"I Can’t Believe Another Semester is Almost Over": Making the Last Days of Class Matter

Many conversations on campus begin with knowing sighs about how quickly the semester, the year, the break is passing. We’re lodged in battle with the calendar just like everyone else, but the sudden and unforgiving arrival of the last day of class can leave us resigned to little more than tidying up, answering questions about looming exams, and leaving the room while course evaluations are completed.

TLN has asked a few of this year’s Lilly-CTE Teaching Fellows to offer very short reflections on the end of the semester. The teacher who thinks learning has ended by the time the last day arrives is in all likelihood a straw man, but we think there’s much to be gained by treating those last moments of the semester as more than clerical sessions. Here are a few thoughts on semester’s end.

Glenn Schiraldi, Public and Community Health

HLTH 485 is called Ways of Knowing About Human Stress and Tension. Through a variety of learning methods we explore how people around the globe and throughout history have thought about the six aspects of the human condition: death, fallibility, suffering,
Training the Future Professoriate: Whose Responsibility Is It?
by Spencer Benson,
Director, Center for Teaching Excellence

With nearly 10,000 graduate students and more than 25,000 undergraduates enrolled in thousands of classes each semester it makes sense that many classes, laboratories, discussions and recitations are taught by graduate students. Graduate students are an essential part of the UMD teaching community and represent the future of the disciplines. Although not all graduate students will necessarily choose to pursue a professional career in academics all will teach in a variety of venues: traditional classes at four-year institutions, classes at community colleges, in the K-12 system or informally as instructors or project leaders in business, government or NGOs.

All professionals teach in some capacity as part of their career duties. Good teaching requires training and an understanding of the basic principles of how people learn. Being able to teach well is a skill that can be learned and improved upon by training and professional development.

While graduate students are experts in taking courses and often have a good understanding of their own learning strategies these are not sufficient to enable them to be good or even competent teachers. Successfully taking a course as a student is very different than successfully giving a course as an instructor. Nor does an understanding of one’s own learning strategies necessarily provide a good understanding of how others learn. Moreover, the students who go on to graduate school represent only a small fraction of the student population. Thus most graduate students’ initial view and understanding of teaching and student learning is minimal; often they mistakenly assume that all students are similar to themselves with respect to learning and that the pedagogy that helped them be successful students is the best approach. Unfortunately, this sometimes means that they see successful teaching as organized lectures and content-centered tests and quizzes. While there is nothing wrong or bad about lectures or content-centered tests and quizzes—each have their place—if these are the only teaching tools they have, the quality and type of learning in their courses is likely to be shallow and quickly forgotten.

As part of their graduate training, there need to be mechanisms, venues and opportunities for all graduate students to learn about teaching and to develop their understanding of what it means to teach and what it means to enable student learning. Assigning graduate students to teach a course, a lab, a discussion section, or recitation section without providing training, support, and mentoring on how to teach is ineffective and inappropriate. The various colleges, departments and programs handle the challenges of training graduate teaching assistants in different ways. In some programs there is a robust and formal mechanism to ensure that all graduate students receive training in how to teach. Other programs provide opportunities for training but do not require it, and in other cases the training of the graduate teaching assistant is the responsibility of the course coordina
**Plus-Minus Grading Policy to Take Effect**

Beginning in the fall, numerical values will be assigned to plus-minus grades for the purpose of calculating grade point averages.

Narrative descriptions of letter grades will not change.

For much more information on implementation and policies, please visit [http://www.provost.umd.edu/Academic_Planning/PlusMinusGrading.htm](http://www.provost.umd.edu/Academic_Planning/PlusMinusGrading.htm)

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**Annual Guide to Instructional Policies and Resources**

- Can I cancel my office hours because of weather?
- Should I post student grades outside my office?
- When should I assign a grade of “I”?
- Where can I find the University Human Relations Code?

