



Teaching & Learning News

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Teaching With Technology: Streamlining Large Class Administration Online

Large classes can offer faculty some unique administrative challenges in terms of disseminating information and secure grading. WebCT, the campus course management system, can offer solutions for these and other challenges. Course management systems are a collection of web-based teaching and learning tools that enhance dissemination of course materials, communications (discussions, chat, whiteboard and email), student project spaces, assessment and evaluation (quizzing and survey tool), as well as administrative functions (grading and tracking student participation). Faculty can choose which tools are appropriate for their classes and modify or add additional tools with each semester the course is offered. The functionality within WebCT allows faculty with various levels of experience to provide a tailored secure web environment that accommodates different teaching styles.

Syllabus: The syllabus is the course map for students. It offers vital information in terms of course policies, grading scale and assignments. How many of your students have lost their copy of the syllabus within the first week? How many times would you like to make changes to the syllabus without having to print them? In WebCT, faculty can post their syllabi in a secure space online, easily available to all of their students. They can make changes to their syllabus document and upload them into WebCT. This allows faculty to notify all of their students of any changes or adjustments in a document they can download wherever they have a web connection.

Course Announcements: Have you ever wanted to make an announcement between classes? Or, you want to make sure everyone gets a particular change to the syllabus? Or, you wanted to

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Teaching and Mentoring – Parts of the Same Educational Challenge

We have heard a great deal about the importance of mentoring in recent months, and the President, the Provost and many campus leaders have raised expectations for this part of our role as faculty, staff, and teaching assistants. In CTE, we see mentoring as an aspect of teaching – not separate from teaching – and good teachers at all levels often act as mentors, even when they don't realize it. As we begin a new academic year, one of our goals in CTE will be to assist in making clear the connection between teaching and mentoring and to contribute to making the campus more effective in retaining students and providing a positive climate for learning and for success at all levels.

This issue of the *Teaching and Learning News* shows us examples of the teaching-mentoring connection. Direct contributions to mentoring on campus are described in Jean Finstad's reflections on the UTA program (see p. 10) and in Jonas Chalk's advice (see p. 3) about managing a team of T.A.'s in a large class environment. The UTA program has been a long-standing model that demonstrates how faculty can be

mentors for outstanding undergraduates and improve the quality of teaching and learning in their classes simultaneously. Aspiring teachers learn skills and gain insights into college teaching, undergraduates get more help in learning new material, and all involved are given more chances to be part of a positive and successful learning environment. In the same way, faculty who work with their graduate TAs effectively are both mentors and teachers for them while modeling good practice in one of the more challenging aspects of teaching, i.e. management. CTE's consultation program, headed by Associate Director Sue Gdovin (see p. 4), offers powerful support for teachers who wish to improve some aspect of their educational efforts, and both partners in this relationship learn a great deal from the experience.

Less direct but important mentoring takes place in any good learning environment. The practical suggestions (see p. 4 and p. 9) for extending student thinking, organizing good discussions, and stimulating engagement at various levels can help teachers go beyond the old "information transmission" role and become

facilitators of student growth into active learners and effective participants in what we call higher education. Many of our students need teachers to "mentor" them into thinking in new ways, into negotiating a system and an educational environment very different from what they left in high school (whether they come from Maryland, another state, or from another country). All of us have the opportunity to be mentors as well as teachers; we just have to use the chances we have. Sometimes that just means taking advantage of some of the excellent resources available on campus, as Paulette Robinson has shown us in her lead article on Web CT and using technology to manage teaching more efficiently.

Nora Bellows, our editor, has given us many useful ideas and suggestions for starting off the year as better teachers – and as better mentors for our colleagues, our T.A.'s and our students. Thanks to Nora and to all those who contributed to this issue. We look forward to hearing from readers and to sharing more ideas and resources in the coming issues of the *Teaching and Learning News* this year.

By Jim Greenberg, Director of CTE

Are YOU on the CTE Mailing List?

Take this short quiz to find out:

Do you receive one issue at the beginning of the school year and then never again until the following year?

If you said YES to this question, you are NOT on the mailing list. Here's the solution to this problem! Simply send an email with your name, mailing address and phone number to the *Teaching & Learning News* Editor, Nora Bellows at nbellows@wam.umd.edu and request to be added to the mailing list. We'll send you a confirmation of your subscription request in an upbeat welcome email!

SPREAD THE WORD ABOUT GOOD TEACHING AND LIFELONG LEARNING!

Give the *Teaching & Learning News* to a teacher colleague or friend!

