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CTL Staff

CTL Bulletin

No. 58 – January 15, 2009

A bi-weekly information sheet by the Center for Teaching and Learning

Join Our Discussions of "Readings on College Teaching"

The scholarship in college teaching has exploded in the last two decades. Not only are there now many new teaching tools that most faculty did not encounter when they went through graduate school, but there are also whole new frameworks for how to teach college students that are gradually changing the profession. Some of these new developments include: the shift from a focus on teaching to a focus on facilitating student learning; the connected emergence of outcomes-based assessment; our increased understanding of the dynamics involved in student learning; the writing across the curriculum and writing in the disciplines movement; our awareness of cultural differences and how they affect the college classroom; and the influence of instructional technologies, especially the Internet, on creating new classroom environments.

This semester, the CTL is offering a forum to discuss these new developments based on key readings that describe those developments particularly well. We would like to invite you to join us for these discussions. To offer more access for everybody, each of the six readings will be discussed twice (see the dates under each of the reading abstracts). Copies of the readings are available in a *NEIUport* group that is open to all faculty (Log onto NEIUport – click on "groups" – click on "Groups Index" – click on "Faculty/Academic De." – click on "*College Teaching Readings*" and open the appropriate file).

The discussion format is informal. We will provide a few guiding questions but otherwise leave it to those who attend to determine the direction. This is an easy way to gain some scholarly insight into important developments in college teaching and at the same time enjoy the company and exchange with colleagues from across the campus. Our meetings are at the Center for Teaching and Learning, Room 310, and will alternate between **Wednesdays from 1-2:15** and **Thursdays from 2:45-4pm**.

The Reading List:

From Teaching to Learning: A New Paradigm for Undergraduate Education
By Robert B. Barr & John Tagg. Change, Nov./Dec. 1995
This is one of the most widely cited articles on college teaching in the last decade. The authors compare the old and the new paradigms for undergraduate education: the "Instruction Paradigm" and the "Learning Paradigm" along the following dimensions: The college's mission and purposes; what it sees as criteria for success; what its teaching/learning structures are; its underlying learning theory; how it measures its productivity; and what roles faculty, students, and staff play in it.
This article is also available on the Internet at: http://ilte.ius.edu/pdf/BarrTagg.pdf
Meets: Wed, Jan. 28 and Thu, Feb. 5

Motivating Students to Learn
By Marilla D. Svinicki. Anker, 2004
Great teachers are often said to be those who can motivate their students to do their best work. We all have our ideas and experiences of what motivates people and particularly our students. Svinicki, an associate professor of educational psychology and the editor in chief of *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, describes the relevant theories of motivation and what they can contribute to teaching. She then outlines seven strategies for enhancing student motivation in higher education.
Meets: Wed, Feb. 11 and Thu, Feb.19

Blended Learning Systems: Definition, Current Trends, and Future Directions
By Charles R. Graham. Pfeiffer, 2006
While few faculty at NEIU have so far become involved with the development of hybrid (or "blended") courses, an increasing number of experts is convinced that "in the long run, almost all courses offered in higher education will be blended." (Ross & Gage). Graham's article is the opening chapter of Bonk & Graham's *Handbook of Blended Learning.* Graham describes the recent emergence of blended learning (i.e. the mixture of face-to-face and computer-mediated learning) and what the current trends and issues are in blended learning. He describes four different models and outlines directions for the future.
Meets: Wed, Feb. 25 and Thu, Mar. 5

How Writing is Related to Critical Thinking
John C. Bean, 1996
Bean's book *Engaging Ideas* is a classic whose importance goes far beyond writing instruction. Like few others, he has demonstrated how writing, thinking, learning, and problem-solving are so closely related to each other that effective teaching cannot do one without doing the others as well. Chapter two in Bean's book shows how immature student essay structures can be explained with widely accepted learning theories. It then goes on to explain the implications of these theories for teachers and ends with suggestions for teaching thinking through teaching students how to revise the drafts of their papers.
Meets: Wed, Mar. 11 and Thu, Mar. 19

