New General Education Courses  
Explore “Big Issues”

By Kathy McAdams, Associate Dean, Undergraduate Studies

On Monday, October 19, 2009, the Chair of the University Senate and the Provost officially announced the Spring 2010 pilot of the “I” Series, the signature of the nascent General Education Program. “I”-Series courses begin the transformation of General Education at the University of Maryland. They are designed to investigate significant issues with imagination and intellect with a belief that they will inspire future investigation and provide concrete mechanisms to implement innovative ideas. They will challenge students to wrestle with the Big Questions and examine the ways in which diverse intellectual traditions address them, offering students not only new intellectual domains to explore but also new ways to think about contemporary problems like the energy crisis but age old dilemmas like ecological sustainability.

In our world, things change. And then they change again.

And so it goes. So every now and then, the University must make sure that the education of our students keeps up with all that change.

Ira Berlin, University Distinguished Professor of History, leads the Task Force appointed by the Provost and by the University Senate and charged with updating General Education at the University of Maryland. Berlin says the job of this Task Force is critically important.

“We in the U.S. worry about health care because it accounts for some 15 percent of our economy; in comparison, CORE is more than 30 percent of our courses, the currency of the University,” Berlin said. “So any change in general education is a tremendous issue for all of us,” he added.

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Like many new assistant professors when I arrived at the university I was assigned classes to teach. The underlying assumption was that since I had an advanced degree, publications, a record of grant support, and experiences as a student, I was qualified to walk into a graduate or undergraduate classroom and “teach”. My actual teaching experience was limited; I had been an undergraduate teaching assistant for a laboratory course, spent one semester as graduate teaching assistant for two laboratory sections, mentored undergraduates in a laboratory setting and taught several very small (less than six students) honor seminar courses as a researcher. My perceptions about teaching were classical: teaching was the delivery of information in the form of a well prepared lecture with the goal of covering the material. I had never taken a course or seminar about teaching, nor thought about student learning, and I was completely unaware of the many useful pedagogies that were available to me. Despite these shortcomings, I received adequate teaching evaluations and even some teaching awards. My story is not unusual and the vast majority of new professors – both here and elsewhere – would have similar tales.

Today there is an increased awareness of the central roles that teaching and student learning play within research universities and increased accountability for faculty teaching performance. Increasingly, universities in England, Australia, Hong Kong, Scandinavia and elsewhere are strongly encouraging or requiring new faculty to engage in professional development for teaching. One approach for addressing the need for new faculty who are trained and well equipped to meet the expectations of excellence in teaching, scholarship and service is to begin this training as an integrated part of students’ graduate education.

In the 1990’s through the efforts of US professional societies and funding agencies there emerged an awareness that graduate education should include opportunities for students to develop and hone their understandings of student learning and teaching skills before they became professors. The Preparing Future Faculty (PFF) [http://www.preparing-faculty.org/] initiative (1993-2003) involved dozens of doctoral institutions and hundreds of partner institutions and provided training and professional development for several thousand future faculty. Graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) are an important component of the instructional staff and a resource for the university. Graduate teaching assistants provide the human power necessary to meet the academic teaching loads that are present at all large state universities. Often the instructors that first and second year students interact with the most are graduate teaching assistants. At UMD there are more than 2500 graduate teaching assistants (Fall 2008, IRPA data), a number that is slightly higher than the number of regular faculty.

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CTE offers this review of the First Year Book as a resource as you make this text part of your fall and spring courses. For more on the book and on First Year Book programs, visit http://www.firstyearbook.umd.edu/.

Dave Eggers’ *What Is the What: The Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng: A Novel* tells the story of Valentino Achak Deng, a Dinka Sudanese, who becomes one of the “lost boys” during the violent uproar of the second Sudanese civil war (1983-2005). The book opens in the midst of Achak’s new life in Atlanta, Georgia, where he has settled after being relocated to the United States. It is in the first few pages that he is robbed and assaulted in his Atlanta apartment. Tied up and waiting for help, Achak starts remembering his long flight from Sudan. There is a great sense of tragedy that runs through the novel, when Achak not “only” loses family and friends to hostile militiamen, wild animals, and hunger, but, once in safety in Kenya, loses his Japanese colleague, Noriyaki, in an accident and, later in the United States, his Kurkuma love Tabitha to the murderous jealousy of her ex. The sense of tragedy, paired with a sense of immediacy, make *What Is the What* an engaging read.

What *Is the What*, however, also comes with several shortcomings that are not only problematic with respects to the text alone but present obstacles to incorporating it in our courses. The title alone brings these potential pitfalls to light. The title, for one, provides an impetus to read; for surely, as readers, we want to find out about the What. While references to the What persist throughout the novel, Eggers describes the What in most detail early on (p. 61-63), perhaps to foreshadow the perspective on the events to come that drive his entire book. It is Achak’s father who tells the story of the What to his Arabic-speaking and Muslim Baggara business associates. The What is part of the Dinka mythology of origin, where God creates man and woman to then make them choose “this creature, which is called the cow…” (62) and the What. The man and woman “see the cattle were God’s most perfect creation” and choose the cattle over the What. And, as Achak’s father then tells the Baggara men: “And God has proven that this was the correct decision. God was testing the man. He was testing the man, to see if he could appreciate what he had been given, if he could take pleasure in the bounty before him, rather than trade it for the unknown.” (63) And, as Eggers tells us through Achak’s voice moments later, when not compromised by the presence of the Baggara, the story usually continues with God “giv[ing] the What to the Arabs, and this was why the Arabs were inferior.” (63)