Do you know a new or experienced teacher who is interested in keeping current on the latest in active teaching and learning? Give the CTE Newsletter (FOR FREE!) to your teacher friends and colleagues on or off campus. Simply send their names and addresses (including email) to Nora Bellows. Your teacher friend will receive a welcome email naming you as the gift-giver.

Write to us **today!**

"Chalk Talk" by Jonas Chalk

"To initiate a dialogue on best practices, successes, and frustrations in teaching."

Jonas on Working with TAs & Managing Student email

Dear Jonas:

Now that I've gotten my students on the right page about my expectations, I want to make sure that my Teaching Assistants function properly. Sometimes I get TA's who jump right in and do what they have to in terms of grading, supervising labs, holding review sessions and/or office hours and do it well. This term, I have a new crop of TA's who seem uncertain about what they should do. How can I show them how to grade, gauge when they should hold review sessions (and how to review material), and what their role is in lab—without ending up doing it all myself?

King of the Hill

Dear King:

Often, graduate students never had TA's themselves, so they are unclear about their duties. Also, expectations vary from course to course and instructor to instructor. It is important that you meet with your TA's early in the term to outline your expectations of them.

Be up front about your expectations for their attendance in lectures, proctoring of exams, and holding tutoring as well as grading sessions. Provide guidelines on how quickly they should return problem sets and lab reports, the criteria you want them to use in grading, and the ways in which they should record student marks. Let them know whether you expect them to attend your lectures, how proactive you want them to be in lab and the way they should use the time in recitation sections. Outline the type of feedback about individual or group performance that you would like to receive and when. Talk about office hours - how many should they hold and the best way for them to utilize this re-

source to benefit students. Include discussions about what to do if a student is missing a lot of classes, ignoring safety regulations in the lab, in danger of failing the course, or if the TA suspects academic dishonesty.

It's a good idea to invite TA's who successfully worked with this course in the past to talk with new TA's about the finer points in managing their end of the class.

You may even want to set up a mentoring program, whereby successful veteran TA's are available to answer common questions throughout the term and provide triage so that the most sensitive and urgent issues go directly to you.

Set up a regular meeting time with your TA's throughout the term. Some faculty meet with their assistants weekly or semi-monthly, while others hold meetings just before and after exams.

It's also a good idea to meet with each TA individually no later than after the first month to give feedback on how well they are performing their duties and further clarify their responsibilities.

Some professors have an outline to guide their discussions with TA's. You may want to develop such a form, one that meets your needs as a professor.

You may also want to direct your TAs to the Center for Teaching Excellence Fall and Spring Workshop Series (see page 5 for a schedule of the workshops this Fall)—there are workshops directed at the specific issues TAs face in the classroom.

Jonas

Quick Tip: Encourage your TA's to keep you informed of common errors they find in problem sets and exams. This is useful feedback to you about topics that are worth clarifying in your lectures.

Dear Jonas,

I'm feeling overwhelmed by email from my students! In some quarters I teach upwards of 100 students, and shortly before a big assignment is due or an exam is scheduled, I typically receive more than 50 email messages a day. I do want to provide a lot of feedback to my students—especially the first year students—but there's got to be a better way. I've told students that I might not respond immediately to email sent over the weekend, yet this means I face a pile of messages on Monday morning. I've also recommended that students come to my office hours rather than mail me their questions, but alas, I usually sit alone during office hours, reading and responding to their email. Any suggestions?

*Signed,
Relentless Replier*

See page 8 for Jonas Chalk's answer

TRY THIS! Strategies to Extend Student Thinking

Remember “wait time I and II”

Provide at least three seconds of thinking time after a question and after a response.

Utilize “think-pair-share”

Allow individual thinking time, discussion with a partner, and then open up for the class discussion.

Ask “follow ups”

Why? Do you agree? Can you elaborate? What is an example of that?

Withhold judgment

Respond to student answers in a non-evaluative fashion.

Ask for summary to promote active listening

“Could you please summarize John’s point?”

Survey the class

“How many people agree with the author’s point of view?” (thumbs up/thumbs down)

Allow for student calling

“Donna, will you please call on someone else to respond.”

Play devil’s advocate

Require students to defend their reasoning against different points of view.

Ask students to “unpack their thinking”

“Please describe how you arrived at your answer--think out loud”

Call on students randomly

Avoid the pattern of only calling on those students with raised hands.

Encourage student questioning

Let the students develop their own questions.

Cue student responses

“I want you to consider alternative answers: take a moment to brainstorm other possibilities.”

12 Discussion Suggestions Try One Today!

1. Discussion Requires Preparation: Give questions ahead of time and allow time for in-class reflection.

2. Break large problems into smaller, more specific problems: Students may perceive discussions as chaotic and some comments as irrelevant, because different students are working on different parts of a problem. Breaking a problem into smaller bits, so that all students are working on the same problem, or different students working on different parts in sequence will help students make sense of discussion, especially if the teacher helps students become aware of the aspect of the problem that is the current focus.

