WILLIAM PATERSON UNIVERSITY

The Center For Teaching Excellence

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What Is the Center for Teaching Excellence?

The Center for Teaching Excellence offers both individual instructional support for faculty and a range of programming on teaching and learning. These services are designed for faculty at all levels of experience who wish to practice effective teaching and advance student learning. Support for individual faculty includes mentoring, instructional development and refinement, individually-selected instructional resources, teaching enhancement activities, classroom assessment, teaching portfolio development, video (or audio) recorded classroom observations, peer teaching observations, and assessment of student learning. In conjunction with the IRT program, the Center can also work to assist faculty with technology and teaching.

In addition to individual faculty support, CTE also offers regular event programming. This includes workshops on various teaching topics, and interdisciplinary forums. Pedagogical seminars are offered throughout the year, often in conjunction with other events on campus. Book circles are organized on a regular basis. All seminar and workshop activities are faculty run and faculty sponsored. Seminars on specific topics can be requested by departments chairs or by individual faculty members.

One of the primary mandates of the CTE is to assist recently hired faculty with their transition to William Paterson University. We co-sponsor the New Faculty Orientation in late August/early September and meet with new faculty throughout the academic year.

The CTE is a faculty-led program; our work with individual faculty is initiated by faculty who request our services, and no record of these services is ever shared with anyone else.

For a full list of recent events and for faculty resources, visit our website at: www.wpunj.edu/cte

Jim Hauser, co-director of the Center for Teaching Excellence, is on sabbatical for the Spring 2013 semester. Maria Villar, who co-directed the CTE from 2008-2011, is acting co-director.

Designing Courses for the New UCC: Reconceptualizing, Not Just Revising

Last Spring, in order to help faculty develope new courses for the UCC program, CTE co-sponsored a workshop entitled "Designing Courses for the New UCC: Reconceptualizing Not just Revising." Eight faculty from a wide range of departments presented brief talks in which they described the new courses they had designed in order to fulfill UCC requirements from Area 1 through Area 6.

We've now asked these presenters to prepare a description of their re-conceptualized courses for campus-wide distribution through this Newsletter.

Two of these course descriptions appear below. The first, by David Gilley of the Biology Department, describes a new Biology course designed to fulfill the Area 3 requirement for a course in "Ways of Knowing: Scientific Perspectives." The second, by Barbara Andrew of the Philosophy Department, describes a new 2000-level course developed to fulfill the Area 5 requirement for "Community and Civic Engagement." Future Newsletters will include additional course descriptions of this sort.

Our hope is that these brief articles will suggest to all of us some of the ways in which we might develop new or re-conceptualized courses that will fulfill UCC requirements.

Biology 1400, Introduction to Animal Behavior (Area 3, Ways of Knowing: Scientific Perspectives)

by: David Gilley

Introduction to Animal Behavior (BIO 1400) is a new course that fulfills the UCC Area 3 requirement: Scientific Ways of Knowing. Part of my rationale for creating the course was admittedly selfish; animal behavior is my academic specialty and the topic I most enjoy discussing with students and colleagues alike. Many students share my fascination with the animal world, and my intention with this course is to use this innate "hook" to teach students how to use scientific approaches to think more deeply and precisely about the natural world. Topics include the diversity of animal behavior (e.g., foraging, mating, parental care, defense, habitat selection, sociality), behavioral evolution, and the genetic/physiological mechanisms which underlie behavior. The course emphasizes the natural behavior of non-human animals but almost everything we discuss has implications for humans and domestic animals with which students can directly relate.

Laboratory activities are perhaps the most important part of the course for teaching the students about science as a process rather than a body of apparently arcane knowledge. Last fall, the first time I taught the course, we performed three different studies in lab.

Students in BIO 1400: Introduction to Animal Behavior track individual worker bees in observation hives housed in the bee research laboratory, part of the new Science Hall Complex.

