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Faculty Instructional Design Lab

Drop-in assistance with the CTE staff Fridays from 1-4 in C-2230.

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## How Can We (or You) Help Improve Teaching and Learning at GGC?

We invite you to send us ideas for workshops or programs you might be interested in doing or having us organize. We are also willing to work with individual schools to help develop discipline-based programs. Contact Stella Smith to discuss any ideas (ssmith2@ggc.usg.edu).

**Special Thanks: Dr. Jason Mosser, Editorial Support for *The Teacher's Edge***

## From the Director

By Dr. Stella Smith

Your colleagues are a rich source of knowledge about effective teaching practices. How often do you use them? Too often, your conversation is somewhat superficial, focusing on inefficiencies that create obstacles in your classroom or students that haven't met your expectations. So who would you include in your network of teachers? The likeliest choice would be a **colleague in your discipline**; close behind would be a **colleague from a different content area**. Much can be learned from someone who teaches in a content area totally different from your own. Besides the possibility that you might learn about different approaches, you're freed from focusing on content. A third possibility is a **good teacher**—that is, someone better than you. However, some talented teachers have difficulty in communicating their techniques. To make this selection realistic, I would suggest selecting a teacher with a style believe you can emulate.

In that vein, a colleague at GGC commented to me that he knows certain topics are taught more effectively by others and hopes that he can "borrow" their expertise and "bottle" it in the format of online lectures. Finding **teachers who share your pedagogical interests** through online environments has proven especially beneficial in identifying teaching resources or simply new ideas. Blogs, emails, and online discussion boards provide links to people all over the world. Finally, identifying a **teacher you can teach** gives you the opportunity to mentor a colleague and extend a hand, as once, someone did for you. ☐

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## Teaching Topic:

**We Have PALs!**

By Dr. Tom Hancock

**How do we make leaders of tomorrow?** In an effort to attempt such an outrageous task, **Partners in Active Learning (PALs)** was created. PALs is a response to the college's challenge to produce graduates who can critically evaluate and respond to today's issues.

**What is PALs?** The initiative builds on the best aspects of learning communities and Problem-Based Learning (PBL). The learning communities are interdisciplinary, student-centered learning groups that build ties among a range of courses and disciplines, encourage peer-to-peer education, and promote experiential learning within the context of diversity. The problem-based learning requires students not only to apply critical thinking skills, but to do this in the context of working with actual local community organizations. The PBL topics engage participants in issues that concern the college and surrounding community. They also require students to develop and implement plans to address issues they explore.

**Do We Have a PAL?** Actually we do have a project team composed of myself, Candace Timpte and Jen Wunder. We have joined together to form a community combining sections of my Cognitive Psychology, Dr. Timpte's Interdisciplinary Applications, and Dr. Wunder's English Composition I. Students enrolled in these classes collaborate on an educational project designed to meet GGC and course goals while partnering with the community organization Gwinnett Clean and Beautiful to practice problem-based learning and develop strategies to address issues surrounding litter in the community. Students investigate specific aspects of the litter problem; engage in peer mentoring activities, teaching each other about the issues surrounding litter; learn how to and help design mechanisms for monitoring litter; and present their work at a culminating event.

**Seem Daunting?** Well, it is not. You will work in coordination with the PALs committee and we already have the procedures in place to make this smooth sailing.

**Want to learn more?** Please make plans to get more information and good food in the B-building Atrium on March 17th from 1 to 2 PM and again from 3:15 – 4 PM (either before or after the professional development meeting) to see how GGC is actively engaged in the PALs program and to get more information on how you can be involved! ☐

**Vista Focus:**  
**What's It Good For?**  
 by David Robinson

Many of our GGC Faculty are truly living up to the statement in our Mission: GGC “emphasizes the innovative use of technology and active-learning environments to provide its students enhanced learning experiences ...” This month, I’d like to share the stories of three GGC Faculty members innovatively using Bb Vista in ways that actively engage their students.

