequently have to wait for several weeks and sometimes even half a semester before they receive any substance feedback from many instructors. That's why I try to provide concrete examples of expectations within the first week or two of a course.

On the second or third meeting, I write a question on the board--a question based on material covered in the previous class. I try to formulate an "accessible" question--something all students who attended the last class could be expected to answer in some fashion, and have them answer it in a paragraph or two -- on a blank paper without their name. I collect their answers and before the next class, I read them and sort them into 3 piles: plus, check and minus.

At the beginning of the next class, I project a few examples of each category on the screen so everyone can examine anonymous models of what I evaluated as excellent, good, and poor. I make sure students have enough time to consider the examples and ask questions about exactly why I scored them as I did. I then write a new question

on the board and repeat the process, but this time the answers are not anonymous.

I conduct this activity many times during the semester and keep a running record of these writings. I give them some weight in determining the final course grade. If I see too many "minuses" and "checks" from any one question as I progress through the semester, I repeat the modeling and feedback again.

I always start this exercise at the hour the class begins, give students about 5 minutes, and don't let late arrivals participate. Students very soon learn what's going to happen at the start of the next class. They make an effort to get to class on time, see the advantage of regular attendance, pay better attention, are more engaged, and actually ask questions.

A Student Voice * Anthropology Alumni

One autumn Monday during my first semester at William Paterson, a few casual yet biting remarks from a faculty member prompted an uncontrollable flow of tears. The remarks in and of themselves were not significant, they simply followed a particularly stressful family event that had occurred the prior weekend. I was dreadfully ineffective at staunching the stream of tears as I walked into my next morning class. My professor could see that I was not myself, yet politely and intuitively avoided drawing attention to my discomfort. When the class finished, as quietly as possible, I left the class with a slight nod to the professor, who in turn nodded back. By the time I reached home, I had an e-mail waiting from my professor, asking me if everything was OK. He did not pry, but seemed genuinely concerned for my well-being. It was a simple gesture that helped to remove my overwhelming sense of embarrassment, and moreover, made me feel as if I was cared about not only as a student, but as a person as well. Sometimes the simplest overtures of kindness can make all the difference. After a brief meeting to go over what I had

missed from the previous lecture, I was able to walk into that Wednesday's class with my head held high and able to concentrate, because I felt respected and valued. With that kind of learning environment, how can you not succeed?

Teaching Tips Corner

When class sizes increase, the interactions between students and faculty tend to decrease. The following teaching tips taken from Iowa state University Teaching Large Class Teaching Tips, Teaching Large Classes, and Little Things Matter in Large Course Instruction by M. Palmer, TRC faculty consultant, can help us improve teaching effectiveness in these situations:

- √ Place "Help" boxes in the back of the classroom so that students anonymously ask questions related to the course. Prepare responses outside of class and answer questions at the beginning of each lecture.
- √ Collect immediate feedback from students by using "The Minute Paper" [developed by Angelo and Cross (1993)] End your class 5-7 minutes early and ask students to respond to two questions: "What major conclusions have you drawn from today's class?" "What major questions remain in your mind?" Provide feedback to your students in the next session.
- √ Use your course website to make announcements and post answers to frequently asked questions. Create and save email templates for use throughout the semester. Establish email guidelines, such as naming conventions for subject lines, formats for attachments, and your

likely response time (e.g., within 24 hours).



❖ Faculty Recollections

On February 19th, a group of faculty met to reflect on changes experienced at our institution. Three faculty members with long term-teaching experience at WPUNJ helped lead the discussion: Profs. Jay Ludwig (Communication), Jean Levitan (Community Health), Sue Godar (Marketing & Management). In animated exchanges, the faculty shared perceptions concerning changing expectations about faculty at our institutions. According to this group:

Faculty degree requirements and tenure rules have become more stringent with time. When Jay joined WPU in 1961, faculty earned their tenure in three years, and doctorates were not required of hires. In the late 1960s, when WPU became a liberal studies college, the tenure granting period increased to five years and degree requirements became more stringent, though many ABDs continued to be hired for years. By the mid and late 1980s, a PhD

became increasingly important to join as faculty.

Teaching expectations have always been high, and continue being high despite rising research demands. When Jean joined our faculty over three decades ago, the faculty load was twelve credits (as at present), and faculty was expected to have a four-day teaching schedule. If you were not a great teacher, you would not be granted tenure. Scholarship was viewed in very broad terms and carried a lesser weight than service. Today scholarship occupies a more prominent position in faculty tenure and promotion, and increasingly justifies three-day teaching schedules.

Faculty involvement in administrative decisions seems to have declined with time. In 1968, when the first Faculty Senate was established, this group played an instrumental role creating policies. Many administrative units were at the time understaffed, and Department Chairs were appointed for life! In the early 1970s, when the Union came to power, administrators became more dominant than the Senate. According to Sue, current president of the Faculty Senate, this body really acts as an advisory body whose voice can be strong or weak depending on the Provost's office.

