Key Lessons for Increasing Achievement

By Karol Dehr, Continuing Lecturer/Associate Director of Writing for Outreach, English and Linguistics

“If we change the way we teach, we can change the way students learn.” These words, from Dr. Craig E. Nelson, keynote at the 4th Annual COAS Symposium on Teaching and Learning, best sum up his focus at the January 9 event. Dean Carl Drummond (A&S) thanked those responsible for planning the day and welcomed attending faculty. Jim Farlow (GEOS) introduced Dr. Nelson, Professor Emeritus of Biology at IUB, who was his former professor.

Nelson’s background includes 50 papers on critical thinking, diversity, active learning, and the scholarship of teaching and learning. He has presented in over 37 states and 8 countries, and among his many achievements, was instrumental in the development of IU’s Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SOTL) Program.

“Increasing Achievement and Retention by Applying Key Lessons from the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning,” the symposium theme, began with an opening exercise of participants reviewing three hypotheses about why more students from different cultural, ethnic, and economic backgrounds don’t succeed in our classes. Each group shared their own reasons why they felt the students in their own classes struggle.

A brief video of two college students with contrasting approaches to learning was shown as a model of the kinds of students we all have—those who are self-motivated and use higher cognitive processes and those who are only surface learners. The struggling student didn’t care about learning and was only “responding to a system” that did not involve active learning and was not...

Continued on page 2

Spring Conference on March 28: Integrating Critical Thinking Skills into Content Courses

By Gail Rathbun, CELT Director

Too few students graduate from college able to achieve the higher order outcomes of inquiry, analysis, critical thinking, and creative thinking. IPFW faculty consistently rank “teaching critical thinking” in the top three teaching topics about which they want to learn more. “Resourceful critical thinking and problem-solving” is one of the learning goals in the Baccalaureate Framework. CELT’s recent teaching conferences have focused on backward course design, re-sequencing learning activities, and adult cognitive development. Craig Nelson, the keynote speaker at the January COAS symposium on teaching and learning, eloquently tied all of these topics together in the service of “fostering critical, more effective communication, better decision-making and more.”

The goal of the March 28 spring teaching conference will be to help each faculty participant make tangible progress toward implementing and assessing new strategies for teaching critical thinking. Author and educator Terry Doyle will lead an interactive “minds-on” workshop that will build on the foundation that has been laid at...

Continued on page 2
Key Lessons... cont. from p. 1

student-centered. Too often, according to Nelson, our students are over committed and work in isolation; therefore, they have difficulty overcoming the challenges of the classroom and its social shock.

Dr. Nelson noted four basic strategies in implementing active learning: preparing material so that the students are held accountable for their learning; creating a social system in which every student participates constructively; focusing on higher-level outcomes with backwards course design; and keeping evaluations quick and simple.

He felt that when we reframe what we think about college teaching, we can “flip” our instruction and focus on key higher-level outcomes that can be more easily assessed. He reviewed different cases where changing the structure of the class significantly changed the success rate of underprepared students. And, most importantly, he emphasized that we need to move away from the “good vs. bad student” view and shift our focus to more effective learning designs.

After lunch, Dr. Nelson led a workshop with COAS faculty entitled “Teaching as if your job depended on it: Fostering critical, more effective communication, better decision making and more.” Participants examined reasons why some students don’t excel at critical thinking and chose their most highly valued higher-order outcomes in their disciplines. Participants worked with the major concepts behind “backwards course design,” the most important of which is to choose just a few higher order outcomes first and use only the content in your course that will help your students master these outcomes. Nelson asserted that college teachers must actively teach core academic tasks because only a few well-prepared students already know how to do them. The goal, he said, is to get most or all students to be able to do these core tasks, such as reading critically, far earlier in their college careers. Last, Nelson presented a framework, based on adult cognitive development, for reflecting on the demands that participants’ courses place on students critical thinking. He called the lowest level “Sgt. Friday” requiring only a choice between two alternatives, and the highest level “Owned Games,” requiring complex, contextualized decisions to be made. Our goal should be for a greater percentage of our graduates to exit college able to think at these higher levels.