This guide offers a brief introduction to the University’s policies, procedures, and resources related to teaching, advising and mentoring. It’s available at the following address: [http://www.faculty.umd.edu/teach/InstructionalGuide.htm](http://www.faculty.umd.edu/teach/InstructionalGuide.htm)

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**Academic Integrity Notice for Your Course Syllabus**

The Student Honor Council encourages any individuals teaching a course to include the following information in the course syllabus:

The University of Maryland, College Park has a nationally recognized Code of Academic Integrity, administered by the Student Honor Council. This Code sets standards for academic integrity at Maryland for all undergraduate and graduate students. As a student you are responsible for upholding these standards for this course. It is very important for you to be aware of the consequences of cheating, fabrication, facilitation, and plagiarism. For more information on the Code of Academic Integrity or the Student Honor Council, please visit [http://www.studenthonorcouncil.umd.edu/whatis.html](http://www.studenthonorcouncil.umd.edu/whatis.html).
Many voices have said many things about the ways blogs operate; academic blogs are no exception. Enthusiasm for the form’s mutability, the appeal of access to newly-formed ideas in their earliest stages, and anxiety over the shape of one’s scholarly persona are only the most obvious issues that attend to this diary-style manner of online publishing. Whatever the risks, though, academic blogs do offer a means for interaction between scholar-teachers who might not otherwise discuss ongoing work.

Anyone seeking lively conversations on pedagogy ought to visit the ongoing series of blog entries called “Teaching Carnivals” (http://teachingcarnival.blogspot.com/). These are periodic digests of the active online discourse on teaching and learning. Each carnival takes the form of a collection of annotated links to selected academic blog posts on teaching and learning in higher education, and each installment is the source of compelling, challenging, and sometimes unsettling reflections on the profession and the classroom.

Teaching Carnivals are arranged by topics and developed by that carnival’s editor, who is responsible for gathering, sorting, and briefly commenting on sometimes more than fifty blog entries. The entries—composed by sometimes anonymous, sometimes named graduate students, adjuncts, tenured faculty, and administrators—are occasionally passing reflections but often include extended discussions of designing courses and syllabi, advising students, grading work, selecting texts, and responding to problems in the class and in office hours.

While the nature of the medium often means that these reflections are less refined than published scholarship, carnivals indicate the remarkable venue blogs offer for a discussion between faculty, graduate students and readers across institutions and disciplines. Perhaps because blogs seem so susceptible to the conversational form, personal experience is the foundation for most of the carnivals’ entries. Semesters in which no student will contribute to discussion, managing open revolt over group work, arranging the contents of tomorrow’s lecture, developing advice for students considering graduate school, and reflecting on anxiety over the personal and the professional are regular topics. Some linked posts take on the lighthearted, and one or two probably fall well below what we might expect of instructors of all ranks. (The carnivals’ founder offers some guidance for readers at http://ghw.wordherders.net/archives/004742.html.) Many posts, however, ask difficult questions and suggest thoughtful ways for thinking about – and doing – the work of teaching.

Links to the seven available carnivals are available at http://teachingcarnival.blogspot.com/.
Communicating Expectations: An Undergraduate Panel  
April 28

CTE is hosting an exciting opportunity to discuss the business of communicating and sustaining teacher expectations. A panel of undergraduate students, moderated by expert faculty, will address their experiences with effective methods for articulating teacher expectations for individual assignments, course objectives, assessment, and other aspects of teaching and learning.

Interdisciplinary Teaching and Learning: A Graduate Research Seminar  
Jo Paoletti, American Studies Department  
May 1

Where does the scholarship of teaching and learning fit in graduate education? How does the PhD—often described as research training—prepare future professors to teach? This panel will present the experience of students in a graduate seminar (AMST 628C: Interdisciplinary Teaching and Learning) that explicitly sought to engage them in scholarly inquiry related to teaching and learning. Instructor Jo Paoletti will give an overview of the course design and content, and students will reflect on their course experiences, including their semester research projects.

Visitors are welcome to read the course blog, Impari, located at http://www.otal.umd.edu/~jpaol/wordpress/ , which also includes links to many of the course readings. (Registration is required in order to post comments).

Distinguished Scholar-Teacher Lecture  
Michael Nelson, Rhodes College  
May 3

Michael Nelson teaches courses on U.S. Politics, the American Presidency, and the Constitutional Convention. In addition, Dr. Nelson teaches Rhodes College’s humanities course, The Search for Values in the Light of Western History and Religion, and is coauthor of a book about the course, Celebrating the Humanities: A Half Century of the Search Course at Rhodes College (1996).

