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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.edu).

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

From the Director

By Dr. Stella Smith

In a recent study, Aimee LaPointe Terosky examines the career strategies of respected professors at a university. Terosky addresses the importance of mindfulness. Participants in her study consciously "interrupt" the flow of their careers and think about what they are doing. "They are, in short, mindful, and through their mindfulness, they realize what actions they can take to become increasingly effective teachers and academics" (p. 139). She adds that taking teaching seriously is about more than pedagogy; it's about thinking mindfully about career management strategies. These excellent professors work at being more effective time managers, at integrating career responsibilities and balancing these responsibilities. They tend to not accept things "as is," but rather, take the initiative to create a vision of the necessary support and then follow through on making their vision a reality. I highly recommend this article, which includes specific examples of participants' practices that can guide us as we begin this new academic year.

Terosky, A. L. (2010). How do they do it? Career strategies of university professors noted for taking teaching seriously. *Journal on Excellence in College Teaching*, 21 (1), 121-145. All issues of this journal are available online through our library resources.

Vista Focus: Blackboard Tools

by Gautam Saha & Stephanie Whittington

Whether you are new or returning faculty to GGC, Blackboard (also known as Vista) or JOVO can greatly enhance your productivity, help your students, and engage them even after leaving the classroom. Please consider the following tools as a way to guide you towards creativity and innovation in the classroom. Please contact us if you need assistance with any of these tools.

As the semester begins, we suggest familiarizing yourself with the Announcements, Calendar, Discussion, and Gradebook tools in Blackboard. The Announcements' tool gives instructors an excellent way to communicate important concepts and time-sensitive information to students. Have you thought of a video announcement for the first week of class? Let us help you create one for your course as a pop-up announcement. The Calendar can be used to create public, course, as well as personal (private) entries. The advantage of using the course calendar is that all personal and course entries in the calendar merge into an integrated calendar for each user. Thus, a student can have all course due dates, assignments, etc in one place! The Discussion tool can be a very powerful way to stimulate online engagement between students as well as between the class and the instructor. During the first week of class, an Ice Breaker activity is a great way to begin class discussions. Lastly, the Gradebook tool offers faculty an opportunity to give feedback to students. Students can use the "My Grades" feature to find their current class standing to keep them focused and engaged.

**A Teacher Speaks:
To Know. To Care. To Act.
by C. Douglas Johnson, Ph.D.**

One of the exciting things about joining GGC was the possibility of becoming an integral part of an experiment to transform higher education. Alas, I could employ some of the pedagogical techniques that had crossed my mind from time to time, but I had been unable to actually apply. In order to explore service learning and take my teaching to a higher level, I sought acceptance into the Governor's Teaching Fellow Program offered by the University of Georgia's Institute of Higher Education. Fortunately, I was admitted into the program and had a chance to further develop my thinking as well as implement some of the lessons learned. Throughout the academic year, I spent time reflecting on my teaching philosophy and wondering if I was actually living up to my personal expectations as a creator and disseminator of knowledge. I begin to question what my vision was for the classes I taught. What impact was I having on the professional and personal development of my students? Did my reach extend beyond the classroom walls? Was I simply giving lip service to the espoused values of GGC, or was I enacting values through my daily activities?

While disseminating knowledge at a diversity conference at Auburn University, I was fortunate to acquire knowledge from the keynote address offered by an esteemed scholar on multicultural studies, Dr. James Banks, a professor of education at the University of Washington. As he spoke, I was struck by six profound words that perfectly summarized my vision for business, actually collegiate education: To Know. To Care. To Act. As a business professor, my training taught me a vision statement should be succinct and easy to remember, but I had been unable to capture it in such an eloquent manner. Not only was this an effective vision statement, it was the essence of my teaching philosophy.

To Know. At a minimum, almost every faculty member strives to ensure her/his students advance their knowledge base within the particular subject(s) they teach. Whether done via lectures, classroom discussions, homework assignments, or group projects, they seek to build on existing knowledge and share new content to advance the student to a higher level of understanding and comprehension.

To Care. For some professors, increasing knowledge is a necessary but not sufficient requirement of collegiate education. They become disappointed, sometimes disheartened, when their students ask "is this going to be on the test?" or "am I going to miss anything important if I don't attend class?" These professors desire their students to actually care about the course content, to learn for learning sake and not solely for the purpose of making a good grade in the class or on a test, or maintaining their HOPE Scholarship.

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To Act. Some professors want to instill in their students a sense of civic and/or social responsibility, where they recognize they are among the elite who are afforded an opportunity to pursue a college degree and as such have an obligation to behave in a way that improves the world around them. By engaging the community and applying their learning, they are getting an immediate return on their investment, while making a positive impact on those around them.