What a Course Will Look Like After Multicultural Change
By Margie K. Kitano. Allyn & Bacon, 1997.
This is still one of the best pieces on teaching for diversity. The author describes a model on what it might mean to open a course up to multicultural perspectives. The underlying assumption is that such change typically will be gradual and has to consider the instructor's and the students' comfort levels. Consequently the model lays out three levels of change and then describes four instructional components that will be affected: content, instructional strategies, assessment of student knowledge, and classroom dynamics.
Meets: Wed, Apr. 1 and Thu, Apr. 9

Educative Assessment: A Vision
By Grant Wiggins. Jossey-Bass, 1998
This is the first chapter in one of the best books on assessment (of the same title). Wiggins defines "educative assessment" as assessment (1) deliberatively designed to teach (not just measure) by revealing to students what the work of professionals in the field looks like, and (2) providing rich and useful feedback to both students and their instructors. The most important types of assessment use therefore "authentic performance tasks."
Meets: Wed, Apr. 15 and Thu, Apr.23

CTL Bulletin
No. 60 – March 1, 2009
A bi-weekly information sheet by the Center for Teaching and Learning

Assessing Online and Hybrid Courses

While online and hybrid courses have become very popular in higher education, there has always been some concern about how to guarantee the quality and effectiveness of such teaching formats. This *CTL Bulletin* shares some resources to help ensure that this quality issue is properly addressed.

Technology use for teaching spans a very broad range. When categorized simply by the amount of tech use (rather than the types and variety of tools or, more significantly, the learning methods used), you will typically see the following:

- Web-enhanced (using some tech tools within a primarily face-to-face course)
- Hybrid (AKA blended; according to NEIU's official definition, "At least 20% of class sessions in hybrid courses will take place online")
- Fully online courses

Because the latter two categories are significantly different from classroom-based courses, alternative assessment criteria and methods are of use. For those faculty already teaching online and/or hybrid courses, as well as for those who are interested in learning more about what it takes to do so, the following resources may be of interest.

Blackboard provides its own assessment instrument, called the Greenhouse Exemplary Course Evaluation. This rubric is designed primarily for online courses, but has some sections that discuss blended course offerings. Faculty can submit their own online or hybrid courses to the program's annual review. The rubric assesses a course based on four main categories. The descriptions below give some examples of the elements of an exemplary course:

1. Course Design – Clear objectives, reflecting student learning outcomes, are integrated into the course, from syllabus through content modules and assignments. Visual and auditory tools are used to enhance content and support learning. Additional resources are included for both remedial and more in-depth work.
2. Interaction & Collaboration – Expectations about student participation are plainly delineated, including communication protocols. The instructor has incorporated efforts to develop a community of learners through the use of e-mail, discussions, chat, and/or other communication tools to facilitate student-to-student, instructor-to-student(s), and student-to-instructor interaction.
3. Assessment – Expectations for assignments are understandable and complete, and are directly connected to learning outcomes. Constructive feedback and self-assessment opportunities are also included.

4. Learner Support – The instructor has provided clear instructions, contact information, links to university resources (library, tech support, tutorials on required software applications), and content files in multiple formats (taking student access and connectivity issues into consideration).

More information about the Greenhouse Program, including information about exemplary courses, can be found at http://www.blackboard.com/ecp. (Take a look at the Freshman Composition course demo.)

Texas A&M University (TAMU) has created an online course assessment that can be accessed through a simple registration process at https://elearningtools.tamu.edu/checklist/login.do.They break out their reviews into a number of interrelated areas including:

- Content
- Navigation & Organization
- Learning Outcomes & Activities
- Communication & Collaboration
- Consistency & Accessibility
- Assessment & Evaluation

This tool is intended for self- or peer-assessment, and provides feedback through an assessment report once the form is completed and submitted. Noticeably, TAMU includes a full category on course content, while Blackboard only specifies in the Course Design category that content be easy to access, navigate, and manage. Not as much emphasis is put on connecting a student to support resources, though that may be handled through another internal resource at TAMU.