While this is Achak’s perspective and therefore, at this moment in the story, a child’s perspective, the novel only ever gives us Achak’s perspective. From a narrative point of view, the novel thereby entertains the most brutal and vile images of Arabs and Muslims that Edward Said questioned with Orientalism. After all, the narrative is Achak’s perspective – Achak, who loses family and friends to the Arab-Muslim Baggara, henchmen of the Sudanese government. The focus on Achak’s perspective, in fact, speaks to the book’s larger complications with genre that are, once again, apparent in the title. The title *What Is the What: The Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng: A Novel* combines three narrative conventions – the autobiography, the biography, and the novel. One result of this mixing of conventions is that the book potentially defies genre expectations that readers inevitably bring to the text. *What Is the What* performs in an autobiographical, even testimonial, mode, when the story seemingly exposes the traumatic events Achak endures. His perspective dominates in the text often with such eerie immediacy, as if there was no writing process involved. The result of this strategy frequently overrides

“CTE Library...” continued on page 11
Teaching as Performance

My career is balanced between the performing and the healing arts. My performance history has been a journey through dance, circus and theatre, in several languages, cultures and countries. It was during my training in the FM Alexander Technique that I learned how to teach presence in performance, which is the core element of my work. I am as passionate about teaching as I am about creating, performing and directing.

I have been delighted to discover that when I lead Teaching as Performance workshops to non-performers and I ask the participants “why do you teach what you teach?” the answers are strikingly similar to those of artists when asked about why they create. “I love what I do.” “I’m interested in fostering understanding between different cultures.” “I think it is important.” “I’m curious about the world.” “I’m following a lifelong interest.” “I want to give a voice to people who don’t have a voice.” “It is a way to express myself.”

In order to refine the focus of my workshops, I began asking the question, “What can a performance experience offer teachers who are already so clearly passionate about their work?” What I discovered was that often passion does not translate from the podium across the lecture hall to students who would rather be browsing Facebook than engaging as an active listener. This is where some foundational performance techniques and concepts can be valuable to create a space where performer (the teacher) and audience (the students) engage together in the performance (the class). Since performance and teaching are three-dimensional activities that utilize all six of our senses - sight, sound, touch, smell, taste, and proprioception - it is a challenge for me to share that experience with you in the form of an article. That said, I have chosen to list a few ideas that easily can be pondered and practiced from page to stage.

Have an Awareness of Self Be aware, as you are reading, of your six senses. Which senses are activated in the present moment? Which senses are you engaging to read this article? Which senses are not within your active awareness in this moment? This is a simple exercise that can take as little as a minute, with the great benefit of inviting yourself and your students to be present in their bodies.

Breathe Take the time to do this. Rhythm comes from breath. Performers spend extensive time attending to the rhythm of how they speak and move on stage in order to engage an audience. When a performer breathes, the audience breathes. Breath facilitates presence. When you are present, your students will be present. If their breathing is constricted, their ability to focus will be impaired.

Have an Awareness of Space Set up your environment so that it is comfortable for you and your students. Some classrooms are small enough to arrange the chairs in various configurations. There is obviously less flexibility in a lecture hall, however, be mindful of where you place yourself on the stage and ask students to fill in the house/lecture hall in different configurations.

Move Allow yourself to move - from the subtle movement of breath to actually changing your position in the room. Allow your students to do the same. Our neuro-muscular-skeletal system is designed to move,
On Teaching *What is the What*

The First Year Book is a rare opportunity for a broadly shared academic experience across the campus. While annual selections are not necessarily part of many course syllabi, they do connect with work in the disciplines, and they are a venue for significant exchange of ideas, criticism, and, on occasion, action. The First Year Book will almost certainly never become an institutional part of a large percentage of undergraduate courses, but the very idea of a shared reading follows a sense that this is an enriching context for the thinking that those courses call for. It is an ahistorical fallacy to lament the loss of a timeless reading culture. We have not always read books on a large scale, and we still read all sorts of things. Nevertheless, this program points to the value of reading long-form works and making sure there are forums in which to talk about those books.

This year’s selection, *What Is the What*, has the potential to initiate complex and meaningful readings on the part of our students, and it has the potential to raise critical questions about how historical experiences are told and distributed. In her piece on the book in this issue of *TLN* Henrike Lehnguth engages with and articulates several challenging questions with which we need to work before integrating the book in academic work.

Eggers’ as-told-to biographical novel raises, even if only implicitly, rich questions that have the promise to complicate thinking in our courses. While the First Year Book website (http://firstyearbook.umd.edu/what/) will help to structure implementation of the book across the curriculum, I want to suggest a small catalogue of problems it illuminates. Here, I’ll raise an issue and offer a brief series of questions, prompts, or exercises that might be adapted for teaching or for colloquia outside of the curriculum. First, as a recollection of forced and violent migration, it characterizes the experience of deadly conflict. There is a visible tradition of first-year books situated in war (including, of course, last year’s *War is a Force That Gives Us Meaning*, Telhami’s *The Stakes*, and Tim O’Brien’s *Vietnam* nonfiction). It is of course not difficult to add *What Is the What* to the canon of stories about conflict in sub-Saharan Africa. As an interrogating counterpart, see Binyavanga Wainaina’s eviscerating “How to Write about Africa,” linked from the First Year Book site. It nevertheless introduces a complicating effect among U.S. readers, likely to call up Darfur and popular laments in response to that history. What is the What comes from another Sudanese conflict and therefore unsettles what we think we know about other parts of the world, too easily stored in bins called “Africa” and “the Middle East.”

