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## In This Issue...

From the Director  
Teaching Topic: What Do Students Value Most?  
A Teacher Speaks: My One Thing by Susan Bleyle  
Look Backward, Looking Forward  
Want More? Additional Resources



Come get classroom engagement ideas, technology assistance with class materials, or Blackboard help at the FIDL (C-2230). Make an appointment or take your chances and drop by for a visit! The FIDL, Jr (A-1044) is also staffed by CTE staff on Wednesdays.

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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](mailto:ssmith2@ggc.usg.edu)).

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

## From the Director

**Dr. Stella Smith**

In her recent blog, *Striking a Balance between Who You Are and Realizing Your Teaching Potential*, Maryellen Weimer was pondering how teachers balance between accepting who they are as teachers at the same time that they push to realize as much of their teaching potential as possible. All teachers can improve, she writes, even very good ones. She has come to believe that teachers can go further with their strengths than with their weaknesses. We all have weaknesses; hers is organization.

She finds herself getting sidetracked, going where student questions take her and leaving students with a vague sense of disorganization. She is working on this and comments, "I have improved, but organization is not something that distinguishes my teaching. I need to keep working on it, but am I ever going to be exceptional? I don't think so, and I think that with instructional maturity comes the ability to accept that some parts of your teaching are not ever going to be great."

She adds, "This is why I think it makes so much sense to know your instructional strengths and see in them your true potential as a teacher. You can do so much more with your strengths. Often they derive from who you are as a person and so there is a compelling authenticity and genuineness about how you use them..... And working on your strengths is way more motivating than always trying to fix what isn't working."♦

## Teaching Topic: What Do Students Value Most?

Which of the topics listed below do you think students consider most important when choosing a course?

- Active learning environment with lively and engaging class sessions
- Assignments which focus on analytical and computational skills
- Assignments which focus on communication skills
- Clearly defined assignments
- Clearly defined testing requirements
- Constructive feedback
- Convenience of class time
- Likelihood of achieving a high grade
- Expertise of instructor
- Flexible course design allowing choice in course components
- Frequent and prompt feedback
- Group work/opportunity to network with other students
- Accessible and helpful instructor
- Low out-of-class workload
- Relevance of course curriculum to life skills and/or career goals.

Continued on page 2...

## Teaching Topic

(cont.)

In a study of 275 accounting students (83 percent categorized as millennial students, i.e. born after 1982), these four course characteristics topped the list: 1) clearly defined assignments and testing requirements; 2) relevance of course curriculum to life skills and/or career goals; 3) convenience of the class time or location; and 4) instructor who is accessible and helpful. The researcher was surprised that the need for a high grade didn't make the top of the list. It actually came in seventh in importance.

What characteristics appeared at the bottom of the list? They included (proceeding down to the least important): 1) flexible course design allowing choice in course components ; 2) assignments emphasizing the development of analytical and computational skills; 3) assignments emphasizing the development of communication skills; and 4) group work and opportunity to network with others.

Another reported finding is that these students didn't select courses based upon the likelihood they would work on skills most relevant to their future professional lives. Although accounting students don't represent all students, this simple study demonstrates the value of getting feedback from our students, feedback which can inform us in our teaching , and provide the basis for challenging our students' decision-making criteria.

Pastorino (2006) reported on what matters most to millennial students. When asked to describe their ideal professor, the following made the list: approachable, flexible/not rigid, nice/caring/friendly/helpful, alert to what students understand. Being knowledgeable did not make the top five.

So, what recommendations do the researchers have for those of us teaching in classrooms today? They suggest we: provide rationale, relevance, and applicability; provide structure and clear performance standards; give consistent feedback; create a comfortable learning environment; allow for flexibility in assignments; use technology such as clickers; use experiential learning and case studies; and offer alternate learning environments, such as hybrid/online. ♦

Milliron, V.C. (2008) Exploring millennial student values and societal trends: Accounting course selection preferences. *Issues in Accounting Education*, 23 (3), 405-419.

Pastorino, E. (2006) When Generations Collide in the Classroom. *Essays from E-xcellence in Teaching*, Retrieved November 24, 2009 from the Society for the Teaching of Psychology website, <http://teachpsych.org/resources/e-books/eit2006/eit2006.php>

## A Teacher Speaks: My One Thing

Susan Bleyle

Monogamy is difficult with Vista tools and me. The Blackboard Vista online environment is simply so multi-faceted, with each tool providing a unique richness to the courses that I teach, that it is hard for me to commit to any solitary tool as my "One Thing." When pressed, however, I must confess to a deep infatuation with Grading Forms, a relatively new Blackboard Vista tool that I have become intimate with over the past two semesters.