3. Ask questions at different levels of abstraction: Don’t fall into the trap of asking only factual questions or only very difficult complex questions. Mix it up, asking questions that require analysis, application, synthesis, and evaluation.

4. Provide encouragement and praise for correct answers and risk-taking: Encourage students to participate using both verbal and nonverbal cues: smile, nod, direct other students to pay attention to and take notes on a classmate’s comments. Remember that a poker face is not perceived as neutral but as negative by students. Avoid preaching, scolding, judging, moralizing, blaming, and other practices that will shut down a class and stifle discussion.

5. Don’t use unnecessary jargon: Explain the terminology used
“Discussion . . .” continued on page 7

Want to improve your teaching?

WORK WITH A CTE FACULTY TEACHING CONSULTANT!

The Faculty Teaching Consultation Division was designed to help provide support for campus instructors that would like to improve their teaching. Teachers work one-on-one with a Faculty Teaching Consultant, based on their own goals. The requesting teacher determines the issues to be explored, and the consultant provides an outside perspective, peer support for a plan of action, and suggestions for additional resources.

Any faculty member that teaches for the University of Maryland at College Park can request a teaching consultation, and they are completely confidential. For more information, contact Dr. Susan Gdovin at the Center for Teaching Excellence, 301-314-1288 or via email <sg91@umail.umd.edu>.

CTE Fall Workshop Series Schedule

Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Talking About Teaching: Does it Help? Wednesday, October 2nd, 12:00 - 1:30

What happens when teaching assistants and practicing classroom teachers are provided with a regular, on-going opportunity to interact? The Center Alliance for School Teachers (CAST) in the Center for Renaissance and Baroque Studies (CRBS) explored this issue with eight teaching assistants and a group of university faculty and local teachers. Their findings have implications for campus training practices and outreach efforts.

Presented by: Dr Nancy L. Traubitz, Dr. Karen L. Nelson and Dr. Adele F. Seeff., The Center Alliance for School Teachers (CAST) in the Center for Renaissance and Baroque Studies (CRBS).

TA Development Grants* Tuesday, October 15th, 2:00 - 3:30pm

CTE and the Graduate School will award a number of small grants to departments and colleges working to improve the support, development, and recognition of graduate teaching assistants. The purpose of the TA Development Grants will be to maximize the impact of the university resources that are dedicated to these purposes.

This workshop will include a description of the criteria for proposals, followed by an informal panel presentation given by past TA Development Grant recipients.

Librarian's-Eye View of Course Assignments: Insights for Improvement

Thursday, October 31st, 12:00 - 1:30pm

How well do students understand the research process? How knowledgeable are they about the wide array of print and electronic resources available? How well can they apply critical thinking skills to evaluating information resources? A panel of our campus librarians, who see thousands of students each year, will offer their unique perspectives on student research assignments.

Grading Writing Assignments* Monday, November 11th, 2:00 - 3:30pm

A panel of experienced graduate teaching assistants from the Freshman Writing Program, the Writing Center, and CTE will offer an informational session/workshop on what teaching assistants in every discipline can expect their students to know about writing. The panel will provide a framework for commenting on and assessing student writing in a variety of different ways, one of which includes creating rubrics for efficient grading. Of particular focus will be a discussion of concrete methodologies for making helpful comments in a timely manner.

Creating an Inclusive Learning Environment Thursday, November 21st, 12:00 - 1:30pm

We're ALL biased. . . regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, age and our positions as teachers or students in the classroom. We each come into the classroom carrying with us the freight of our individuality, and all of this affects how we teach and how we learn. An inclusive environment is one in which our individuality, rather than ignored is allowed in a context of respect, support and encouragement. This workshop will focus on the ways in which individual differences and common ground functions as a context for teaching and learning, in some cases as the driving force.

A campus panel will introduce several different issues and "scenarios" relevant to diversity of ourselves and our students on campus. Participants will have an opportunity to respond to these issues, as well as brainstorm strategies for deliberate creation of inclusive classrooms.

***Specifically designed for TAs
but all are welcome to attend**

PUTTING THEORY INTO PRACTICE: REFLECTION CAN IMPROVE TEACHING

WHY AND HOW TEACHING “JOURNALS” CAN MAKE YOU A BETTER TEACHER

The idea of keeping a journal, any kind of journal, can be daunting. We worry that it will take too much time, something that seems already in very short supply. But keeping a written record of your own reflections about how well individual classes, whole units, or particular semesters went can provide you with a tremendous pedagogical payoff.