Before coming to Rhodes in 1991, he taught at Vanderbilt University for thirteen years and was an editor of The Washington Monthly. He has published twenty-one books, the most recent of which are The Presidency and the Political System, 8th ed. (2006), The Elections of 2004 (2005), The American Presidency: Origins and Development, 1776-2002 (2003), and Governing Gambling: Politics and Policy in State, Tribe, and Nation (2000). He has published more than 200 articles in scholarly journals such as the Journal of Politics and Political Science Quarterly and in periodicals such as Newsweek, the New York Times, and the Chronicle of Higher Education. Although most of his articles have been about American politics and government, he has also written about C.S. Lewis, Frank Sinatra, Charles Dickens, Garrison Keillor, and baseball. More than forty of these articles have been reprinted in anthologies of political science, history, and English composition.
Help on Teaching (HoT) Program

If you are a graduate teaching assistant (GTA) with a teaching-related concern, issue, or crisis, and you want the advice of a seasoned and trained GTA, call on one of CTE’s Help on Teaching Fellows. The HoT Program fellows are prepared to work with you on:

- Assessment
- Course design
- Teaching methods
- Discussion strategies
- Student evaluation data
- Classroom management
- Motivation strategies

As a UMD GTA you can have up to three one-hour consultation sessions with a fellow each semester. These sessions are informal, voluntary, and confidential and are intended to address your teaching issues.

If you seek an ongoing mentoring relationship, you should contact your department’s graduate director and inquire about opportunities for mentoring within your department.

To arrange to meet with a HoT Program Fellow, contact Peggy Stuart, CTE’s Coordinator of Graduate Student Programs, at 4-1283. Peggy will put you in contact with the fellow who can best address your needs.

Online Teaching Resource Packets

CTE has made available—on its website—valuable teaching resources for the campus community. Visit http://cte.umd.edu/PODresources.htm to review a number of teaching resource packets published by the POD (Professional and Organizational Development) Network.

POD packets address current, relevant topics in higher education teaching and learning. Each is composed of past “Essays on Teaching Excellence,” a POD Network publication series that began in 1989.

Written by expert scholar-practitioners, these thoughtful and succinct essays can be used as readings for faculty development workshops, seminars, individual consultations, and classes on college teaching.

Try Clickers for a Day

Are you interested in the student response devices known as clickers? CTE has a loaner program by which you can borrow a set of radio frequency (RF) clickers and a laptop equipped with the RF receiver which makes any classroom with an LCD projector a clicker classroom.

For more information about classroom response technology, see the November-December issue of Teaching & Learning News or contact CTE at 4-9356.

EXAMPLES OF AVAILABLE PACKETS:
- The Learning Process
- Change, Renewal, and the Professoriate
- Thoughts on the future
- Technology and Related Issues
- Improvement of Teaching and Assessment
- Alternatives to Traditional Teaching Methods and Learning Strategies
- The Student/Teacher Relationship
- Defining and Characterizing Teaching
- Motivating Students
- Cooperative/Collaborative Learning, Small Groups
- Critical Thinking
- Diversity Issues
- Grading, Testing and Assessment
- Introductory Courses/General Education
University Teaching and Learning Program

The University Teaching and Learning Program (UTLP) is an elite cohort of graduate teaching assistants who come together informally to discuss aspects of teaching and learning, engage in mentoring relationships, and create their teaching portfolios. UTLPers have a common commitment to improving undergraduate education and an eagerness to make their classes the best that they can be.

Supported by the Office of the Provost, UTLP is administered by the Center for Teaching Excellence and coordinated by Peggy Jerome Stuart, a graduate student from the department of Education Policy and Leadership. For more information about the UTLP, contact her at mjstuart@umd.edu.

Want to improve your teaching?
WORK WITH A CTE FACULTY TEACHING CONSULTANT!

The Faculty Teaching Consultation Division is designed to help provide support for campus instructors who 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 who teaches for the University of Maryland at College Park can request a teaching consultation, and they are completely confidential. For more information, contact the Center for Teaching Excellence at 301-405-9356 or via email cte@umd.edu.

The Lilly-CTE Teaching Fellowship

The Center for Teaching Excellence and the Office of Undergraduate Studies seek applicants for the 2006-07 Lilly-CTE Teaching Fellows Program. Lilly-CTE Fellowships have been a University highlight for more than twelve years, and it is a pleasure to announce their continuation.

The 2006-2007 Lilly-CTE Fellows will join an elite group of faculty leaders who have helped to define and shape the academic culture of the University. The 2006-2007 Lilly-CTE Teaching Fellows Program provides the opportunity for up to ten faculty members from the College Park campus to meet regularly during the 2006-2007 academic year to discuss and address important issues in undergraduate education. Each fellow will receive $3,000, which can be applied to his or her individual needs (e.g., summer support, a graduate assistant, or professional expenses).