- How does this war story characterize Sudan? Visit allAfrica.com, read at least three pieces on or from Sudan, and evaluate how having read Eggers’ work influenced your view of those articles. How do the articles influence your view of Eggers’ book?

- Read Binyavanga Wainaina’s “How to Write about Africa.” Which of these “rules” does *What Is the What* follow? Which does it break? Are there consistencies between Wainaina’s satire and Eggers’ storytelling?

- Before reading *What Is the What* how would you have described Sudan? How has the book reinforced, corrected, or enhanced that

“On Teaching *What...*” continued on page 13
Making a Sustainable Contribution: A Reflection on the CTE-Lilly Graduate Fellowship

By Heather Brown, PhD Candidate, English

A year ago, I was one of eight graduate teaching assistants selected to be a CTE-Lilly Fellow, a program modeled after the successful faculty Lilly Fellow Program, which has been around for about twenty years. We were the first group to kick off the program, and right from the start I felt immensely honored to join the company of intrepid teacher-scholars from a range of departments—all of whom I am now very proud to call my colleagues. As a group we met on a biweekly basis throughout the academic year, these two-hour meetings were facilitated by then Interim Director Dr. Dave Eubanks and CTE Graduate Coordinator Henrike Lehnguth.

Starting out, we discussed a range of issues related to undergraduate teaching, learning, and professional practice in general. We began by writing and sharing teaching philosophy statements, which was an excellent way for us to engage with each other’s individual perspectives. After getting better acquainted as a cohort, it was soon time to make a decision: what would be our collective contribution to undergraduate teaching and learning? Should it be an event? A resource guide? A website? All three? Such a decision posed many challenges, as each of us had come to the table with an idea of a project we’d like to see crystallize. Thus, we spent a significant (and well-spent) amount of time at what Cicero, the classical rhetorician, would call the “invention” stage. We asked lots of questions, offered answers, debated over the answers, asked more questions…you get the idea. However, this process of collaboration and decision-making was just as much of an accomplishment as our final product. The experience of working across disciplinary boundaries to achieve a shared goal is, I believe, one of enduring value.

To formulate our specific project, we had to determine how we could add to existing efforts to support undergraduate teaching and learning, a feat not easy to accomplish given the size of our university. It seemed that no matter where we looked, any original idea we thought was ours had already been turned into a successful program somewhere else on campus. Figuring out what was going on already, though, was a vital part of the process. In so doing, we established a connection with the Mark Stewart in UM Office of Sustainability and developed a project that would support their goal to educate the campus on the value of sustainability. Our contribution would be to focus on existing and potential academic efforts to incorporate sustainability into undergraduate teaching and learning. Briefly defined, sustainability as an angle of inquiry connects social, economic, environmental, and moral concerns.

Since so much of what we do as students and teachers must happen in private—most of the time, it feels like it’s just me and my laptop—I welcomed the chance to regularly engage with a group of committed teachers and learners.

“Lilly Graduate Fellows...” continued on page 15
Notes from a CTE Retreat: What is a Teaching Portfolio, Anyway?
By Jasmine Lellock, PhD Candidate, English

This pesky question, coupled with the looming prospect of entering the job market, provoked a group of graduate students to apply for the Graduate Assistant Teaching Portfolio Retreat. Over winter break in 2009, we met for three days for an intensive workshop to begin the daunting task of beginning to create our own teaching portfolios. We benefitted from the helpful guidance of interim director of the Center for Teaching Excellence, Dave Eubanks, and Faculty Programs Graduate Assistant, Kirsten Crase. They introduced us to the basics of assembling the portfolio and led us through a series of exercises to begin brainstorming ideas for our own work.

One of the recurring themes of the retreat was that because the teaching portfolio is a relatively new development, its form and content are highly flexible; the length and structure vary across specializations and types of job. As a result, designing the ideal portfolio is a complicated task. The retreat gave us the support and structure to deal with this issue. Dave and Kirsten provided us with a basic template for the portfolio, including items such as teaching responsibilities, activities to improve teaching and learning, and mentorship.

The centerpiece of the teaching portfolio is, of course, the teaching philosophy, so it was a logical place to start. We spent many hours drafting and revising our teaching philosophies, followed by incredibly beneficial peer editing. For me, these activities were the most useful of the retreat. Having the time and space to work solely on the philosophy was invaluable, as was the peer feedback. Indeed, commiserating with other graduate students who experience the same anxieties and have the same questions helped make the process less intimidating. Further, Kirsten and Dave were on hand to offer essential one-on-one support. We spent time working through the other sections, as well, and many of us left with a substantial, if not complete, document. Dave also informed us that the Center for Teaching Excellence is available to offer individualized support as we continue revising and updating the portfolio.

Despite the many hours of concentrated work, the retreat was also fun. It provided a rare opportunity for us to get to know our colleagues in other fields, while preparing an important component of our application materials. We also had interesting conversations about pedagogy; engaging in these discussions and preparing the teaching philosophy gave us an important opportunity to reflect on our teaching practices. And, perhaps most importantly, the Center for Teaching Excellence fed us! I highly recommend this retreat to graduate students who plan to enter the job market in the next few years.

CTE Teaching Portfolio Retreat 2010
Application Deadline: December 4

If you plan to teach at the university level, you will need a statement of teaching philosophy and a teaching portfolio. CTE is now accepting applications to participate in one of two two-and-a-half-day teaching portfolio retreats for graduate teaching assistants. Visit http://cte.umd.edu/programs/graduate/GTAPortfolio/index.html to apply.