Reflection of Any Sort Can Help Us Change the Way We Teach

Studies show that one of the main factors in improved teaching is active and frequent reflection on what we do and why. We can see the positive results of careful reflection in our conversations with our colleagues.

Just this morning a colleague of mine and I worked through some problems with a discussion format I want to try, problems I would have had to work out in-process through trial and error if I had not spent some time reflecting on the process ahead of time. We accomplished in our ten-minute conversation what it might have taken me several class meetings to work out. Good record-keeping of what we do, why, and how it worked, “journaling,” can function in much the same way as collaborative conversation with our teaching peers.

I have for years wanted to keep a teaching journal, in large part to help me remember the sorts of details that really will help me identify what I do, for good or ill, and then keep the stuff I like and learn to do other things differently, and, I hope, better. There is only one problem: I hate to keep a journal. I love the idea but I have been attached to a very traditional notion of journal keeping--one I think many people share: I spend a relaxed hour musing and writing in a pastoral setting. How hard could this be on a

campus such as ours with inviting lawns and the occasional nook, complete with moss covered brick seat? But where is that relaxed hour? If the hour can't be found (often, that's the hour relegated to my commute!) then the journal goes unwritten. Quite a disincentive for regular reflection.

But times have changed since the Romantics were seeking the sublime in the 19th century, and there are likely as many ways to keep a written record or journal of your teaching as there are teachers. The main ingredient in successfully keeping a journal is figuring out a method that *really* jives with your teaching life.

As you can see from my anti-journal confession, I get to thinking this journal business just takes too much time. And, well, it does to keep the journal I always wanted to keep. But an unwritten journal, lovely or not, is of no use to me or my teaching.

My New Teaching Journal Plan: The E-Mail Approach

So, this year I am going to take a much more realistic approach. I'm going to use email for my “teaching journal.” Here's my plan: before class (I teach 200-level literature classes) I'm going to jot down (or cut and paste into the email) my plan for the class.

This might sound terribly involved, but I'm a person who likes to see what the students do with ideas during discussion, so my plans are often quite loose. I have several “high level” questions written down ahead of time, a bridge from the previous class, and I go with it. Those questions and any notes are what will be pasted into my e-mails to myself. I'll also note assignments due (also very shorthand. For example, maybe they had a 1 page response paper due on

the Senate scene in Othello. So, I'll record that in the briefest way).

At this point, I'll record any other information that might be relevant, such as the weather (“It's an unbelievably gorgeous day, the sort makes no one want to come to class, not even me.”), the day of the week, (“Monday after holiday. . . will they have read?”), events that might have affected more than just me, or only my

Studies show that one of the main factors in improved teaching is active and frequent reflection on what we do and why.

students (“Big championship game last night and most of my students were going--maybe not a good idea to expect them to read new material?”), and how I feel (“Got lots of energy today and optimistic. I love this part of the book and think they do, too.”).

In short, I'll put in that “draft” email any plans I have. My goal is to spend no more than 5-10 minutes on this, TOPS.

After class, or as soon as I can during office hours, I'm going to make comments on my plan, recording the students' demeanors as a class, make notes about the questions I (or my students) asked that generated the most lively discussion, or that indicated we needed to get more basic. Because I like to write down my questions ahead of time, this part of record-keeping will be a fairly streamlined process. I am particularly interested in making note of the things that stopped or slowed discussion, as I am work-

ing on ways to get and maintain interesting discussions that involve as many students as possible.

I'm going to write everything I can think of within the time frame of ONLY TEN minutes. I've got to stick to ten, because it's my check on perfectionist tendencies. I'm going to let this journal be *ugly* if it has to be, so long as it has a lot of information. Then I send it off to myself and file it in my "Teaching Journal" folder to look at tomorrow, next week, next semester or the next time I teach that class.

My Colleague's Plan: Put Lecture Note Margins to Good Use

A colleague of mine offered a different approach. When I told her about this idea of mine she balked, saying that was way too involved for her. Here's what she has done for years and it has been an invaluable tool for her. Because she was teaching large science lecture classes, she always has lecture notes.

Her method of reflection has always been to write down comments about what the students responded to, what they didn't understand, what they had questions about. All this in the top margin of her notes. She uses feedback techniques, such as the one-minute paper, show of hands, or index card, to help her get a sense of just what is on the students' minds (for a description of these and other feedback methods, see "Five Methods of Self-Assessment for Different-Sized Classes" in the April/May 2001 issue of *T&LNews*).