All full-time faculty members interested in undergraduate education are encouraged to apply. Your reasons for seeking a Lilly-CTE Fellowship, the quality of your ideas, and the evidence of your commitment to improving undergraduate education will be important to the selection committee. The application process consists of a simple letter.

Applications must be received by Thursday, June 1st, 2006. Applications should be submitted electronically via the CTE website. For more information about the Lilly-CTE Fellowship program see http://cte.umd.edu/programs/faculty/lilly/index.html or contact Spencer Benson at 314-1288 or sbenson@umd.edu.

http://cte.umd.edu/programs/faculty/lilly/LillyApplicationForm.html

This is the sort of book title we will have grown accustomed to by now, another sobering notice that undergraduates take degrees without whatever it is we have promised to teach and they have chosen to learn. But Bok, President Emeritus of Harvard and namesake of that university’s teaching and learning center, surveys the educational work of colleges and universities without much of the panic and doom many of these books announce. In fact, Bok makes a notable effort to distance his analysis from the culture warrior’s jeremiad, insisting that most indictments of higher education in the U.S. devote themselves to curricular battles and the infinite search for partisan indoctrination in the classroom. *Our Underachieving Colleges* is instead fundamentally a meditation on method—not so much what we teach as how and why we teach, and the relative successes and failures of those pedagogies.

Bok’s major claims will be familiar to most who are paying attention to the scholarship of teaching and learning, but this work’s significance is born of two characteristics. First, these are not merely anecdotes and aphorisms on what works in the classroom; substantial research is enlisted to make Bok’s case. Second, while not quite a multi-part blueprint to fix our colleges and universities, readers will find a clear argument for specific objectives that are universal enough to match most schools’ missions and that are reasonable enough to initiate at least some practical improvement. Bok’s audience is the institution—many of his suggestions are very likely not the sort of things individual teachers are in a position to reform—but his case should resonate with teachers who’ve reflected on the purposes of their work, the relationships between teaching and learning, and the significance of student expectations.

Looking toward a large-scale approach to undergraduate teaching and learning, Bok takes on the following eight areas of undergraduate education: the ability to communicate, critical thinking, moral reasoning, preparing citizens, living with diversity, living in a more global society, developing a breadth of interests, and preparing for work (this scope is articulated early in the work). His case for addressing and improving teaching and learning under each category rests on a few principles, including the following: that simply doing what we’ve always done because it’s comfortable will not work, that student learning is— if only to some extent —measurable, that active learning lasts longer than passive consumption, that teaching students to develop moral reasoning and civic engagement does not mean teaching students right and wrong and how to vote\(^\text{1}\), and that teaching students to be critical about the nature of vocations in a diverse and international world far surpasses the sorts of vocational preparation common to the contemporary university.

All of this follows a brief but informative survey of the history of higher education in the U.S. Bok contributes to the demystification of the idyllic university of an imaginary past.

Bok argues that by reimagining the relationship between the disciplines, reflecting on the civic aims of education, understanding the likely experiences of university graduates, and recognizing the role of active learning, universities that seek to improve the eight areas above are more likely to teach engaged, thoughtful, and self-aware students. He contends that the disciplines have much to learn from each other and even points to the shortcomings of the undergraduate major (noting, for example, that a concentration in one area sometimes even correlates with diminished proficiency in another). He insists that mission statements about producing students who are contributing citizens are rarely backed up by teaching. He worries that the most important and foundational courses are too often taught by novice graduate students and too often encourage uncritical memorization and unproductive competition with peers.

Seasoned teachers and cynical readers—and, perhaps, admittedly a few critical thinkers—will very likely raise objections to some of

"Review.." continued on page 9
Bok’s observations. Particularly worrisome is an offhand remark about the inherent value of literature, a claim which nearly four decades of literary criticism has worked to denaturalize. The risk, of course, is that the Great Books curriculum (which Bok effectively addresses) might become an uncritically revered foundation once again. His chapter on diversity helpfully suggests that simply putting students from different communities together hardly guarantees cooperative movement toward a stronger community. However, the choice to address only “blacks and whites” and “men and women” because both “types of interaction […] seem especially instructive” risks simplifying the operations of difference. The chapter’s concluding insistence on programs to develop and improve interpersonal relations makes a great deal of sense.

The best value of this ambitious diagnosis and prescription for U.S. higher education comes from Bok’s dismissal of the popular condemnations that only offer superficial indictment and his engagement with the data on student learning, the purpose of university teaching and learning, and the importance of improving teaching. Of course, implementing many of Bok’s proposals would require major transformation; this overview is a valuable contribution to the discussion of higher learning.

