Th'Ink Well

Quarterly Newsletter from the Center for Teaching Excellence

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Faculty "Issues" with WPU Students
Findings from a Spring 2010 Informal Survey, Maria Villar

This spring semester, my Applied Anthropology class (ANTH340) decided to explore faculty-student "issues" at William Paterson University. To support their efforts, and compare students' and faculty's views, I sent an email to the faculty of ten WPU Departments, two from each College. The email read as follows,

Dear Colleague,
What are the two top issues you face with students at WPU? Would you mind sharing your views via email? A quick (2 line) reply will suffice.

I was surprised by the prompt response from faculty. Within a few days, I received over sixty responses (39 female, 28 male) describing "top issues" with students at WPU. Although the response rate was unclear because, as I later learned, the current email directory of departments contains many outdated entries, the outcomes were consistent. From the perspective of *faculty respondents*, "**attitudes**" (more than external pressures or skills) are the **top issues with students at WPU.**

♦ 20%   Students do not make an effort to study (*attitude*)
♦ 20%   Students lack basic writing, reading or critical-thinking skills
♦ 14%   Students are unmotivated to study (*attitude*)
♦ 13%   Students do not prepare for class (*attitude and/or skill*)
♦ 8%   Students constantly use their phones & text in class
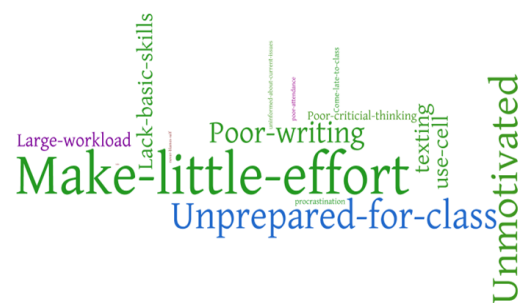
Visual displays generated with Many Eyes highlight the most recurrent themes in faculty responses. Codes have been used to standardize diverse qualitative responses..
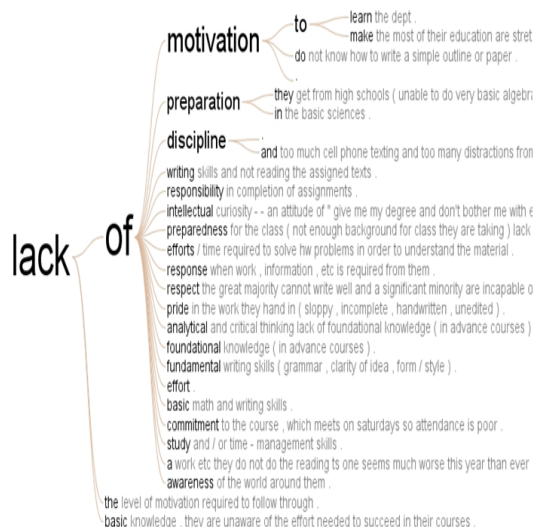
Thanks to Dr. Sheetal & Dr. Heinzen for introducing us to Many Eyes & other data visualization techniques. (See more on page 2).

Advocating for Graphic Literacy and Data Visualization Techniques
Horizon Report 2010

Dr. Sheetal Ranjan and Dr. Thomas Heinzen led our final CTE Seminar of the semester on April 22, which advocated for graphic literacy. This is an area that faculty scarcely pay attention to, though students are increasingly relying on visual media. **Visual displays of information can foster critical thinking skills and provide students with essential quantitative skills.**

The leaders of this seminar focused on the necessity of **graphic literacy in the classroom**, but also mentioned the downfalls if used incorrectly. They illustrated the importance of understanding how people can misrepresent critical information and demonstrated how these visualizations represent insights that can only be perceived through a visual display.

The New Media Consortium (NMC) Horizon Project seeks to identify **emerging technologies which will likely have an impact within higher education**. They focus on teaching, learning, and creative expression while using new technologies. Their **Horizon Report** is considered to be an authoritative source of information on new and emerging technologies available to education anywhere.

One major focus of the Horizon Report is data visualization, or visual data analysis. According to the report, this "blends highly advanced computational methods with sophisticated graphics engines to tap the extraordinary ability of humans to see patterns and structure in even the most complex visual presentations."