Nelson provided workshop participants with a handout jam-packed with excellent references. Contact Karen Burtnette, COAS Administrator, at burtnetk@ipfw.edu, for further information. ▼

Spring Conference... cont. from p. 1

previous conferences. He will demonstrate various ways teachers can create a thinking classroom, plan critical thinking activities using course content, make the activities relevant to course content, develop critical thinking assignments for students, and assess students’ learning of critical thinking skills.

After lunch, campus colleagues will share tips and techniques for using Blackboard to support teaching of critical thinking. Whether you have just begun your journey or have been on the road for a while, CELT invites you to try something new and apply for a Certificate of Completion in Teaching Critical Thinking that will help you document your teaching effectiveness. (An application can be found in the Workshops section of the CELT web site.)

Doyle is Professor of Reading and coordinator of the Center for Teaching, Learning and Faculty Development at Ferris State University in Big Rapids, MI. He is the author of three books that focus on the application of neuroscience, biology and cognitive science to teaching and learning. The first is Helping Students Learn in a Learner Center Environment: A Guide to Teaching in Higher Education, published by Stylus, 2008. His 2011 book is titled Learner Centered Teaching: Putting the Research into Practice published by Stylus and was featured in the Chronicle of Higher Educations Selected New Books in Higher Education in 2012. His most recent book, published by Stylus in August 2013 with co-author Todd Zakrajsek and written for the college student, is The New Science of Learning: How to Learn in Harmony with Your Brain. Terry also co-authored the book New Faculty Transition - An Ideal Program published in 2004.

The morning workshop will take place in the Walb Classic Ballroom from 8:15 am - 11:45 am. Lunch and the afternoon sessions will take place in Liberal Arts Room 35C from 12:00 pm - 3:00 pm. Register for this event on the CELT web site on the Conferences page. CELT, CASTLE (Committee for the Advancement of Scholarly Teaching and Learning Excellence), and FACET are co-sponsors. For further information contact Stephanie Stephenson at 481-6354 or email CELT@ipfw.edu. ▼
Rave Reviews for Formative Peer Review

By Debrah Huffman, Associate Professor, English and Linguistics

Faculty attending two CELT workshops on using peer review and formative feedback for improving teaching found the workshops very informative, useful, and valuable, some even seeing it as having potential for a culture change for review of faculty teaching. Many made special note of the value of the workshops’ role play of the process.

CELT responded to two requests for the Peer Review Workshop, one from the College of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the other from the Department of International Language and Culture Studies (ILCS). Faculty members of CELT volunteered to present the two workshops, one last October and the other last month.

To model the peer review process, workshop presenters play the role of a teacher requesting a formative peer review and a reviewer, such as one of CELT’s Teaching Fellows. A third presenter moderates, presents material on the overhead, and involves the audience. The workshop models excerpts of the three primary parts of the peer review process: the initial consultation, observation of the teacher’s class, and a post-observation consultation. The “teacher” purposefully illustrates some realistic problems in teaching for which he or she would like the reviewer’s help.

Faculty attending the workshop play the part of students in the teacher’s classroom as well as reviewers and are invited to contribute ideas and questions for the peer reviewer to incorporate into the consultation. They are also encouraged to ask questions about peer review. Both groups of faculty attending the workshops were involved, helping create energetic and entertaining workshops as well as “quite worthwhile” ones.

According to an anonymous survey, attending faculty overwhelmingly agreed that the material was clear and well organized and that the workshop gave them sufficient opportunity to participate. All either agreed or strongly agreed that the workshop was valuable. One anonymous response from a faculty member attending stated, “The role play was an excellent way to help me understand the intended tone of formative peer review.”

The workshops emphasize the difference between formative feedback and summative evaluation, how the former is meant to give a helpful perspective on teaching that leads to the teacher’s decisions for improvement while the latter is generally assessment from a senior colleague.

Some faculty members attending expressed how much more valuable peer review can or should be considered in a culture of teaching review that is typically evaluative only. Interim Chair of ILCS, Lee Roberts, citing the motivating element of the workshop, expressed how much he hoped his faculty could “begin to consider the next step in creating in our department the sort of peer review culture we saw modeled.”