Notes

1) On this campus, Citizenship and Ethical Development Programming in the Office of Student Conduct (see http://studentconduct.umd.edu/ethical/index.html) addresses the aims Bok proposes for teaching “moral reasoning.”

2) The Words of Engagement program, part of the Office of Human Relations Programs, works to achieve these ends on this campus. See http://www.ohrp.umd.edu/WE/about/weinfo.html.

Journal on Plagiarism Debuts

Talk of plagiarism and academic integrity often turns to strategies for prevention and instruments of enforcement and away from the nature of the practice. Scholarly analysis of plagiarism is not always part of the picture. Of course, in what we like to call the “most egregious cases” (loose compilations of cut-and-paste excerpts from papers found via Google, or unabashed use of a crib sheet, for instance) little about these violations seems as intellectually interesting as what happens when recording artists complicate standards of fair use or when the line between protected parody and copyright violation is troubled. But common student explanations — “I didn’t have time to do the research.” “My other teacher said paraphrasing doesn’t require citation.” “I didn’t understand what you meant by citation.” — may be addressed in sophisticated ways, too.

A new electronic journal, Plagiaryst (“Cross-Disciplinary Studies in Plagiarism, Fabrication, and Falsification”) (http://www.plagiary.org), has initiated a scholarly discussion of plagiarism. At the moment, the journal is free and its contents are publicly available. Much of Plagiarist’s current and forthcoming content addresses “plagiarism and related fabrications/falsifications within the professional literature (i.e. scholarly journals and books) and popular discourse domains (i.e. journalism, politics, audio-visual texts).” For teachers who occasionally encounter academic dishonesty in undergraduate work, though, this looks to be a promising source that “will hopefully bring together existing strands of scholarship and create a point of focus for lively discussion, ongoing debate, and presentation of research results.” Submissions on “pedagogical approaches and student perspectives at the university level (cheating & academic integrity)” are being solicited.

For more on plagiarism, see Diane Harvey’s February 2005 article in Teaching & Learning News (http://cte.umd.edu/teaching/newsletter/2004-05/FebMarch05.pdf), contact the Office of Student Conduct (http://studentconduct.umd.edu/aca/index.html), or review CTE’s adaptation of Ryan Claycomb’s and Nora Bellows’s suggestions for preventing plagiarism in our Graduate Teaching Assistant Resource Guide (scroll to page 36 of http://cte.umd.edu/programs/graduate/GTAResourceGuide.pdf).
An Interview with Michael Black, Electrical and Computer Engineering Graduate Teaching Assistant and UTLP Certificate Holder

This is the sixth in a series of interviews with exemplary graduate student teachers at the University of Maryland. We hope to recognize and celebrate the significant contributions to undergraduate education made by our graduate students.

Teaching & Learning News: Tell us a little about your teaching experience. What sorts of courses have you taught? Have you worked as a professor’s T.A. or as an autonomous instructor? Both?

Michael Black: I have been a teaching assistant for ten semesters in the Electrical Engineering department at Maryland, and an instructor for three semesters in the Computer Science department at American University. Roughly half of the courses I have taught as a TA have been 200- and 300-level lecture/discussion courses, for which I have been responsible for a weekly discussion session. The other half have been 200- and 300-level laboratory courses. In these I help students build and troubleshoot electronic circuits. As an instructor I have been teaching 500-level computer science courses on subjects close to my field of study. Instructing courses takes a lot more time than TA’ing them, as I have to develop lesson plans, assignments, and tests; it is also much more rewarding.

TLN: What sorts of relationships exist between your research and the courses you have taught? Do you look for connections between your work as a graduate student and your work as a classroom teacher?

MB: Many of the courses I have instructed and TA’d have been fairly close to my research area. Nevertheless, I don’t usually make any special effort to bring my research into the classroom; I believe it is largely too advanced for the classes I am teaching and would probably bewilder most of the students more than educate them. However, sometimes I use insights that I gain from research to explain course material better. For example, my research occasionally gives me practical examples for abstract concepts that I am teaching. I try to share some of these practical uses with my class. My students may not understand all of them, but I feel that it makes the material more tangible.

TLN: How do you plan for a class meeting?

MB: It depends on the class.