Over the past century, the methods of data collection, storage, transmission, and display have changed dramatically. In research settings, scientists have found ways to generate mountains of data and develop a variety of tools and techniques to expose meaningful patterns, trends, etc.

Visual data analysis is "not only characterized by its focus on making use of the pattern matching skills that seem to be hard-wired into the human brain, but also in the way in which it facilitates the work of teams working in concert to **tease out meaning from complex sets of information**." The tools used to illustrate this new trend cover many disciplines, and there are **many services that are free** for anyone to use.

Visual data analysis aids in increasing the natural abilities humans have to seek and find patterns in what they see. The Horizon Report lists many of the different techniques and services available that illustrate this trend, and the many tools to be used in education in our future.
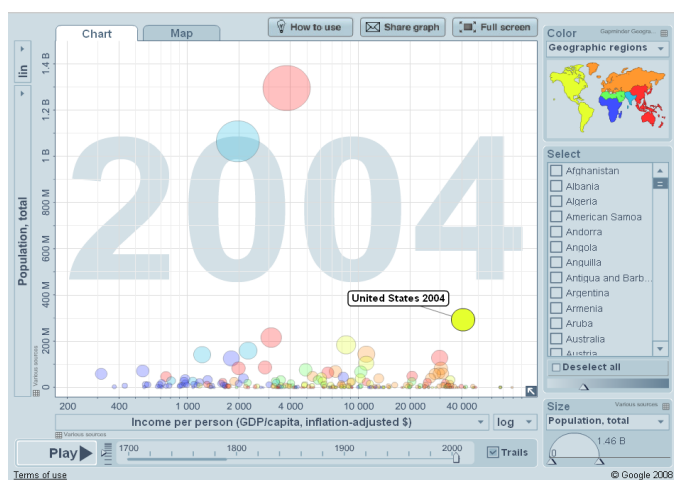
Links of Interest:
Many Eyes:
https://manyeyes.alphaworks.ibm.com/manyeyes/
Gapminder:
http://www.gapminder.org/data/
Horizon Report 2010:
http://www.nmc.org/pdf/2010-Horizon-report.pdf

Explore Gapminder USA yourself

Some of the things you can do:
- Select and compare bubbles
- Drag the time slider
- Zoom in and out
- Turn trails on/off

Browse example graphs
Learn to select indicators and more
Download PDF Guide

Data visualization generated with Gapminder displaying Total Population vs. Income per Person worldwide. Play button allows you to see changes over time.
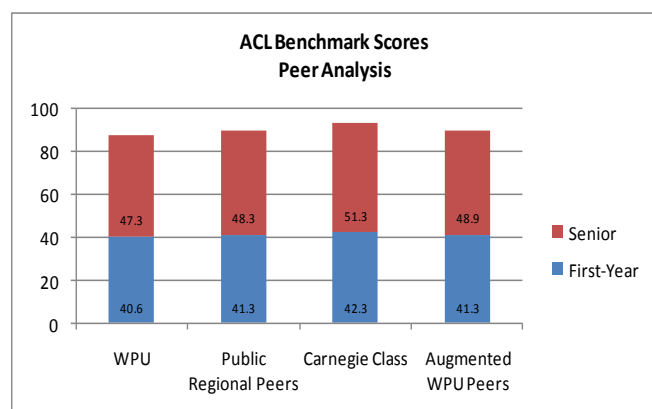
Active and Collaborative Learning (ACL)
Findings from the National Survey of Student Engagement at WPU

Active and Collaborative Learning (ACL) practices are high-impact educational experiences. According to National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), the specific **practices that have greater ACL value** for **first-year students** are "*learning communities*" and "*service learning*." The practices that have greater ACL value for **senior students** are "*student-faculty research*" and "*service learning*" (followed by capstone and study abroad). These practices are effective because they require (a) extra time and effort, (b) interaction with faculty, and (c) more immediate and informal feedback. They also (d) foster greater exposure to diversity, and (e) offer experience in different settings & opportunities to integrate and apply lessons.