The first Graduate Teaching Assistant Portfolio Retreat will be held January 11-13. The second Graduate Teaching Assistant Portfolio Retreat will be held January 19-21. Each retreat is limited to 12 participants.

For further information, please visit CTE's website at http://www.cte.umd.edu or contact Dave Eubanks at eubankd@umd.edu.

Faculty at the University of Maryland are agents for improving undergraduate teaching and learning. As scholars, faculty discover and generate new knowledge that contributes not only to ongoing academic exchanges but on occasion informs new understanding in transformational ways. Often that work occurs at the boundaries of what is known, what is settled, and what remains to be said. Research scholarship in the disciplines is borne of controversy; it pushes against the complacent and the mundane, and scholars challenge prior understandings and refine the things we know. While discovery through research may not provide our undergraduate courses with immediate content, it does offer a model for all manner of learning in which expectations and prior conceptions are continually challenged. In support of rich and deeper student learning, we can find increased learning by introducing controversy. When new things are agreeable and easily added to what is already familiar, students are not required to negotiate challenges and are therefore less likely to learn new ways, to understand more deeply, to integrate, to create and to communicate.

The 2008-2009 CTE-Lilly Fellows took up the challenge of using controversy as part of their undergraduate teaching pedagogy, seeking to introduce situated controversy in order to simultaneously increase academic rigor and student engagement. That coupled increase in engagement and rigor is of course a foundation for enhanced student learning. Their preliminary finding is that introducing controversy enhances both the content of and learning in their courses.

Following the University Strategic Plan’s call for meaningful academic challenge, the Lilly Fellows identified controversial and complex issues within their academic disciplines that could be used as learning objects and activities. As a cohort they adopted a shared project, the pedagogy of controversy, attentive to the individual needs of each of their courses and disciplines. While their work has much to offer the campus generally, its significant first impact took place in real classrooms during the 2008-2009 year. It is our shared conviction that their experience in these classes can inform teaching and learning well beyond this cohort’s reach.

Each project introduced problem-based learning as a pedagogical mode. Specifically, each asked students to consider some critical question and to reflect on the ways different stakeholders see their position. Students synthesized and communicated responses to embedded problems that range from silver nanoparticles in Michelle Brooks’s chemistry course, to synthetic biology in Boots Quimby’s cell biology course, ...The common adage that describes teaching as “comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable,” can introduce productive discomfort of controversial problems in ways that nearly always facilitate enduring student learning.

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class administration, to overseeing laboratories and recitation sections to autonomously teaching classes where they are responsible for all aspects of the course. Across the campus there is a wide spectrum of levels of support provided by colleges, departments and individual instructors for their graduate teaching assistants with respect to their teaching duties. In some departments professional development for academic teaching is part of the departmental culture and their graduate programs ensure that in addition to the expected discipline scholarship requirements graduates are well prepared to teach the next generation of students in the discipline. In other department graduate students are left to their own initiative to find ways to develop their expertise as university teachers and in rare cases advisors and departments actively discourage students for such activity (the rationale is that teaching and learning how to teach effectively takes time away for the important work of research).

The Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE) has a long history of supporting professional development of graduate students for enhancing teaching and student learning. Over the last five-years the number of programs that CTE provides to the campus for graduate student professional development has increased and we (CTE) are an important national model for this areas of the academy. CTE’s efforts to provide opportunities for graduate student to develop and document their teaching skills and efforts has been possible because of the support of the Graduate School, the Provost’s office and Undergraduate Studies, as well as the many faculty and graduate students who volunteer time and expertise. CTE’s signature graduate student professional development program is the University Teaching and Learning Program (UTLP; http://www.cte.umd.edu/UTLP/index.html). This self-paced program is open to all graduate students and involves workshops, reflections, observations, a graduate class on university teaching and learning, a project, and the development of a teaching portfolio. Students who complete the program receive a notation on their graduate transcript signifying they have completed a program on university teaching. This notation plus the products that are the outcomes of the students’ UTLP work are valuable assets for graduates entering the job market. Several departments who traditionally have had strong teaching components embedded in their graduate programs (EDHD, Woman’s Studies, Psychology, Spanish and Portuguese) have partnered with CTE, so that students in these departments who complete a comparable set of UTLP requirements within the departmental program receive the transcript notation. In addition to the UTLP program, CTE in partnership with the Graduate school has developed two new programs aimed at professional development for graduate teaching assistants; the CTE-Lilly Graduate Teaching Fellow Program, [http://www.cte.umd.edu/programs/graduate/lillygraduate/index.html; also see Heather Brown’s article in this newsletter], and the International Teaching Fellowship (ITF) Program for International Graduate Teaching Assistants, [http://www.cte.umd.edu/ITF/]. All three of these programs involve graduate teaching assistant learning communities and provide mechanisms and forums that enable graduate students to meet and interact with peers outside their immediate department. In addition to these formal programs, CTE provides departmental workshops for graduate teaching assistants, a regular workshop series on teaching and learning [http://cte.umd.edu/teaching/workshops/index.html] and orientations for new graduate students. An underlying goal for all of these initiative is to strengthen graduate student perceptions and understandings of the scholarly role that teaching plays within the academic. For each of the past five years CTE, with support from Undergraduate Studies, has taken dozens graduate teaching assistants to the region Lilly East Conferences on Teaching and Learning [http://lillyconferences.com/dc/default.shtml] where they present, engage with experts, build connections and witness the scholarship of teaching in a professional setting.