There is a course on computer organization that I have TA’d six times. When I first taught the class I would spend a couple hours drafting notes for my discussion period, listing all the topics that I would cover, and even scripting what I would say. By the third or fourth time, I found that I really did not have to actually draft out lecture notes at all, since I pretty much had them memorized. Instead I spent some time before recitation brainstorming twists to put on the material. For example, I tried to find demonstration pieces of 70s or 80s computers to bring into class, and I came up with problems and activities for the students to try.

As an instructor, I tend to spend at least 3-4 hours per class period (and sometimes double that) preparing lecture notes, projects, and homework assignments. Typically I read the textbook sections on the subject I am teaching and make an outline of them as my lecture notes. I often then go online or to other books to try to fill out the notes a bit. Sometimes course preparation goes fairly quickly because I am teaching material that I have used extensively before in research or hobby work. There are other times that preparation goes slowly because, I hate to admit, I have to learn the material myself before teaching it.

TLN: Could you articulate some major principles that shape your teaching?

MB: As a teaching assistant, my job is much more focused. I am not generally responsible for introducing course material for the first time, designing exams, or assigning final grades. My main responsibility instead is to supply some much needed redundancy to the course. Specifically, I fill in gaps in student understanding, and I help out students who are struggling.

Two of my principles as a TA are to be patient and helpful. It is too easy to be impatient. Sometimes after explaining a topic in four or five different ways, some students will ask me to explain it again. Often times a student will raise his or her hand and ask me to repeat everything I have been saying. My impulse is to reprimand those students for not paying attention and move along to another topic. I have received emails from students less than two hours before a major project is due asking me for help starting it. My gut reaction is to not respond, or even to respond sarcastically. Instead I try to suppress these impulses, patiently repeat the ma-
“Black...” continued from page 10

terial I had taught before, and offer the student real aid at the eleventh hour.

I also try to be available for my students. Beyond regular office hours, I typically hold extra review sessions and additional office hours, if needed. I also try to respond promptly to questions by email. I can remember a couple of nights before major projects were due sitting in front of my computer until 4 or 5 AM, helping several students debug their program over email.

TLN: What moments from your experience as a teacher are you likely to remember for a long time? What makes that scene (or those scenes) memorable? How have they affected your teaching?

MB: I tend to remember the compliments. My first semester as a teaching assistant was the first time in my life that I stood in front of a class and tried to teach material. I never really liked making presentations in front of a classroom and I was very nervous before each discussion period. My department did not have any evaluation or feedback mechanism then like it does today, and I had not yet learned to gauge the enthusiasm of my students. I was racked with a lot of self-doubt about my teaching ability. At the end of the semester a couple students came to me and told me how much they enjoyed my class. These unsolicited compliments went a long way towards building my confidence as a teacher.

TLN: What sorts of mentors have you had? What elements of their mentorship has been the most effective for you?

MB: Possibly one of the best mentors I have had in my graduate teaching experience has been my department’s graduate director, Dr. Dan Balón. Dan is very skilled at facilitating workshops and dialogues. I have been working with Dan to create and lead TA training workshops for my department. For me, one of the most valuable parts of these workshops is the opportunity to observe how Dan organizes a workshop and sparks animated group discussion. He has also been a person I can come to when I have problems with my teaching, and has given me valuable advice.

The views expressed above are those of the interview subject and do not necessarily reflect those of the Center for Teaching Excellence.

The 3rd Annual Meeting of the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISSOTL) will be held at the Hyatt Regency Washington DC on Capitol Hill, November 9 - 12, 2006. The conference site may be found at http://www.issotl.indiana.edu/ISSOTL/. They are inviting proposals addressing this year’s theme: “Making a Greater Difference: Connecting to Transformational Agendas.” The call may be found on the web at http://www.issotl.indiana.edu/ISSOTL/call.html. The deadline for proposals is May 1, 2006.

The Center for Teaching Excellence wishes to encourage all UM faculty, staff and graduate students engaged in the scholarship of teaching and learning - critical inquiry into the teaching and learning of one’s own field or discipline - to submit a proposal for ISSOTL 2006. We are prepared to fund early bird registration for all presenters; all you have to do is forward your letter of acceptance to CTE and we will handle your registration.