In the first, students observed changes in the behavior of honey bee workers over several weeks (see accompanying photo), which gave them practice at observing and quantifying animal behavior, summarizing the results graphically and statistically, and using this information to address a hypothesis. In the second, students observed aggressive contests between male crayfish which had been injected with a (natural and non-harmful) neurohormone compared to those that received a sham injection, which gave students practice with *manipulative* experimentation, importantly different from the previous observational study. Lastly, the students conducted an "independent study" of cricket behavior, where they were allowed to formulate their own question and hypothesis, design a study to test their hypothesis, collect the necessary data, analyze the data graphically and by statistical hypothesis testing, and finally present their entire study orally to the class as well as writing a manuscript in scientific format.

I was favorably impressed with most students' performance on their cricket projects, which to me confirms the notion that science is an intuitive process that requires for understanding neither sophisticated instrumentation nor comprehensive knowledge of the natural world. The major challenge I have faced in implementing this UCC course is the fundamental tension between my goal of instilling in students a lifelong understanding of and appreciation for natural science and, on the other hand, the amount of knowledge and understanding of the natural world that I want them to acquire. These two things come hand-in-hand for students that have committed to the natural sciences (and certainly for us scientists!), but for non-science majors the opposite is usually true; the more I require of the latter, the less I get of the former. Perhaps I am restating the central conundrum of liberal arts education, but as I teach this course it is a daily balancing act on what feels at times like a very narrow beam.

As a veteran coordinator for a large General Education course, I see the UCC program as a chance to reform WPU's science curriculum for non-majors away from huge and organizationally challenged, fact-based courses, to smaller, more specialized, inquiry-based courses. Courses with fewer sections and more specialized content allow students to work within an area of mutual intellectual interest with faculty and allow faculty to maintain organizational control over curriculum -- and thus the quality of student learning outcomes. Widespread curriculum reforms such as this would be an indicator of success for the UCC initiative, and will be encouraged by provision of adequate resources and the creation of appropriate faculty incentive structures.

Of all the new UCC categories, the Area 5 requirement in "Community and Civic Engagement" has proved to be the most difficult to develop courses for. Below you'll find a particularly interesting solution, a course that remains traditionally discipline specific and yet satisfies the new expectations for Area 5 courses.

Philosophy 2400, Ethics and Community Engagement
(UCC Area 5, Community and Civic Engagement)
by: Barbara Andrew

I'm a strong believer in Area 5 courses which support the idea of the Community and Civic Engagement requirement. But as a Philosophy professor I had to conceptualize a course that would be true to my discipline. As I thought about this, I recognized that I don't genuinely believe that students need more applied experiences. I think students' lives are filled with applied experiences. In fact, most of the students I come in contact with have jobs and have a pretty good sense of how to get around in the world. What it seems to me that they need is a respite from all of that. They need time to reflect critically on what they are doing. They need more time reading books and peer-reviewed articles, and studying theories. And they need to thoughtfully consider how those theories and the information in those articles might help them to reorganize their ideas about the world or to engage in the world differently.

"One thing I have noticed, as the years sped by, is how students seemed less able to apply theory to their everyday lives unless explicitly required to do so"

So, it was with a great amount of hesitation that I developed "Ethics and Community Engagement," PHIL 2400, a new Area Five course. I've taught ethics and applied ethics since I was in graduate school. One thing I have noticed, as the years sped by, is how students seemed less able to apply theory to their everyday lives unless explicitly required to do so. I assumed, perhaps wrongly, perhaps rightly, that this had in part to do with my ever-increasing age and my inability to find pertinent examples from pop culture that relate to the theories I'm presenting. (The fact is that many of my students don't even watch TV: they watch internet shows that I am unfamiliar with). On the other hand, it may be that they no longer identify with me and instead identify me as someone who might be like their mother, thus making them less happy to reveal their own ethical quandaries and perhaps even hypocrisies. Perhaps, at a moment of economic decline in the information age, there is no time for a respite. Regardless of whether this change has to do with their psychology, my psychology, my age versus theirs, or, well, some systemic problem in contemporary public education that merely teaches to the test, the end result is this: they don't think about how ethical theory could make their personal lives better unless it is a part of a required assignment. And I find this unfortunate because it continues to seem to me to be the most interesting aspect of ethical theory.