“From the Director’s Desk...” continues on page 11

One of the aspects that make research universities unique are the presence of bright enthusiastic graduate students who come in as students and leave as colleagues.
Our current CORE General Education requirements were created in the late 1980s and put into effect in 1990. CORE gives students broad knowledge through requirements in more than 10 disciplinary areas. For each student, CORE adds up to about one-third of credits earned at Maryland. Students in all majors must complete CORE requirements to receive a Maryland bachelor’s degree.

Changes over the past two decades—changes in disciplines, technologies, pedagogies, and even in the nature of knowledge—mandate revisions to General Education at this time. Many major debates and issues in the world are absent from lists of required courses.

“Big questions about big issues” form the signature of the Task Force’s work toward new requirements for General Education. The “I” Courses, a set of innovative and inspiring courses on big issues, will be the foundation for the new plan. Students will take one or more of these courses when they first arrive at the University.

A test run of the I-Course concept is set for the Spring semester, when 24 of these “big issue” courses will be offered to freshmen and sophomores. The list for the Spring semester pilot program includes such courses as “Cross-examining Climate Change,” “HIV/AIDS in a Global Perspective,” “Information 3.0,” and “Acting Human: Shakespeare and the Drama of Identity.” A complete list of Spring I-courses may be found at the link at the end of this article. The Task Force announced the new courses and the professors who designed them on Oct. 19.

Beyond the I-courses, Task Force requirements will include four to five categories from which students choose one or two approved courses. Such topics as “Natural Sciences” and “Theory in Practice” have been discussed, but no final decisions have been made. Finally, the Task Force plans to retain requirements for “Fundamental Studies” for each student. These courses in writing, mathematics and other foundations for studies in higher education.

“Many areas have been recommended to us for the requirements,” Berlin said, “such as health and wellness, civic engagement, diversity, global studies, and others.” The Task Force hopes to integrate these suggestions in the final set of requirements. The full proposal for new requirements will be sent to the University Senate and to the Provost in December.

For more information visit: http://www.provost.umd.edu/GenEd2009/
One of the aspects that make research universities unique are the presence of bright enthusiastic graduate students who come in as students and leave as colleagues. We owe our graduate students the opportunities to develop the skills and credentials that they will need to succeed in an academic market place that is highly competitive. Everywhere there are increasing expectations that universities provide high quality educational experiences for all students. To effectively meet this challenge universities need teaching staff that is informed, engaged and willing to go beyond traditional pedagogies and embrace new technologies and way for teaching and learning. CTE by providing a stable of programs for professional development of graduate teaching assistants address the current need for excellence in teaching and helps to lay the foundation for the next generation of university faculty who will be expected to do more (often with less) and be great teachers as well as great researchers. Information on all of CTE’s professional development programs for graduate students and faculty in available on our web site [http://www.cte.umd.edu/index.html] or by contacting us at cte@umd.edu.

what could have been a more (self)reflective approach to the story and the writing process. This critique seamlessly transitions to the book as a biographical text. After all, it is Eggers not Deng himself, who fictionalizes Valentino Achak Deng’s “lost boy” experience. Eggers is, however, aside from the preface, absent from the text, all the while the text mostly operates as if it were unmediated experience. Eggers’ absence, in that sense, not only obscures that this text has been written (the writing process), but that it has been written by a white American man in his thirties, who inevitably brings his own, culturally-grounded assumptions to Deng’s experience. Auto/biography are two modes that are at work, even if What is the What lays greatest claim to being a novel. This brings me back to Achak’s perspective and the Baggara. In the context of the novel What Is the What, the book’s uninterrupted focus on Achak and his inner world provide a vehicle to empathize, even identify with, the plight of the “lost boys,” but it does so, while it simplifies the complexity of the Sudanese civil war into familiar tropes of the Arab and Muslim violent Other. Teaching the novel in the classroom may, in other words, be a risky business, when complicating its representational strategies and repertoires also means that instructors have to be particularly prepared to address the complexities of Sudanese history and politics.


**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.

Consultations can address any number of areas, including, among other issues, assessment, active learning, collaborative learning, lecturing, instructional technology, syllabus construction, rubrics for grading, and scholarship in teaching and learning.

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 at cte@umd.edu.
“Teaching as Performance” continued from page 4

with constant, subtle postural shifts. When students sense your physical tension, they will become tense. When they sense your physical ease (originating from breath) they will become more relaxed thus more attentive. F.M. Alexander, who founded the technique named after him, would often say that we confuse stillness with immobility.

Listen
Listen to yourself and your students, with a willingness to explore new perspectives and engage in lifelong learning and research.

Project and Articulate
In order to be heard clearly actors need to be attentive to speaking in a manner that allows them to be understood as well as to communicate their intended message. Remember that you teach because you want to share your knowledge, and clear communication will allow you to do that.

Direct Your Focus
Performers usually have every moment on stage planned and practiced. Of course there is always room to respond to a new stimulus that arrives in any given moment. The ability to respond is based on the solid foundation of the moments that have been previously planned. When we teach, we have our plan and we need to be present to engage with our students.

Make Surprise Changes
Vary Rhythms and Pause
A well-scripted and directed piece has a rhythmic shifts that keep the audience engaged. How we communicate the material we are teaching will facilitate our students’ abilities to absorb the material.