In addition, the University of Maryland, as a co-sponsor of the conference, is organizing several sessions and we are particularly interested in hearing directly from UM faculty and administrators willing to take responsibility for organizing sessions on any of the following themes:

- the role of graduate programs in promoting the scholarship of teaching and learning among future faculty (UM is home to many graduate courses and programs which involve discipline-specific pedagogical research and nationally-known faculty doing work in this area. We want to showcase them as exemplars of the role of research universities in SoTL.)
- learning outcomes and the living-learning program (UM is a national leader in these learning communities; how do we know they work?)
- disciplinary leadership in promoting the scholarship of teaching and learning (We are particularly interested in UM faculty who have worked with professional journals and disciplinary societies to advance the scholarship of teaching and learning, and who could organize panels which would include organization representatives).
ill will, creativity, and pleasure. Following a summary lecture on the last night, I ask each student to respond verbally to the following question: “What will you personally take away from this class?”

In teaching stress management to the Department of the Army at the Pentagon, my colleagues and I developed this approach to wrap up a course which taught diverse cognitive-behavioral skills. We found that this question usually resulted in a much more relevant and practical summary than lecturing. People tend to listen to their classmates, who are speaking from their personal experience, often framing up their life lessons in fresh ways. It helps to assign students the task of reviewing their notes ahead of time to prepare for the discussion.

Susan White, Finance

The last week of classes is difficult for both students and teachers—much too much is happening on all fronts. Remember the joke about the teacher who died and went to hell? When she got there she had a mandatory interview with the devil. He told her that in hell everyone had to work and that her job assignment was as a teacher. She said that she would like that—she had worked as a teacher all her life. The devil said, “yes, but in hell every week is the last week of classes.”

Strategies for a last class can vary widely, depending on the class. The last class day does not have to be wasted time, but if it can be made into a fun class, you and the students will appreciate it. The last day of classes is a good day to wrap things up—students could present on their projects or do a role play exercise. The instructor can use the last class as a review, and wrap up the main points of the course. If there is a final exam in the course, the last day can be used as a formal exam review session.

Philip Silvey, School of Music

I have always found endings to be more challenging than beginnings. Often the end of a semester arrives too quickly, and in the final class session it’s as if everything suddenly grinds to a halt. There I am, bleary-eyed in the middle of a vacated classroom asking, “What just happened?” By creating a forum for students to share their mastery and progress as they negotiate their way through our degree program, we have set aside a moment in time to appreciate and reflect upon what has just happened, and to orient ourselves toward what lies ahead. The success of our own version of “noon recitals” is an indication that perhaps final classes are best spent as a public forum in which our students will appreciate it. The last day of classes is a good day to wrap things up—students could present on their projects or do a role play exercise. The instructor can use the last class as a review, and wrap up the main points of the course. If there is a final exam in the course, the last day can be used as a formal exam review session.

One of the advantages of teaching university courses in musical performance is that student progress is readily discernable. If pitches are out of tune, or the technique is flawed, the instructor immediately perceives this and can determine if a student has not mastered the challenges of performing a musical composition. In the School of Music, students regularly participate in weekly “noon recitals” to demonstrate individual progress on their principal instrument for peers and faculty in a public performance. Along with encouraging the development of musicianship and performance skills in our students, the Division of Music Education faculty also endeavors to nurture students as teachers-in-the-making. Unlike the immediate impact of a well-rehearsed performance, the skills required to be a successful teacher are less glamorous and rarely seen by a broader audience outside an individual instructional setting.

A few years ago, in an effort to recognize and acknowledge student advancements in their “educatorship” (the ability to teach, an expression used by music education philosopher David Elliott), the music education faculty decided to implement a “music education noon recital.” This occasion was conceived essentially to serve as a public forum in which our undergraduates could share with one another the progress they had made as teachers-in-training both within and outside of their music education coursework during the semester. The music education noon recital has now become a regular feature of end of semester activities. This event includes student performances on secondary instruments (often never attempted before the beginning of a particular semester), demonstrations of teaching success through student led small ensembles or peer teaching, and the sharing of video clips of practice teaching conducted in field placements in area schools.

“Semester’s End” continued on page 13
Students at all stages of the degree program gather to celebrate achievements that have contributed to each other’s growing identity as skilled teachers. The general mood of these occasions is one of celebration and appreciation, a chance to reflect on what has been learned in a semester’s time. In some cases, “before and after” video clips attest to growth in an undergraduate’s teaching confidence and expertise. The tacit message is that faculty and students together value the progress these students are making, and that we are all a part of it in some way. Freshmen begin to see where they are headed as they witness sophomores and juniors demonstrating their developing knowledge and skills. In some ways, it is a variation on the familiar grammar school practice of “show and tell.” It enables the faculty and students to come out of our classrooms and see what’s been happening among us. It is an opportunity to gain perspective; to see where we are and to appreciate how we have changed.