Other Plans: The Form Journal

For the teacher who likes to have a more structured journal, consider generating a form that you can fill out quickly, in fifteen minutes or less, and attach any assignment sheets, agendas, discussion or other questions. Here are CTE's suggested parameters:

1. How did students react to the lesson(s)?

2. In what ways did you deviate from the plans for today's lesson(s)?

3. What worked especially well today? Why?

4. What didn't work today? Why?

5. What do you wish you had tried or done differently?

6. What "outside" circumstances or factors may have had an impact on the students' abilities to learn today?

Use Journal Notes for Planning a Course or Set of Lessons

"Good preparation may mean less time spent reacting to behavior problems and more time on content" said Michael Anderson, professor at the University of Nebraska Lincoln, of the importance of reflective planning. He advocates a six-step process that can be used as another sort of "form" for a teaching journal or as a process to help teachers think through any aspect of a course or lesson:

1. What is an abstract description of the course/unit/lesson?

2. What is the rationale for the course/unit/lesson?

3. What are the learning objectives?

4. What are the methods or activities that are best suited for your content and your students?

5. How will you assess student learning for this particular method/lesson/activity/assignment?

6. How did the course/unit/lesson work? What worked well and why? What needs more work and why?

For a more detailed outline of this planning process, see the original article in the November/December, 2001 *Teaching and Learning News*.

If you've been keeping a teaching journal, even sporadically, let us know what works for you. If you start one, let us know that, too. Write to me at nbellows@wam.umd.edu with your ideas.

Me, I've got fifteen minutes before I've got to teach--gotta write my email journal! —Editor, T&L News

"Discussion . . ." continued from page 4

in your discipline. Carefully word your questions, asking students if they understand the question.

6. Adopt the 10-second rule: Allow for silence in the classroom. Count to 10, before you follow up, or, perhaps even better, tell students you will give them __ minutes to think about the question, take notes, look for evidence, etc., and then do something else yourself so you don't worry about the silence and your students don't feel too "watched."

7. Learn to paraphrase: Interpret what students say, restate in another way, or have another student restate so that everyone clearly understands what the original speaker said. This sends the message that what students say is important to pay attention to, and offers to students a model for how to paraphrase.

8. Allow students to answer: Resist the temptation to answer your own question. Also consider resisting the temptation to hear from the same five students all the time. Investigate ways to get other students talking (see our red packet on *Diversity* for some tips).

9. Learn students' names: Doing so sends the message that they and their words matter. Help other students to use names, too.

10. Seat students facing one another: Circular or horseshoe seating arrangements encourage interaction, indicating to students that talking to each other is important. Keeping students in rows indicates that the focus really should be on you, the person at the front of the room. If you have bolted down chairs, stadium seating situations, or other impossible classroom seating scenarios, don't despair! To help students negotiate such static seats, the teacher should move to stand next to the student who is speaking--tell your students what you are doing, so they learn to look at the people who are talking, just like they would at any dinner party discussion. Ask your students for help with the situation--they will come up with great ideas (take as many as you can), and if all else fails, move your classroom to a

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More "Chalk Talk" by Jonas Chalk

Jonas on Managing email communication

Dear Relentless:

You're not alone in feeling buried by email: there are times when it can take me two hours to read and reply to a day's worth of email. Email can bring out the closet Luddite in even the most technologically friendly professor. Yet before blaming the technology, we should analyze the type of question students are asking.

Do you find that you're writing the same reply to many different students' questions? Could it be that you've not been as clear or detailed in your class assignments or lectures as you thought you were? Freshman students especially need more structure and detail than students further along in their undergraduate career. Pausing in your lecture every 15 minutes, and asking for students' questions, is a wise investment of time: better to answer a question once for all the students to hear, than to answer the same question 50 times to individual students by email.

This may not offer a complete solution to your email problem, however. Perhaps many of the e-mails you receive are questions related to scheduling and course policy: "Can I have an extension on the problem set?" "What day is the exam?" "When will you be returning our lab reports?" In some cases, automating your reply can be a time saver. For example, you could compose a generic response using word processing software like Word, Simple Text or Notepad, and save it on your computer. Then copy and paste the response into your reply to students' email

messages. This approach is especially useful when you've taught the class before, and can anticipate the type of questions students are likely to ask.

Along similar lines, you can create a list of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) for your course. When students ask one of the questions on the FAQ, either copy and paste the pre-written response into your email reply, or tell students to check the FAQ itself. Perhaps you could post this information outside your door or on a web site.

In many situations, however, canned responses like these will not address students' questions, and some instructors may cringe at the thought of depersonalizing their feedback in this manner. Here's where another technological tool—the online discussion board—might be a great alternative to email. If you create a class bulletin board that students are required to use, all students in the class can benefit from your answer to a single student's question. If one student has a question, chances are good that many other students in the class are wondering the same thing. Yet you'll need to answer the question only once, and a written record of your answer will remain available online for all other students, at any future time, to reference.