While not an assessment, University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee (UWM) offers online resources specifically in support of hybrid course developers. One faculty member is quoted as saying, "My students have done better than I've ever seen; they are motivated, enthused, and doing their best work." Comments and ideas from several faculty members are featured, as well as a discussion of the advantages and challenges of this teaching method.

UWM's Learning Technologies website provides ten questions to consider when developing a hybrid course, as well as some tips for faculty beginning the process. Our favorite tips include concentrating on the design of the course rather than the technology used, and making use of existing resources, such as:

- The "peer reviewed online teaching and learning materials" available from MERLOT (http://www.merlot.org/merlot/index.htm) and other sources
- textbook cartridges from publishers
- experienced colleagues and university support staff (in this case, the CTL)

See more information at http://www4.uwm.edu/ltc/hybrid/faculty_resources/questions.cfm.

Interested faculty can find a listing of NEIU's online and hybrid course offerings in the printed schedule under the heading Distance Education. These courses can also be found online using the Search Course Schedule link on the Faculty tab in NEIU*port* (select Hybrid and/or Online in the Schedule Type field). Those who are interested in learning more about teaching with technology at any level are encouraged to contact the CTL staff at x4467.

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No. 61 – April 15, 2009

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Podcasting for College Courses

The term podcast officially denotes a series of audio recordings delivered over the web via an RSS feed that can be subscribed to by listeners. However, the term is also generally used to indicate audio or video files that are posted on the web for playing and downloading. The latter meaning is often used in higher ed, when an instructor wants to record a lecture or sections of a lecture and make the recording available to his or her students on Blackboard. Podcasts of this nature can be "not too hard" to create and very useful for students who appreciate a break from reading text. These recordings can be played on a home computer, in the campus computer labs (students can request the use of headphones), or they can be downloaded to a portable device (iPod, iPhone, etc.) and listened to on the go.

Preparing to Record

While the tech side of creating an audio recording may worry some instructors, the more important part is planning the content. This does not need to be a formal lecture; some might say the shorter the better. (See Pennsylvania University's 60 Second Lectures series here: http://www.sas.upenn.edu/home/news/sixtysec_lectures_archive.html.) It's helpful to consider how much content you want to include in each file. Breaking a longer lecture into shorter chunks makes for files that are quicker to download and easier to digest.

You may want to have a written version of what you want to say, or an outline of it, to make the recording smoother. You may also want to consider how "perfect" you want the recording to be. We are all used to hearing very polished recorded media, but speaking in a relaxed manner and not fretting over the occasional "misspeak" can make for a more personable and user-friendly talk. Give yourself time to practice—with both the tech aspects (software, headset or microphone) and the preparation of your talk—before you are rushed to get something posted. That way you'll have time to play your recordings back to get a feel for how you come across to the listener.

One professor we know has provided several audio files to her students via Blackboard. Usually, she simply opens the recording software when she has the urge to explain something to students, records herself explaining, saves the file and posts it on Bb. These short lectures typically last three to five minutes, and offer quick insight into the current reading or discussion forum topic. She has also posted longer audio files (30 minutes), which are great for downloading onto an iPod or other device. On another occasion, she recorded herself discussing the slides in a PowerPoint presentation, ringing a bell when she wanted us to move to the next slide. While her home-made style may not work for all situations, her students really appreciate her efforts and find the recordings to transmit not only her ideas but her personality—a nice plus when communicating via the web.

Recording Needs

While a professional recording studio is always nice, most podcasters get started using their computer, simple recording software, and some kind of microphone. Generally speaking, preference goes to a decent headset rather than the mike built into your laptop. A quiet office or workspace (with a door that can be closed) is always a plus. One popular software option for recording audio files is the free Audacity program, available at http://audacity.sourceforge.net. Audacity supports not only recording but also editing of "tracks," and allows you to add in a bit of sound such as intro music fairly easily. Of course, we recommend learning the basics and then deciding how involved you want to get as you try things out.