So, while I continued to take the "old school" approach of demanding that they to write about what they had read, break into groups and diagram the argument, and do other things philosophy Ph.D.s are fond of, I also required three "engagement" activities. The first assignment came after reading some dead white guy's view of virtue. The students wrote a journal in which they picked a small number of virtues (honesty, respectfulness, kindness, etc.) and tried to actively put those virtues into practice in their own lives for two weeks. The results were shocking, seriously. I refuse to reveal how many students claimed it was near impossible to be honest for two weeks, lest you begin packing in hopes of winning a spot in one of the first lunar colonies. The second assignment also involved reading another dead white guy's idea, this time about giving oneself universal rules for behavior. The students were asked to begin journaling about their experiences outside of the classroom. About two-thirds of the 35 students managed to find internships for themselves. One student became a certified domestic violence responder for the county, two built houses with Habitat for Humanity, and others worked in after-school programs, nursing home programs, food banks, AIDS awareness centers, and pet shelters (I'll reserve my comments on the last example). The third assignment that I'll describe here also involved reading yet another dead white guy's ideas, this time about collective well-being and the greatest good for the greatest number. The project involved forming groups and putting together a community education project on an issue they chose. To provide only one example, one group did a particularly fascinating project on hunger in the United States.

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Of course, we also read contemporary articles (written by authors of various races and genders) criticizing, or "updating" as the students say, the dead white guys. These articles discuss individuals' relationships with our communities, including our responsibilities to ourselves and others, our capacity to make reflective choices with integrity and care, and the conditions for dialogue, connection, and reciprocity. We read about specific issues such as the death penalty (the students' favorite, macabre children that they are); economic inequity; global access to pharmaceuticals; and our moral obligations to the poor, to the starving, to animals, and to the environment.

I really don't know for sure whether the course was more successful in terms of my goal, which is showing students that incorporating ethical theory into their thinking improves their lives as well as my own. But I do believe that, if they learn to think ethically, it will improve all of our lives. These things take time, you know. Aristotle thought it took a lifetime. Kant thought it would take the entire history of human progress. But Mill thought we ought to try to put it into practice now, regardless of how long it might require. The students seemed to like the course better and, perhaps, were better able to articulate how ethical theory relates to their lives.

For many years now, researchers like John Goodlad, William Labov, and Mary Budd Rowe have been studying the patterns of classroom interaction between teachers and students. In the Writing Across the Curriculum Pedagogy Workshops, some of their data is shared with faculty participants. Among their most startling and eye-opening results are the following:

The Importance of Wait-Time

When you increase your wait-time to three seconds or more:

- The length of student explanatory responses increases.
- The number of unsolicited, appropriate responses increases.
- Failure to respond decreases, slow students contribute more, and student confidence increases.
- The incidence of speculative, creative thinking increases; students give more evidence before and after inference statements; the number of questions students ask increases; and the variety of responses increases.
- Teacher-centered teaching decreases; student-centered interaction increases.

This also happens - to you - when you increase wait-time:

- You exhibit more flexible types of response.
- The number and kind of questions you ask changes.
- Your expectations for student performance change. You become less likely to expect only the brightest students to reply.

How to Get Out The Way and Get Greater Student Response

These strategies can be helpful in generating a better quality of student responses.

Talk less & listen more

- look interested & be interested in what the student is saying

Don't interrupt to summarize or to disagree

- it stops your listening and following.
- it stops other students from responding
- it short-circuits trust and halts communication

Be receptive even of wrong answers

- if other students don't question wrong answers, correction can be taken care of at the end of the discussion

Direct questions to all students first

- don't call on any student by name before you ask the question
- don't interfere with student thinking by repeating a clearly stated question

Practice good wait-time and good silent-time

- after a student response, wait
- remain quiet and use body language to invite response from others
- there is such a thing as creative silence