**Susan Bleyle, Peer Review**

Students in my English for Academic Purposes Applied Grammar II course (EAP 0091) are using the new peer review tool as a way of engaging with one another more deeply in their grammar-focused discussion postings. Each week, the students post paragraph-length responses to a discussion prompt which encourages them to focus on both the content of the prompt and the use of the particular grammar structure we are studying. They then do a quick simple-scale peer review of their classmates’ postings and choose one post to reply to with grammar-focused feedback. The tool has really expanded the students’ sense of writing for an audience because rather than just waiting for a grade from me, they seem to be striving to impress their friends and earn “more stars” on the peer-review feedback scale. I believe this tool empowers my students by giving them a voice in how writing is assessed and evaluated in our course.

**Christopher Bloss, Web Links**

My current English 1102 classes center on the theme of *Southern Literature and Culture*. With the mixed quality of websites related to the topic, it is important to create a sense of awareness and critical assessment in students. With the Bb Vista 8 *Web Links* tool, I created thematic categories into which were compiled numerous sites from previous web browsing and bookmarks. Under the link description, I offered a concise annotation of each web site, including elements used for assessing its value. Students can now see how I evaluate a web site and annotate resources.

This use of the *Web Links* tool has led to a student assignment to contribute to the initial annotated list with new links and annotations. Students must locate potential web resources, assess the content of each site, make a conscious and informed decision whether it will benefit the class, and provide a statement of relevant content found there. Through this process, students learn how to evaluate Internet content and provide each other with helpful resources.

**Tom Lilly, Directed Blogs**

In my Fall 2008 thematic ENGL-1101, The Run-Up, student teams developed a virtual blogosphere on topics and issues relevant to the November elections. At the beginning of the semester, student teams were assigned a topic unique to their team’s thread, hosted on the WebCT [Bb Vista] Discussion Tool. Each week, teams were responsible for publishing a team member’s original argumentative essay to their blog, researching and summarizing news stories related to their blog topic, and posting comments and responses on the other groups’ blogs. The result was a dynamic virtual discussion space, where students became increasingly confident with the rhetorical skills of the composition classroom and increasingly informed about the political world around them. ◻

**A Teacher Speaks:**  
**Using Debates in Your Courses**  
 by Dr. Ellen Rafshoon

I didn’t learn how to debate on a high school team or in a college rhetoric course. I picked up techniques around my family’s dinner table. In our home, any topic was fair game and my three siblings and I fought to get the last word, a challenge since our Dad was a successful trial attorney. This was great training; we all entered careers where verbal ability is prized.

In my courses, I give students a taste of what I experienced growing up minus the roast chicken or the meatloaf. Above all, I use debates to generate enthusiasm for the subject matter and to make sure everyone gets to have a say. Debates ensure that classroom discussion is lively and organized, not a free-for-all for more assertive students. In addition, you know that diverse points-of-view will be aired. In some of my debates, we argue a topic from as many as four different perspectives.



There are four factors that go into a successful debate: topic choice, instructor preparation, structured student preparation, and incentives.

- First, to generate sufficient heat, the topic must be controversial. Having a moral or ethical component helps. However, I recommend staying away from shop-worn issues such as abortion rights, evolution or gun control. Pick something that students didn’t realize was so complex but is central to concepts in your field.
- Second, you need to do your homework. At the outset, provide students with the parameters for research. In introductory classes, assemble research materials for the students so they are limited to reliable sources. If this is a major assignment spanning several weeks, assign milestones prior to debate day – an outline or summary of their argument and a rehearsal. In addition, you should divide teams that are balanced. Make sure that your most motivated students are spread around so they can inspire the others.
- Third, your students should know at the outset how they will be graded and what rewards are in store for those who do outstanding work. The assessment should include a written component since some students may not have a large speaking role depending on how the debate is structured. To raise the stakes for this activity, you should make the

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debate be worth a significant percentage of their grade. Be creative on the rewards: my history colleague David Mason thinks candy works and he buys surplus holiday sweets. Students don't seem to mind eating chocolate reindeers in March, he says. I've exempted winners from tests, and this semester I am considering treating winning teams to lunch.

- Fourth, you must set aside class time for students to meet at least twice: once to organize teams and divide the work amongst themselves and a second meeting for a mandatory rehearsal. During these student meetings, you should personally visit with each student to make sure he/she is on track. Please know that this is not a "waste" of course time. It is very difficult for our cohort of students, who all work and commute to school, to meet as a group. And the time they spend together planning teaches collaboration and ensures a more polished performance that they can be proud of. You can facilitate outside-of-class cooperation by setting up discrete discussion sites on Blackboard Vista.