Foster Audience Participation
This can be a direct moment when a performer actively engages with the audience or an awareness of if and how the audience is responding to the action. Performers will instinctively make subtle adjustments during a performance in order to connect with their audience. In teaching this can be achieved simply by asking questions.

Share Research
Performers are always continuing to train, expanding their vocabularies and perspectives. It is exciting when a director or fellow performer shares the process of their development and focus. It is equally exciting when we share with our students how we are applying the material we are teaching to our own research and development.

Students will engage more fully when they are inspired.

If you would like more information about other performance techniques that can be adapted and utilized for teaching, or would like specific information on how to implement these concepts in your classroom, please feel free to contact me at lfelbain@umd.edu. Break a leg!

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For more than fifteen years TLN has included articles, notes, and schedules to keep the campus informed about new technologies, available grants, fellowship notices, workshops and roundtables, distinguished lectures, assessment, learning outcomes, classroom management strategies, consultation programs, new conferences, established programs, award winners, grant recipients, University policies on teaching, and other valuable information for faculty and graduate teaching assistants. Most important, it always suggests ways to enhance teaching for better learning. Subscribing to the TLN listserv list takes about twenty seconds and means that you will receive approximately five emails a year, notifying you that a new issue of the only regular campus-wide publication on teaching and learning has arrived.
description?

• In the U.S., “Africa” is often misread as a single country with a single history, a small catalogue of systemic problems, and almost no distinction between its many nations and communities. Is What Is the What participating in that tradition? How well does it address that misunderstanding?

Second, as unconventional life writing, this novel calls for discussion of how lives are represented, who owns experience, and how history and storytelling intersect. Eggers, whose Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius plays on the boundary of fiction, memory, and criticism, may not devote self-conscious attention to the problems of as-told-to memoirs in the work itself, but almost any attention to What Is the What demands that we consider what it means for a popular U.S. writer to publish his version of a Sudanese Lost Boy’s experience. There are ethical, political, and aesthetic problems to unpack. Asking those questions is intellectually troublesome if we presuppose fault; instead, close attention to the work itself in the context of other stories ought to generate thoughtful scholarly exchange. Eggers traffics in the sort of conventions Wainaina (participating in a long traditional of postcolonial critique) abhors; and yet his Sudan is not just a fictional contribution to the West’s Other but one of many ways to represent a life with experience under threat, and it was composed with the cooperation of its subject.

• What does Dave Eggers gain from writing Valentino’s story? What does Valentino gain from having Dave Eggers write his story? (Note that these questions may imply a cynical view of economics, celebrity, and victimhood. They need not be read that way; Eggers and Valentino exchanged stories for Story.)

• Whose story is What Is the What?

• What does it mean for a living person to become a fictional character? Is the latter less “true” than the former?

• How is historical knowledge created and shared?

Third, What is the What is a meditation on dangerous place. As Valentino Achek Deng makes his way from his home to Kenya to Atlanta, teleological wishfulness is regularly undermined by experience. Eggers’ representation of immigrant life in Atlanta may be especially rich for our students, who are perhaps inclined to see life in the U.S. as the right goal of international migration.

...Eggers’ representation of immigrant life in Atlanta may be especially rich for our students, who are perhaps inclined to see life in the U.S. as the right goal of international migration. As What Is the What operates as an object of—and initiator of—these questions, it serves efforts to guide students into an academic investigation of issues that are contemporary (refugee and immigrant life in the U.S., war stories, representations of race and racial conflict) and long-standing (refugee and immigrant life in the U.S., war stories, representations of race and racial conflict).
Mobile Learning

By Dave Eubanks, Assistant Director, CTE

Six members of the faculty are implementing uses of mobile devices for learning in their courses this year, having initiated projects during CTE’s 2009 Summer Institute for Teaching with New(er) Technology.

In collaboration with OIT’s Academic Support Unit and the University’s Mobility Initiative, which has distributed iPod Touch devices and iPhones to Maryland Incentive Award recipients and Banneker-Key Scholars, CTE is working with faculty to determine effective uses of mobile devices in teaching for a larger population of students in a number of disciplines.

Many undergraduates carry web-ready devices, and there are promising strategies for supporting active learning with these tools. It is our conviction that faculty – faculty with good support – are best suited for evaluating the influence and potential of mobile learning in undergraduate education.

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facultymight require students to complete short assignments at designated times via handheld device. Knowing that collaboration generally bolsters individual learning, mobile devices might be used during class, for instance, to populate shared notes on a wiki. Students asked to collect data in the field are able to use mobile devices to more reliably capture images, interviews, and other products for learning.

This is perhaps the weakest of arguments for mobile learning, but the ease of small, handheld devices may lower barriers to engagement raised by powering up laptops, finding paper notes, and the other sorts of minor labor that must be completed before reconnecting with course work. If an idea from class is stored in a student’s jacket pocket, along with notes, assignments, and readings, it is more accessible and ready than our familiar stack of notebooks and texts. The scene of studying becomes mobile. What of the value of sitting down to a notebook surrounded by printed texts? The uses imagined by faculty from CTE’s summer institute do not replace all of the familiar models and rituals for learning (at least not yet) but instead activate what we believe are effective alternatives to *some* traditional pedagogies.