"Grading Forms" are what Blackboard Vista calls grading rubrics, pedagogical tools that I had been striving to incorporate into my classes well before they appeared as part of the Blackboard Vista environment. There are several reasons that rubrics make good pedagogical sense: first and foremost, they are good for students. When a student is given a rubric prior to beginning an assignment, it is like having a road map for that assignment. The student knows exactly what is expected of him/her, which criteria the instructor will use to evaluate his/her work, and exactly how heavily each of the criteria will be weighted in determining the final grade.

For very similar reasons, rubrics are also good for teachers. Creating a rubric forces an instructor to pin down his/her beliefs about what is and what isn't important in a particular assignment. Rather than just relying on the amorphous, "I'll know it when I see it" approach to assigning a particular grade, the instructor is forced to articulate just what exactly "it" is. For all of these reasons, I have been creating rubrics on my own using the table-making tool in Microsoft Word, or online rubric development websites like Rubistar.4teachers.org, for several years.

Because of my longstanding interest in rubrics, I was glad to hear that Blackboard Vista v8, to which GGC migrated in spring 2009, would incorporate a new Grading Form tool. Having used it for two semesters now, I can genuinely say that, though not perfect, the Grading Forms tool is an excellent addition to the Blackboard Vista tool kit and has made a positive impact on my classes.

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Where are the journals & conferences related to teaching and learning? How can I link to archived workshops on teaching topics? Where can I find CTE workshop hand-outs? Where is the online version of this newsletter?

The answer to all these questions is our [CTE org site](http://www.cte.org) in the new portal. Many resources are available there to help you with your teaching needs. ♦

## A Teacher Speaks (continued)

The primary reason for this is that Grading Forms are extremely convenient. Once I create one, it lives within my Blackboard Vista course, and I never have to keep track of it. I don't have to worry about how many copies I need to print, or to remember to hand it out to students prior to starting an assignment, or to return it after they have completed the assignment. I simply attach a Grading Form to an assignment or discussion board prompt as I create it, and students automatically see it when opening the assignment or logging in to the discussion board. Then, after I grade the assignment, students see the completed form when they check their grade.

I can also attach a Grading Form to a new Grade Book column that I create, which is particularly helpful when I give an assignment that is not within the Blackboard Vista environment, such as a classroom presentation. Best of all, there is no way that students can lose track of their Grading Forms as they remain attached to grades in the Grade Book tool. This ensures that students always have access to the detailed analysis of their strengths and weaknesses that Grading Forms provide and that they can use to measure progress over time.

Despite a few minor areas in need of improvement, most notably the ability to import or export grading forms from one Blackboard Vista course to another, my love affair with Grading Forms remains strong. I will continue to use Grading Forms in their current iteration and, as with all things Vista, will eagerly await improvements that will inevitably come with future versions. Grading Forms are not the only indispensable tool in the Blackboard Vista environment, but they are the "One Thing" I can least live without, and without which my teaching and my students' learning would not reap so many positive rewards. ♦



*About the author: Susan Bleyle teaches English for Academic Purposes at GGC. She presented on her use of Blackboard Vista Grading Forms at the 2009 USG Annual Computing Conference on November 12, 2009.*



*The CTE wishes you and your family a wonderful holiday season!*

## Looking Backward, Looking Forward

### Looking Backward:

The Center has presented a variety of programs this past semester culminating in Dr. Christy Price's workshop on the millennial student. The feedback from participants focused on Dr. Price's engaging manner and the insights they gained into what works with today's student.

### Looking Forward:

Next semester's programs will include a number of sessions related to survey design, implementation, and assessment. Professors will be leading discussions on a variety of topics, such as the impact of cultural issues on learning, finding mathematics in unexpected places, and integrating case studies and debates into class work. For those of you who were unable to attend any CTE workshops in the fall, check our calendar in the BB portal under the CTE organization for days/times.

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## Want More? Additional Resources on ... *Role Playing*

At the recent American Association of Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) conference in Atlanta, a team of faculty from Drake University demonstrated the power of role-playing in engaging an audience, in this case, an audience composed of faculty and college administrators.

Pioneered by Barnard College in 1996, *Reacting to the Past* (RTTP) is supported by a consortium of colleges and universities. It consists of elaborate games, set in the past, in which students are assigned roles informed by classic texts. Class sessions are run entirely by students and facilitated by faculty, who grade written and oral assignments.

All the games are set in the past, and thus might be viewed as history, but each game also explores multiple additional disciplines. Learn more about the project and view their shareable resources at <http://www.barnard.edu/reacting/>. ♦

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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. ♦