NSSE Survey questions contributing to ACL benchmark scores include:
- *Asking questions in class or contributing to discussions*
- *Making class presentations*
- *Working with other students during class*
- *Working with other students outside of class to prepare assignments*
- *Tutoring or teaching other students*
- *Discussing ideas from readings or classes with other students*
- *Participating in community based projects*

The 2008 and 2009 NSSE outcomes suggest that William Paterson University is on par with institutional peers in terms of *active & collaborative learning experiences*. Although WPU seniors score lower than seniors in peer institutions, overall differences are not statistically significant (except when compared to Carnegie peers).

The 2009 National Student Engagement Survey & Faculty Student Engagement Survey provide us with specific insights about ACL experiences at WPU:

1. **There has been** <u>no major progress</u> **in Active & Collaborative Learning during the past 5 years.** Benchmark scores have been wavering around the same mark (47) since 2005.

2. **WPU seniors report working with classmates outside of class** <u>less</u> **than seniors in peer institutions.** These scores have consistently declined since 2008. The differences with peer institutions are statistically significant.

   ⇒ *WPU seniors work less with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments than seniors in peer institutions.*

   ⇒ *WPU seniors tutored or taught other students less than seniors in peer institutions.*

   ⇒ *WPU seniors participated less in community-based projects as part of a regular course than seniors in peer institutions.*

3. **WPU faculty consider it important that students participate in service learning activities** but only 9% (Lower Division) and 16% (Upper Division) report that students frequently participated in service learning projects**.**

4. **There is a large discrepancy between faculty's and students' perceptions regarding class participation.** Over two thirds of the students report that they ask questions and contribute to class discussions often or very often (63% First Year; 73% Senior Year). Less than half of the faculty report that more than half of their students frequently ask questions or contribute to class discussions.

ACL Benchmark Scores
Peer Analysis

	Senior	First-Year
WPU	47.3	40.6
Public Regional Peers	48.3	41.3
Carnegie Class	51.3	42.3
Augmented WPU Peers	48.9	41.3

Faculty Voices * *Practicing Blogging in Undergraduate Courses*

Communication Department Experiments with Blogging

Elizabeth Birge, Associate Professor of Journalism, Communication Department

Students in my Advanced Reporting class were each required to create a blog in class and cover a specific beat, or area, during the semester. The students could cover whatever subject they wanted and their selections ran from hip-hop music to romantic movies to beer.

The blogs were created using Tumblr.com, which allows anyone to create a blog for free, and also allows the posting of videos and photographs.

The students were required to post twice a week to their blog, include links and a photo or video that was relevant to their subject. I collected the URLs for each blog and posted them on the class Blackboard site where everyone had access.

The students loved the assignment. It allowed them to write freely on the subjects they most cared about and that was one of the reasons I think that their writing was so thoughtful and creative. In many ways, some of the students produced their best writing of the semester on this assignment.

Faculty Voices * *Teaching via U-Tube*

Lessons from a Colleague Teaching Accounting via U-Tube

Lisa Ekmekjian, Associate Professor, Department of Accounting & Law

On April 24, 2010, I attended a session at the 2010 Mid-Atlantic Region meeting of the American Accounting Association. Dr. Christian Wurst, Temple University, gave an innovative discussion on "Teaching Via U-Tube." His presentation was very enjoyable as he introduced me to a new concept in teaching.

Dr. Wurst's taped presentations provide detailed guidance and instruction on how to answer accounting questions. The video is a simple piece of paper or power point presentation with facts and figures. The video is not intended to take the place of his lecture, but to supplement it with additional guidance on how to answer homework and test questions by identifying issues and understanding accounting terms and principles.

Students in Dr. Wurst's class reported that they used the You Tubes for "All or Almost All" of their homework assignments. Many considered them the most valuable part of the course. The classes that used You Tube had a significantly higher percentage of A's than classes that did not use You Tube!

To see one of Dr. Wurst's videos, visit
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PirYKFKQ9Rs

Student Voices* *My Undergraduate Experience*

### Lauren Smith, *Biology Major*

During the Spring 2009 semester, I was ecstatic that I had only two semesters left until graduation. But, what was I going to do after graduation? The next step was to meet with my advisor and figure out my career goals. When I first met Dr. Becker, I remember thinking about the different fossil shark pictures that were plastered all over his office walls. I was fascinated, and thought, maybe I could become a fossil researcher. Then, all it took was a couple of field trips and I was hooked. I loved discovering fossil shark teeth. It had been almost a year since I discovered my interest in fossil shark teeth.