Here are brief summaries of ongoing projects. In Animal and Avian Science, Mark Varner’s students will use mobile devices to capture popular interpretations of scientific studies. Students will interview friends and family and produce for class an analysis of the varying kinds of scientific literacy they encounter. In Spanish and Portuguese, Roberta Lavine’s students will use mobile devices to listen to and communicate in Spanish outside of class, surrounded by the noises of daily life outside of the protected quiet of class. In Kinesiology, Marvin Scott’s students will use mobile devices to code their observations of elementary physical education teachers with Ecological Momentary Analysis, and Marcio de Oliveira’s students will use theirs as clickers and as flash card devices for studying on-the-go. In English, Liora Moriel’s students have generated (and collected) interpretations of Elizabeth Bishop’s poem, “One Art,” and those readings of the poem from outside class will undergo a secondary analysis. Finally, in Communication, Sahar Khamis’s students are using mobile devices as media consumption journals.

“Mobile Learning” continued across
resources. Based on the positive responses we received when we pitched our idea to faculty, the question about whether we should create a resource guide, website or hold an event was soon answered: we would do it all three. Pooling our individual and collective talents, we gathered resources from departments across campus, researched programs at peer institutions, and created a format for presenting our information that would be adaptable and easy to use. The result was an online resource portal called @TLAST: “Applying Today’s Learning to Achieve Sustainability Tomorrow” (you can find it at this link http://cte.umd.edu/programs/graduate/lillygraduate/@last) that we would present at a CTE Workshop and at the Chesapeake Project, the first UM summer institute on sustainability. And not to brag, but in addition to completing this project by the Spring, three of the eight students in our cohort defended their dissertations (!).

As someone who will soon defend her dissertation and (hopefully) take an academic post, being a CTE-Lilly Graduate Fellow offered me an amazing opportunity to work with colleagues to create something as collective. Since so much of what we do as a students and teachers must happen in private—most of the time, it feels like it’s just me and my laptop— I welcomed the chance to regularly engage with a group of committed teachers and learners.

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**Try Clickers for a Day**

Are you interested in the student response devices known as clickers?

CTE has a loaner program. You can borrow a set of 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, visit http://www.clickers.umd.edu, or contact CTE at cte@umd.edu.
to sustainable packaging in Audra Buck-Coleman’s design course, to the risks of structural failure in Deborah Oakley’s architecture course, to questions of intelligent design in Raghu Murtugudde’s Honors seminar, to the controversial role of transgenic animals in genetic change Frank Siewerdt used to integrate a series of lectures in his animal science course. Instead of merely comprehending a history of those controversies, students in the Lilly Fellows’ courses were able to engage with immediately significant questions for and about academic work. They engaged in critical thinking and learning in a way that is sustainable and transferrable to novel problems.

As one Lilly Fellow from this cohort, Jaime Schultz, has noted, the category of “controversy” is itself an unsettled notion. Initially, controversy seemed a straightforward idea: what are the unsettled disagreements about which stakeholders feel strongly? What sorts of questions and problems generate strong convictions and, maybe, discomfort? the Fellows had identified were controversial. For instance, it is hardly controversial to insist that product packaging ought to be sustainable or that institutional racism in public education is a destructive force. Instead, the questions introduced in their course raised problems of complexity and uncertainty. In Raghu’s seminar, how can students negotiate matters of faith with science? In Jaime’s course, how best to unpack the roles of race in American sports? In Michael’s studio, how to design a truly public building when the very definition of publicness is contested? As the cohort negotiated their own implementations of new modules in their courses, they met regularly as a learning community to discuss an expansive set of issues in higher education. Those conversations, a hallmark of the CTE-Lilly Fellowship, provided faculty the opportunity to share experiences and convictions about teaching across disciplines. Cinzia Cirillo’s project, a survey of her colleagues’ views of teaching, reflects a new connection between the Lilly Fellowship and the larger community of faculty at the University of Maryland.

At least one of the conclusions we at CTE draw from the breadth of “controversy” as a concept for teaching and learning is that each of the Fellow’s projects carefully situates a problem in an academic context. Their work is not an admonition to introduce issues likely to create conflict without providing a rich context, modeling scholarly inquiry, and structuring student response with productive venues. In other words, no Lilly Fellow simply stirred emotion in service of student engagement; each gave students an academic route for investigating significant problems.

The common adage that describes teaching as “comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable,” balanced with another, “no pain for gain,” can introduce productive discomfort of controversial problems in ways that nearly always facilitate enduring student learning.

We have collected a project summary for the campus as a resource for all undergraduate faculty. We invite you to review these project descriptions and encourage you to contact individual Lilly Fellows to discuss their experiences and consider implications for your own teaching. Go to here to learn more.
CourseEvalUM: Best Practices, Response Rates, and Access
By Renee Snyder, Course Evaluations Coordinator, Institutional Research, Planning and Assessment

Best Practices Project

In an interview project of 100 students who submitted no CourseEvalUM evaluations Fall 2008 and 100 faculty whose courses had the highest rates of participation that same term, we learned that course evaluation participation rates are assisted largely by how the course instructor approaches the course evaluation process. Find out more at the CourseEvalUM Phone Interview Project: https://www.irpa.umd.edu/Assessment/CourseEval/Referenced_Files/interviewsSpr09.pdf

A lower response rate does not explain a lower score

IRPA staff completed another study using CourseEvalUM Spring 2009 data. The study indicated that the response rate for CourseEvalUM submissions explains less than 1% of the variance in the evaluation scores. You don't need 100% response rates to get good scores. Read more: https://www.irpa.umd.edu/Assessment/CourseEval/Referenced_Files/response_score_fall09_report.pdf

Fall 2009 Course EvalUM

The system opens for student submissions on Tuesday, December 1 and closes on Sunday, December 13. Students can log in to complete evaluations at https://www.courseevalum.umd.edu/

Check your updated course response rates during the evaluation period

When CourseEvalUM is open for students, you can use updated response rates for your courses to prompt participation: https://www.irpa.umd.edu/Assessment/CourseEval/response_rate.shtml.