Furthermore, an electronic bulletin board—if used well—can take some of the burden of answering questions off the individual instructor. Studies show that students learn much more effectively if they try to solve problems together, rather than asking

the instructor for the answer. If you structure your class's use of an electronic bulletin board so that students see the benefits of peer collaboration, students can help one another with questions ranging from the simply administrative—"When is our midterm?"—to the more analytically rigorous—"Can someone help me understand how to calculate K when one of the reactants is a solid?" Because we have WebCT on campus, it's quite simple to establish such bulletin boards, too.

You may be thinking that I'm crazy for recommending that you add yet one more mode of communicational technology, when the initial problem is actually a function of communicational technology. Think of it this way: each communicational medium has its own strengths and weaknesses, and it's our job as communicators to choose the most effective and efficient medium for various types of feedback.

Instructor-student email is very useful when private feedback is warranted. Devoting a few minutes of each class meeting to student questions, or establishing electronic bulletin boards, can help you reduce the number of email questions you receive from students.

Building small group activities in your course can encourage students to provide feedback to one another, rather than looking only to you for the answers.

Jonas



Tips and Scripts for Asking Questions that Generate Quality Thinking

Knowledge: *Identification and recall of information*
 Who, what, when, where, how _____?
 Describe _____.

Comprehension: *Organization and selection of facts and ideas*

Retell _____ in your own words.
 What was the main idea of _____?
 What does _____ mean?

Application: *Use of facts, rules, principles*

How is _____ an example of _____?
 How is _____ related to _____?
 Why is _____ significant?
 In what ways can you see examples of _____ in the world? in your life?

Analysis: *Separation of a whole into component parts*

What are the parts or features of _____?
 Classify _____ according to _____.
 Outline/diagram/web _____.

How does _____ compare/contrast with _____?
 How is _____ the same as/different than _____?
 What evidence can you present for _____?

Synthesis: *Combination of ideas to form a new whole*

What would you predict/infer from _____?
 What ideas can you add to _____?
 How would you create/design a new _____?
 What might happen if you combined _____ with _____?
 What solutions would you suggest for _____?

Evaluation: *Development of opinions, judgments, or decisions*

Why do you agree/disagree with _____?
 What do you think about _____?
 What is the most important aspect of _____?
 Why is _____ important?
 Prioritize _____ according to _____.
 How would you decide about _____?

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 more discussion-hospitable location.

11. Adopt the role of troubleshooter:

Facilitate a clear discussion trajectory by asking for (and sometimes offering) facts, concrete examples, or evidence when things get a little too abstract. Refocus or redirect discussion by summarizing or preventing premature closure of a particular line of thought.

12. Handle disagreements creatively:

Put pros and cons on the board, allow the class to debate an issue in teams, have students argue for one position and then switch sides, arguing for the opposing position, in each case offering good evidence to support their position. If you are concerned about student conduct during a heated discussion, go over the rules for constructive interaction. See also "Hot Moments in the Classroom: Strategies for turning difficult encounters into learning opportunities" in the Nov/Dec issue of *T&L News*.

For more discussion tips, come to the CTE office in 0405 Marie Mount Hall and pick up our red resource packet on Discussion, particularly William Ewens' article on "Teaching Using Discussion," from which this feature was adapted.

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notify students of a related event on or off campus? An electronic space can be created in WebCT to post course announcements. It insures students will receive course announcements that are not reliant on the time and space constrictions of the classroom.

Course Content: Have you wanted to have an easy way to distribute to students lecture notes, related links on the web, or supplemental materials? In WebCT, faculty can easily post lecture notes, PowerPoint slides, and other course materials. Not only do students have access to course materials any time and from anywhere they can get onto the Internet, but it also saves on the printing costs of distributing paper materials in class.

Grading: Have you created a convoluted method of posting grades to secure students' privacy? Do you dread putting

grades online for more than 100 students? WebCT's grading function can address these issues. Faculty only need to fill out a short online form and all of their students are automatically loaded and updated with student changes into the WebCT course space. Students, who drop or add a course, are automatically handled by the system. Grades can easily be uploaded for assignments using a common spreadsheet. Faculty decide when the grades will be released to students. Students can also see how their point grade compares to other students in the class. Faculty can request their early warning and final grades be uploaded automatically from WebCT into the UMEG system. This provides them with an easy way to submit grades electronically while still providing a secure way for students to view their individual

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Our Students Talk About the UTA Program: Seeing the Classroom, and Knowledge, with Different Eyes

by Jean Finstad, III, a senior seeking BA with emphasis in Jazz Bass performance

In its purest form, the ‘classroom,’ it is a room where an exchange of knowledge and experience flows amongst all members of the class. For this flow to occur, everyone must be able to input and share their knowledge. In this type of ‘class,’ everyone is equal and a more true version of a classroom becomes apparent to all those in the ‘class.’ This is where my experience with the UTA program comes into play.