CELT emphasizes that ideally peer review, and as it is conducted by Teaching Fellows, is a confidential and teacher-driven process and should not be considered simply for tenure or reappointment documents. The ILCS workshop, however, did discuss how formative peer review could be used to generally to show teacher efforts to improve and the results.

Free Legal Advice: What is a C-Plus Worth?

By Kent Kauffman, Esq. and Assistant Professor, Accounting and Finance

When Lehigh University graduate student Megan Thode received a C-plus in her therapy internship course in 2009, the grade prevented her from continuing in the master’s counseling program. She would have received a B, had it not been for the zero participation points out of 25 her then-student teacher Amanda Carr awarded Thode. According to Carr, Thode displayed a bad attitude in class and was disruptive, including cursing at the professor.

Thode, who was an A student, filed a grievance with the counseling department and when that failed, she transferred to Lehigh’s master’s program in human development. Upon graduating, she sued her professor and Lehigh University for $1.3 million dollars, alleging that such an amount is the difference between what she would have earned in her career as a therapist, compared to what she will earn as a drug and alcohol counselor. Such a calculation requires a finance specialist, and Ms. Thode had two: her hired expert, and her father Stephen Thode, who is a Lehigh University finance professor.

At the four-day trial in February 2013, conducted without a jury, Thode attempted to show that Amanda Carr (who was now Amanda Eckhardt and a professor in Lehigh’s College of Education) and Nicholas Ladany, the counseling department director, conspired against her because she had complained about the class. Thode also alleged that she was discriminated against because she was in favor of same-sex marriage. Lehigh presented

Continued on page 4
Upcoming CELT Events

February

**Faculty Showcase**
Friday, February 7, from 12:00-2:00 pm in KT 128

**Applying Lessons from SoTL Reading Groups (CS)**
**Topic: Want Brighter, Harder Working Students? Change Pedagogies!**
Sessions held each day the week of February 17-21. See CELT’s website for details.

**Applying Disciplinary Knowledge to Teaching Brown Bag Series Topic: Legal Issues in Teaching**
Tuesday, February 25, from 12:00-1:15 pm in NF 355

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March

**Online Teaching Seminar**
Tuesday, March 4, from 1:30-4:30 pm in WU G21/G21

**DECCO Award Guest Lecture**
Wednesday, March 5 3:00-4:00 pm in the Kettler Faculty Lounge

**Applying Lessons from SoTL Reading Groups (CS)**
**Topic: Student Diversity Requires Different Approaches to College Teaching, Even in Math and Science**
Sessions held each day the week of March 17-21. See CELT’s website for details.

**Applying Disciplinary Knowledge to Teaching Brown Bag Series Topic: Using Concepts from Acting, Voice, and Movement to Gain and Hold Student Interest**
Tuesday, March 25, from 12:00 pm - 1:15 pm in WT 128B

Searching for that lost issue from last semester? Never fear! Back issues of the CELT News are available online at www.ipfw.edu/celt .

Legal Advice... cont. from p. 3

evidence that Thode earned her zero participation points because of her disruptive nature and because she lacked the self-reflection required of one who would be a licensed therapist. Lehigh also asserted that the discrimination charge was baseless and that part of what was driving the suit was Stephan Thode’s attempt at revenge against Lehigh for not promoting him from associate to full professor. The judge scolded both sides throughout the trial and suggested the parties settle. But at the trial’s conclusion, the judge ruled that, even though he was baffled why Thode was awarded no participation points, she had failed to meet her burden of proving that the grade she received was the result of “arbitrary and capricious” action against her. In November 2013, the judge denied Thode’s motion for a new trial.

**The Takeaway:** The arbitrary and capricious standard is the lodestar by which nearly every faculty decision regarding a student is judged. The U.S. Supreme Court wrote in 1978 in *University of Michigan v. Ewing* that “great respect” should be shown for a professor’s judgment, such that a court may not overturn it unless the judgment is “such a substantial departure from academic norms as to demonstrate that the person...responsible did not actually exercise professional judgment.” There are more than a few Indiana cases similar to Megan Thode’s lawsuit and all with the same outcome. Faculty are generally protected from liability for their professional decisions, even where judges might disagree with them. But from a preventative medicine standpoint, participation components of course grades that are not tied to objective standards create conditions that beg to be litigated.▼