Between the Spring 2009 and Fall 2010 semesters, I had the opportunity to conduct field work in Malvern, Arkansas with Dr. Becker and a few other William Paterson University students. The experience has been extremely rewarding and motivational. This March, we presented the research we conducted at the Geological Society of America's Northeastern/Southeastern section meeting in Baltimore, Maryland. During that time, I plan to continue conducting research with Dr. Becker while working toward a Master's degree.

Noelle Kalipetis, *English Writing Major*
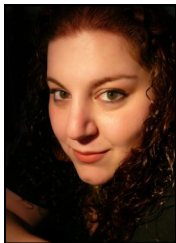
Like many students, I transferred to William Paterson after receiving my Associate's degree at a county college. My only experience on a college campus was of a small, pretty close-knit atmosphere where I had already made a name for myself and knew a fair amount of the students and faculty. When I got to William Paterson, though, I felt like I just melted into the crowd. I was technically a junior and I knew absolutely no one on campus the first day I arrived (and for the first few weeks, too). Parking, as we all know, was bad. I couldn't find any of my classes, and I had no one to spill my misery to while I waited in between classes.

That, mixed with other factors, pushed me to almost transfer out of William Paterson last semester. After a particularly bad day, one of my English professors asked me how things were going. I made it clear that I was seriously considering transferring out of the program. She expressed genuine concern about my problems, hoped that they would be resolved quickly, and that I would consider staying at the university. Not only that, but she provided me with countless opportunities to apply my skills and passions for English and writing at a professional level; her desire to see me succeed and to continue offering me experiential learning has been inspiring at the very least. If not for her push for me to stick it out through days where I was literally at my wit's end, I would have moved on from William Paterson long ago and missed some great opportunities.

Jesenia Ponce, *Political Science Major*
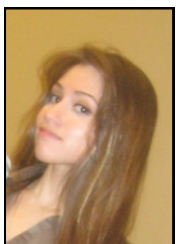
While working on my thesis, I found that guidance on how to research materials and advice about the flawed areas of my paper were most helpful.

When I was overwhelmed with the amount of research that was ahead, I was shown how to approach search engines and several other databases that would provide me with the specific materials I needed for the thesis.

By learning the types of documents I should be reading, the kind of books I should be focusing on, and the amount of information that should be reviewed, my mind was put at ease and I was set off to a good start.

The advice on how to use transition sentences, organize the narrative, and use appropriate styles helped me improve my overall writing skills. I recall receiving my graded thesis proposal and reviewing it for quite a while, going over all the problematic areas of the paper. The guidance and suggestions were particularly useful not only for the thesis assignment, but for any written work that I may be involved with in the future.

Faculty Spotlight
Presenters from CTE Seminar on Graphic Literacy, 4/22/10

Thomas Heinzen
Psychology

B.S. Rockford College
Ph.D. SUNY at Albany

Dr. Heinzen specializes in social psychology, creativity, gerontology, clinical psychology, and research design. Among his professional accomplishments are many articles in respected journals as well as two books: Everyday Creativity and Frustration in State Government and Many Things to Tell You.

Sheetal Ranjan
Sociology

Ph.D. John Jay College

Sheetal Ranjan (Assistant Professor) received her PhD in Criminal Justice from the John Jay College of Criminal Justice (GC-CUNY). Her thesis was entitled *Intimate Partner Violence: An Examination of Ecological Factors*. She also has a Masters in Criminal Justice from the John Jay College of Criminal Justice. Professor Ranjan's research focuses on intimate partner violence, stalking and sexual harassment. She is also interested in analysis of crime patterns using ecological theories and GIS (Geographical Information Systems).

Please stay tuned for the Fall 2010
Center for Teaching Excellence Seminars!

Date/Time & Location	Seminar
Thursday, September 30 **12:30PM-1:45PM** **Paterson Room**	*Practical Ideas for Strengthening Student Engagement and Participation in the Classroom*