When I started working as a UTA in January 2002, the very first thing I noticed was the different perspective of the classroom. Sitting up at the head of the class with an agenda to get through is a very different feeling from being a student waiting for someone else to prompt discussion. Throughout the spring semester, I was able to see both the classroom as well as my ideas on learning through a new pair of eyes.

The second thing I experienced was the monumental amount of work that our underpaid teachers have to go through to be fully prepared to lead a class. Our teachers must be masters of the materials before they can even attempt to be an asset to their students’ understanding of anything. A great and experienced teacher is also able to think ‘on the fly’ and is able to answer, or create an opportunity for other students to answer, practically any question that may be brought up by an inquiring student.

Teaching a discussion class is different from teaching a lecture class. I feel that when a student has a true engagement with the text or subject matter and a discussion turns heated, this is when students not only learn the subject, but also learn real-world skills such as how to handle themselves properly and be able to

prove a point with facts instead of feelings or unsubstantiated or unsupported opinions. Discussions are what make learning interactive.

As a student, I see the UTA experience as an invaluable addition to my knowledge. I feel that it has and will help me to become a more well-rounded individual that can see, respond to, and critique multiple arguments and points of view while staying level-headed. The UTA ex-

. . . the point of the UTA program is not only to help out teachers, but to help students to see that there is a closer connection between the lines of teacher and student.

perience puts a spin on student learning and helps to “fill out” the classroom experience. As a student, I used to see my classes as two dimensional. Now a third dimension has been added for me. I can see from the teacher’s point of view and now have the knowledge of what goes into the making of a really terrific class.

This newfound knowledge of the classroom is what I will use most in my future. It has made me a better student in every class I have and will take in the future. I also now feel an obligation to teachers to do whatever I can to make their job flow as well as possible in the classroom and have since then taken on responsibilities without being asked. I feel that the point of the UTA program is not only to help out teachers, but to help students to see that there is a closer con-

nection between the lines of teacher and student. At the same time, I see that a main purpose is to help those in the program to become better, more knowledgeable students who are able to take on any classroom responsibility and become leaders in every future experience they may have both inside and outside the classroom.

My duties as a UTA were as follows: to grade and effectively comment on student papers and exams, hold out-of-class review sessions, co-lead class discussions with another UTA, help to plan class discussion forums, help in lesson planning, help to come up with exams, and to act as a liaison between the students and their teacher. I believe that because of the amount of involvement my partner UTA and I had with the students, they began to see us in a different light--possibly like interpreters to a foreign dignitary. This helped to open the lines of communication and set the foundation for all class discussions. They quickly began to see us as a valuable commodity for their learning throughout the semester and many of them used us to their fullest extent.

Throughout the semester, I spent countless hours reading, commenting on, and critiquing student’s work. It was our hope that with our helpful and instructive comments, the student would be able to more strenuously critique their own work with a new pair of eyes and ideas for the future.

This kind of constructive commenting takes a lot of time, especially when starting out because of innate feeling to address every aspect of the student’s work. I feel that over the course of the semester, I

“Seeing . . .” continued on the facing page

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came a long way in our approach to commenting. By the end I think that the students felt comfortable that my comments read like a way to help them improve rather than putting their work down, or praising them without saying anything constructive about why their paper worked well. I learned that satisfaction through personal growth was the driving force for how much effort the students put into their work. I began to see that if they felt that you spent a good deal of time on their work and really cared about what they had to say, the level of their work improved.

When the students improve, the teacher improves and the classroom reaches its fullest potential. This is what the Undergraduate Teaching Assistant program has to offer our institution.

The Undergraduate Teaching Assistant (UTA) Program is offered by the Center for Teaching Excellence. Student applicants must be rising juniors in class standing, have a high grade point average, and have taken the class for which they would like to be a TA. Students must apply for the program in coordination with the professor with whom they would like to work. For complete details, please see the program requirements and application materials on our website under the pull down menu heading "Depts/Colleges": www.umd.edu/CTE

This article is the first in a series of articles under the heading of "Our students Talk." All of these articles will be written by undergraduates about the experiences of undergraduates here on our campus. We here at CTE felt it was important for all of us concerned with teaching and learning to hear from people as integrally involved in the process but often with very different perceptions and experiences from ours as teachers.