There are a variety of formats that can be used. An informal debate that requires limited preparation on the instructor's and student's part involves dividing the class in half and assigning each team one side of an argument. Students independently complete a set of readings on the topic and outline points to make their assigned case. On debate day, students gather in their teams and are given 15 minutes to organize, choose speakers, and put on the debate with opening arguments, rebuttals and closing arguments. This semester, my history classes are using this format to debate whether Andrew Carnegie was a "Captain of Industry" or a "Robber Baron" and whether President Andrew Jackson was a "pragmatic politician" or "scheming devil" in his treatment of Native Americans.

My more ambitious debates involve dividing my class into four teams that play the roles of decision-makers in important historical events. For example, last semester my U.S. History One students were given the debate question: "Was John Brown a martyr or a terrorist in carrying out the raid on the Harper's Ferry Arsenal in 1859, an event linked to the outbreak of the Civil War." Students were assigned to argue from the points of view of African American slaves, Southern Democrats, Republicans and Northern abolitionists. Interestingly, I taught four sections of this course, and in each class a different team won the debate.

Many of the students enjoyed the John Brown debate so much that they enrolled in my History Two class, knowing they would get to debate again. If you are interested, stop by in early April to see them argue whether the United States should have launched an atomic attack to end the war against Japan in 1945. As they assume the roles of U.S. military strategists, atomic scientists, Hiroshima victims, and President Truman, you will see a lot of hard work and a little magic on display. 🍀

**The  
"audience"  
was  
encouraged  
to criticize,  
comment on  
the validity of  
the arguments  
presented by  
the "author".**

## Looking Backward, Looking Forward

### Looking Backward:

It's hard to believe how fast time is flying past us! The CTE has hosted a Brown Bag event dealing with the integration of SMART tools to enhance instruction, which was repeated twice. Two Faculty Showcase events were also hosted, featuring a lively discussion about classroom incivility and another hosted by Dr. Terry Barron who described her approach to classroom assessment.

Workshops were also presented on a variety of topics such as survey development, creating and evaluating small group projects, integrating debates in the classroom (see article in this edition for more info!), the use of SPSS and other statistical tests, and challenges of teaching to different levels. Special thanks to Drs. Kathy Weigand, Susan Bleyle, Ruth Garber, Alan Marks, Ellen Rafshoon, Dave Mason, Richard Pennington, Michael Gagnon, and Christine Lutz for their contributions toward these workshops!

The second round of the Reading Circles has kicked off, with a choice of four books faculty/staff have to choose from. These have been a very popular edition to our CTE offerings!

### Looking Forward:

We hope to finish out the 2009 Academic Year with a bang! We will be offering workshops on the use of case studies to make learning authentic, teaching portfolios, and making the jump from textbook to completely online materials. In addition, we will be offering Brown Bag events on learning communities and making the last class meaningful.

There will also be two more faculty showcase events - *A Tale of Two Psychologists* and *Stuck Between a Rock and a Hard Place*. For more information on these events, including the most current date and time information, see our Jovo site at <https://jovo.ggc.usg.edu/cte>. 🍀

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### Want More? *CarnegieViews*

*CarnegieViews* is a new series of video podcasts that features conversations with education innovators such as New York Hall of Science Director Eric Siegel, Urban Education Institute Director of Innovation Nichole Pinkard, and Deloitte Center for Edge Innovation Co-Chair John Seely Brown. Current topics include tinkering, open education resources, digital media and learning, and basic skills education. For more information or to access these video podcasts, visit <http://commons.carnegiefoundation.org/views/>. 🍀

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### Submission Guidelines

*The Teacher's Edge* encourages submissions on any aspect of college teaching and learning. The articles should not exceed two or three double-spaced pages, so as to conform to the intent of the newsletter: providing concise, thought-provoking topics that promote discussion among faculty and staff.

Articles may be submitted by GGC faculty, staff, and even students so that all voices are represented for our readers. Our web site gives us rich opportunities for posting ancillary materials to accompany submissions.

Submit manuscripts to Stella Smith, CTE Director. 🍀