By combining these three perspectives, I attempt to provide my students with a range of experiences that will not only enhance their knowledge such that they meet the course objectives and pass the tests, but provide them with skills which prepare them to pass the ultimate test – life. To me, this is learning at its finest. Learning is best when shared with others, but this sharing rarely happens if the student does not understand that linkages between knowing, caring, and acting. Therefore, I challenge my students to engage in service learning projects where they apply the course content while benefiting others. This has been done in the past by requiring group projects entitled "Claws for a Cause," where the students identify a particular charity or cause to support by raising funds or awareness to assist the entity in achieving its mission. This has been rewarding at the individual, group, class, and organizational levels. Whether it is raising funds for Relay for Life or the Haiti Relief, or providing assistance to the elderly, schools, foster children, or reading programs, or increasing awareness about breast cancer or the humane society, the students gain a better understanding of course concepts by collectively engaging in the project. While bureaucratic challenges have caused me to question the projects ongoing viability, the response of the students and community provide evidence these are worthy of continuing.

As we embark upon a new academic year, I offer (and accept) a threefold challenge to you, my GGC colleagues: 1) to live on the learning edge, where you learn/teach by stepping outside your comfort zone (e.g., try something new that is not completely comfortable for you), and 2) to question the effectiveness and impact of your living legacy, and 3) to make an ongoing commitment to impart knowledge in a manner that will enhance the professional and personal development of our students, of the GGC community and beyond. I can't say my approach has reached every student who has enrolled in my classes, but I am convinced the impact is greater than it would be if I didn't at least attempt To Know, To Care, To Act.

Teaching Topic: Don't Waste the First Day

Despite the fact that numerous articles have been written on the importance of the first day, too many of us still use it to do little more than go over the syllabus and review basic guidelines for the course. This year I decided to try a different approach, and the results were much more dramatic than I expected. I taught real material on the first day. Despite that, there have been fewer questions about course policies, with some students actually referencing them without even a mention from me. Let me explain how I achieved these results.

On the first day (I used this approach in all my courses), I spent the majority of the time teaching content that related to the overall ideas of the course. Thus, in freshman composition, a course that focuses on experiential learning, I had the students go outside and experience a brief period of blindness. They took turns taping cotton balls over their eyes and leading each other around. We then analyzed the experience and talked about how one might craft a thesis to describe what happened. In a Western literature class, I introduced the major ideas of the Enlightenment and talked about how the interplay of reason and emotion would reoccur throughout the course.

Only after this exposure to course content did I give students a copy of the syllabus. Rather than going through it in detail, I told students that they were perfectly capable of reading it. I think we should start assuming that students ranging from developmental courses to upper division major classes can read and understand a syllabus. Rather than treating the syllabus as something special, I decided to handle it as another reading assignment.

To prepare students for this reading assignment, I did a brief presentation (I used PowerPoint this year, which I almost never use) on the most important aspects of the syllabus: why students are taking the course, how to get in touch with me, our university's mission statement, academic support for those with disabilities, how to access the online readings, and the overall structure of the class. I limited the presentation to 10 minutes. I have even begun to wonder if I could skip handing out the syllabus altogether and simply have students print it off themselves and read it before coming to the first day of class.

On the second day, I had students pick up note cards as they arrived for class. I asked them to write on the card any questions they had about the syllabus. In one class of just over 30 students, I answered fewer than five questions, and it took less than five minutes. Even in my

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largest class, which had the most questions, I was still able to respond in less than 10 minutes. Thus, my presentation of the syllabus took 15 minutes, at best, as opposed to the 40 to 50 minutes it used to take.

Reprinted by permission of the author. Brown, K. (2009, November). Don't Waste the First Day. *The Teaching Professor*, pg. 4.

Want More? Additional Resources

Here is a great site on Team Building and Ice Breakers. This a great way to build community within your classroom! Try one of these activities in the first week of classes so your students can get to know one another and you. See the site for more details, http://www.teampedia.net/wiki/index.php?title=Main_Page.

Looking Backward, Looking Forward

Looking Backward:

The CTE held its first Learning Content and Technology Fair in late April. Faculty and vendors gave presentations on the various tools that faculty have available to them at the college. The 2010-2011 Hybrid Fellows held their first meeting in May. Subsequent meetings were held via Wimba Classroom in the months of June and July.

Looking Forward:

The CTE has moved to its new location on the second floor of the new library building! The CTE will begin the new school year with concurrent sessions for new faculty during New Faculty Orientation. Drop-in sessions will also be held in addition to an evening session for Adjunct faculty members. The CTE will host a Fall Learning Content and Technology Fair in conjunction with the Office of Educational Technology on 8/16 in building C from 8:45 to 12:45pm. It will be titled, Fall Into Technology. The first CTE workshop, "Getting Your Syllabus Ready for the First Day of Class," is set for 8/19 starting at 1pm. Dr. Jenn Wunder will demonstrate how she creates her class syllabus in collaboration with her students.

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.