Successfully taking a course as a student is very different than successfully giving a course as an instructor. Nor does an understanding of one’s own learning strategies necessarily provide a good understanding of how others learn. Moreover, the students who go on to graduate school represent only a small fraction of the student population. Thus most graduate students’ initial view and understanding of teaching and student learning is minimal.

Determining who is responsible for ensuring that current and future graduate students have access to and receive the training essential for high quality undergraduate teaching while learning in a high quality graduate program is complex. The goal of graduate programs is to produce new knowledge, and in doing so establish the next generation professionals for the discipline. Few programs have as part of their mission the production of scholarly teachers. Nonetheless reflective and scholarly teaching is both an expectation and a requirement for those who decide to pursue careers in higher education. One solution that all graduate programs should consider is the development of a graduate course or workshop series that focuses on the basic knowledge and skills that faculty in that discipline need to be successful educators. Such a course should go beyond presenting teaching tips, classroom management techniques, and discipline teaching knowledge. It needs to include basic knowledge of how students learn, epistemology, assessments, and pedagogies that engage students in active learning. There are examples of courses that address this need both on campus and at peer institutions. However, the presence of such a course may not be sufficient if the program’s faculty discourage students from devoting time to the course. Recently, a student in my own Introduction to University Teaching and Learning (UNIV798A) was discouraged from pursing the
course because it did not fit with the goals of the graduate program, despite the fact the student’s personal career goal involved university teaching in the discipline. The program inadvertently sent the message that teaching is not valued, which was probably not the intent. The paradox is that without good teachers in the discipline there would be fewer high quality students applying to the graduate program and far fewer researchers in the discipline.

A second important reason for providing our graduate teaching assistants with the tools they need to be good teachers is that in many of our undergraduate courses, discussion sections and laboratories are taught by graduate students. For many entering students the teacher they interact with most frequently and in the greatest depth is a graduate student. As the University of Maryland’s flagship campus we strive to provide exceptional instruction, and many of our graduate teaching assistants are exceptional teachers. These teaching assistants are recognized each spring for their contributions to the University at CTE’s Distinguished Teaching Assistant recognition ceremony.

I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge that there are programs on campus that pay great attention to ensuring that their teaching assistants are knowledgeable in both course content and the processes of teaching and learning; however, they are the exception rather than the rule. As a faculty member who understands and values both research and teaching I am always surprised by my colleagues who fail to see the win-win situation of providing mechanisms to encourage and enable graduate students to develop their teaching skill in the discipline. A minimal outcome is that by providing those mechanisms we help those who are interested in a teaching career be successful, and we provide a means to improving undergraduate education as measured by improved student learning.

Departments and programs interested in improving their graduate teaching assistant training program should contact the Center of Teaching Excellence so that we can work with you to define graduate teaching assistant training needs, and so that we can help by providing consultations, resources and examples of things that work.

CTE Graduate Assistant Position: Coordinator of Graduate Student Programs

The position of Coordinator of Graduate Student Programs is a 12-month, 20-hour per week GAship at CTE, a unit within the Office of Undergraduate Studies, which supports the efforts of campus faculty, instructors, and graduate teaching assistants GTAs to improve teaching and undergraduate learning. The Coordinator is responsible for CTE’s professional development programs for GTAs.

Applicant must be a UM doctoral student who possesses an understanding of how theories of learning and teaching are related to the practice of learning and teaching. Applicant must have excellent written and oral communication skills, solid organizational and time management skills, and a commitment to enabling GTAs to grow in their understanding of teaching and learning. Applicants should have teaching experience and, ideally, experience mentoring or teaching other teachers. Selected individual will assume full responsibility for the position in early June and will be expected to begin training in spring 2006. Training time will be compensated.

For best consideration, materials should be submitted by April 7. Applications will be accepted until the position is filled. For more information, including a full list of responsibilities, contact CTE at cte@umd.edu or 59356.
CTE Congratulates the University’s 2006-2007 Distinguished Scholar-Teachers

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Edward Redish  
Department of Physics

The University of Maryland’s Center for Teaching Excellence is an initiative of the Office of the Associate Provost and Dean for Undergraduate Studies. Its purpose is to support the campus-wide efforts to enhance and reform undergraduate education and to offer tangible assistance to individual faculty and TAs as well as to the departments and colleges in which they work.