View your CourseEvalUM results

Reporting for CourseEvalUM is located at www.ares.umd.edu under Faculty Services.

CourseEvalUM Institutional Research, Planning and Assessment
https://www.irpa.umd.edu/Assessment/crs_eval.shtml
Introducing the 2009-10 CTE-Lilly Graduate Teaching Fellows

For the second year the Center for Teaching Excellence and the Graduate School have piloted a CTE-Lilly Graduate Teaching Fellows Program. The program is modeled after the very successful CTE-Lilly Fellows program for faculty, which has been in existence for nearly two decades, and provides an opportunity for graduate students from across campus to meet regularly during the academic year to discuss and address pedagogical and educational issues in undergraduate teaching as at the University of Maryland.

This fall eight senior graduate students, each with at least two years of teaching experience, were selected through a highly competitive application process to be the very first CTE-Lilly Graduate Teaching Fellows. The selected fellows will receive a stipend and are expected to develop a sustained conversation about teaching and learning and together construct and implement a project, initiative or event relevant to the improvement of the educational culture at the University of Maryland.

The Graduate School and the Center for Teaching Excellence are pleased to announce the 2009-2010 CTE-Lilly Graduate Teaching Fellows:

Kevin Barry, Biology

Bryna Clover, Chemistry

Leonard Demoranville, Chemistry

Tom Geary, English

Rebecca Krefting, American Studies

Yi-Tak Lai, Cell Biology and Molecular Genetics

Jeff Olimpo, Cell Biology and Molecular Genetics

Ana Perez, Women's Studies
2009-2010 International Teaching Fellows Selected

The Graduate School, in partnership with the Center for Teaching Excellence, is pleased to announce a new program to support the professional development of international graduate students. This pilot initiative, the International Teaching Fellows program, pairs international graduate teaching assistants (IGTAs) who have recently joined the University with faculty mentors who will consult with the Fellows to facilitate their development as future faculty and as University of Maryland teaching assistants. The International Teaching Fellows will also meet as a learning community, under the guidance of CTE. They will write, share, and discuss reflections on teaching and will investigate strategies for improving their understanding of effective undergraduate education.

Fellows will dedicate approximately 20 hours per semester to the program. TAs selected will receive a $500 supplemental stipend upon program completion.

The International Teaching Fellowship (ITF) is an honorific program. GTAs are nominated by their graduate directors.

The Graduate School and the Center for Teaching Excellence are pleased to announce the 2009-2010 International Teaching Fellows:

Gisela Bardossy, Management and Organization

Tasos Lazarides, English

Abulfazl Fakhari Mehrjardi, Chemistry

Yichao Mo, Electrical and Computer Engineering

Danette Morrison, Human Development

Deepak Sharma, Civil and Environmental Engineering

Kranti Vora, Family Science

Lin Julie Zhu, Communication
The Department of English and Center for Teaching Excellence will host a symposium event on "Writing Across the English CORE Curriculum." This symposium will feature a series of presentations by instructors of introductory English and Comparative Literature courses who will share their best practices for incorporating writing into literature classrooms.

Innovative practices currently being utilized in 100 and 200 level courses include using blogs and twitter to create communities of writers and employing creative writing techniques to teach literary analysis. There will be three sessions as part of the event beginning at 12:45 in Tawes 3250. A welcome lunch in Tawes 3248 precedes the symposium.

All members of the English Department and the larger UMD teaching community are welcome and encouraged to attend. Please see the attached schedule for session titles, times, and locations. This symposium has been made possible through funding provided by the English Department and a CTE Teaching Assistant Development Grant. If you have questions or would like more information, please contact Jennie Wellman or Heather Brown.


**2010 CTE Teaching Portfolio Retreat - Application Deadline: December 4**

If you plan to teach at the university level, you will need a statement of teaching philosophy and a teaching portfolio. Starting Monday, November 9, CTE will begin accepting applications to participate in one of two two-and-a-half-day teaching portfolio retreats for graduate teaching assistants. The first Graduate Teaching Assistant Portfolio Retreat will be held January 11-13. The second Graduate Teaching Assistant Portfolio Retreat will be held January 19-21. Each retreat is limited to 12 participants. Applicants will be selected on the basis of the following criteria: timeliness, teaching experience, and strength of application materials.

The deadline for submitting an application is Friday, December 4. We expect to announce acceptance decisions by mid-December. For further information, please visit CTE’s website at http://www.cte.umd.edu or contact Dave Eubanks at eu-bankd@umd.edu.

**Lilly-East 2010 - Submit a Proposal - Proposal deadline: January 18, 2010**

The Lilly-East Conference on College and University Teaching will be held in College Park, Maryland, June 3 – 5, 2010. It will include 3 days of stimulating workshops and sessions presented by college and university instructors from throughout the United States.

The overarching theme for Lilly 2010 is Evidence-Based Teaching and Learning. The call to submit proposals is now open and will close on Monday, January 18, 2010. Please visit http://lillyconferences.com/dc/proposals.shtml to propose a conference session.

CTE traditionally provides travel grants to fully support conference attendance and accommodation to dozens of participants from the University of Maryland College Park. This year CTE will again offer conference grants to faculty and graduate students who present at the conference.

CTE encourages you to submit an abstract to Lilly-East by January 18, and to watch for our announcement of conference grants.