We invite you to write to *T&L News* (nbellows@wam.umd.edu) in response to any feature you see here!

What We're Reading:

CTE "Red Packets" Packed With Good Ideas!

CTE has in its library a number of "red resource packets" on different topics, collections of articles about topics of interest to teachers, including leading good *Discussion, Alternatives to Traditional Teaching Methods, Lecture, Diversity, Assessment and Grading*, and other issues--there is a full list of the red packets on our website. We have asked a number of people, including faculty on campus, graduate TAs, and undergraduate students, to read selections from these red packets and comment on what struck them as particularly useful for thinking about as they enter the classroom, from the perspectives of both teacher and student. Over the course of the year, we will offer these comments. In the meantime, please stop by the CTE office in 0405 Marie Mount Hall and pick up your own red packet on a topic that interests you!

Red Packet on Cooperative Learning:

As an Undergraduate here at the University of Maryland, I have experienced first hand how beneficial cooperative learning can be; it affects every aspect of learning, from academic achievement, to thinking skills, and even social interaction.

There is a very interesting article in the packet that discusses the positive effects of cooperative learning: "**Cooperative Learning And College Instruction: Effective Use of Student Learning Teams.**" The article offers a lot of positive evidence from studies on the effects of cooperative learning. After reading the article I realized that I think one of the most, if not the most, beneficial effect of cooperative learning is improved race relations. On the college campus we embrace racial diversity, and are very proud that we have a campus with incredible diversity. Unfortunately, a lot of the time people tend to stick together. There are many organizations on campus that focus on specific groups or races, and not enough that encourage bringing people together.

I believe that the most important benefit of group work is that it brings people together who might not otherwise have talked, much less talked heatedly about a particularly difficult issue. Group work gives people the opportunity to learn about one another. I know from my recent experience that group work is great, and I still talk to many of the people from my past groups.

--Gabriella Sackrin, undergraduate

Red Packet on Diversity:

I read along quite comfortably about the presence of subtle biases in the college classroom until I read an article called "**Ensuring Equitable Participation in College Classes**" by Myra and David Sadher. They write that most teachers, "regardless of gender, race or ethnicity . . . are completely unaware of . . . inequitable interaction patterns" (50). These inequitable interaction patterns come as no surprise to most who have ever taught a discussion class or even had question and answer sessions with a large lecture: there are about five students who do all the talking and more likely than not, these students are white and male. If you've ever had students who cluster together in your class along racial or gender lines, those clusters talking amongst themselves but often loath to interact within a larger discussion, you may be seeing evidence of past teachers' biases and *your own*.

The Sadher's article is useful in identifying student interaction patterns that may reveal teacher biases (such as avoiding calling on certain students, failing to address self-segregation, teacher talking patterns--talking front and left, for example) that can have a profound cumulative effect on student learning outcomes.

This article goes beyond simple identification, however, to offer a concrete method not only for in-class strategies to start using tomorrow, but also offers a program for using peer mentoring as a way to help teachers "see" what they do and then change, through a combination of talking cure with colleagues, and, again, concrete methods. A must read! --Graduate TA

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grades throughout the semester.

Experienced Faculty: Examples of three faculty, who use WebCT to provide administrative and pedagogical solutions for their large classes, are Ann Smith (amsmith@umd.edu) in Microbiology, Carol Burbank (cburbank@umd.edu) in Theater, and Elaine Bailey (elbailey@umd.edu) in Applied Agriculture. They have agreed to share their experiences with WebCT and the solutions it has offered them in enriching the learning experience for students as well as making their courses operate more efficiently.

Teaching and Learning Support

Group: The Teaching and Learning Support (TLS) group in the Office of Information Tech-

nology provides three hours of training for individuals, groups (department or program) or campus training-wide, November 1 from 9 am –12 for any faculty who are interested in using WebCT for their large classes.

WebCT allows faculty with various levels of experience to provide a tailored secure web environment that accommodates different teaching styles.

Registration for the campus-wide training can be found at the Institute for Instructional Technology (IIT) website (<http://oit.umd.edu/iit/current.html>). TLS also will assist faculty in tailoring their course space for

their particular needs. We can customize training for TAs involved in specific courses using WebCT. If you are interested or you have any questions, you can contact me, Paulette Robinson (probinso@umd.edu, 5-3011), or Sharon Roushdy (sroushdy@umd.edu, 5-8820).

Teaching with Technology is a new column written by Paulette Robinson, Ph.D., Manager of Teaching and Learning Support with the Office of Information Technology.

If you have a response to this column, please write to the *T&L News* at nbellows@wam.umd.edu. Let us know how you have used technology in your classroom, what worked, what problems you have had, how WebCT has worked for you.

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