You will want to save your audio files as .mp3 files, because they are compressed for quicker upload and download and compatible with most players. To do this on Audacity, you also need to download and install a small plug-in application, the LAME MP3 Encoder. Instructions for this process can be found on the Audacity support wiki. You will also have to set a "bit rate" for recording. This rate determines the quality of the recording (i.e.: a higher bit rate equals a higher quality piece, but also a larger file size).

Please Note: Blackboard recommends no more than 250 mg of uploaded content per course. While most Word documents are only a fraction of that, the size of audio files can be significant. According to the Audacity website, "a 128 kbps bit rate [the default setting for the program] takes up about 1 MB of space per minute." If you want to use multiple large files for a given course, you may want to consider uploading each one for a limited period of time.

How to Get Started

Here are some resources to get you started podcasting:

1) If you are tech-comfy and a DIY-type, you can download the Audacity software and try it out on your own. There are several how-to sites for Audacity users. Here are some places to get started:

The Audacity Homepage
http://audacity.sourceforge.net

Brief Audacity Demo
http://net.educause.edu/Screencasts/Audacity/Untitled.html

Instructions for installing the LAME MP3 Encoder plug-in
http://audacity.sourceforge.net/help/faq?s=install&item=lame-mp3

2) If you would prefer one-on-one support to get started, make an appointment with the CTL. Expect a brief review of the info covered here, questions about your specific needs, and a hands-on tutorial on Audacity. Prepare a short script (no more than 5 minutes of material), and you'll leave with at least a practice version of your own podcast.

A Final Thought

Depending on the type of courses you are teaching, you may want to consider assigning your students to create audio files, too. After all, who wouldn't appreciate a fresh approach to making class presentations? A group assignment, including a written script and a recorded and posted audio file, is one way of incorporating the activity. The MLRC (3rd floor library) is equipped to support small group projects such as this. We recommend that you contact them for specifics as you are planning the activity.

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No. 62 – May 1, 2009

A bi-weekly information sheet by the Center for Teaching and Learning

NEIU Philosophy Ethics Bowl Team 5th in the Nation!

The story of NEIU's Philosophy Ethics Bowl Team winning first the regional and then taking 5th in the national championship almost reads like a made-for-TV movie. In this corner, we have the underdogs from a Master's level state university of modest resources, and in that corner we have scores of students from top-tier research institutions such as Loyola, IU-Bloomington, UNC-Chapel Hill, Clemson, Dartmouth, the Naval Academy, among others. We have a small group of student volunteers pitted against teams that had extensive pre-trials at their institution to select the individuals who would compete. We have a tired team of contestants that had already checked out of the hotel and then had to camp out in the lobby to recuperate for the final round, in which they hadn't counted to participate. But those are just details. The *real* story, however, is how faculty and students from a small program at Northeastern have come together to create a great learning experience while, along the way, accomplishing remarkable academic feats far from home.

We sat down with the two coaches of the team, Prof. Dan Milsky and Prof. John Casey, from the Philosophy Department, and asked them about what they did and why it worked. Here is a brief summary of their comments.

How did you recruit and coach your students for this competition?

Other institutions started with internal competitions and then selected their team from the winners, but we opened it up to everybody, using word of mouth, our listserv, and in-class announcements, and then we went with those students who volunteered. It helps that the Philosophy students are a tightly-knit community, and we see them frequently throughout the week. We ended up with a traveling team of five, and three additional team members who practiced with the others at home. Reasoning through the various ethics cases together took quite some time. Getting ready for the competition took about eight weeks, with a couple of hours per week at first, five to six hours in each of the last three weeks, and a couple of long marathon sessions at Dr. Milsky's house. It wasn't always easy to find times during which all participants could make it, but everybody was really dedicated.

How does this fit with your regular teaching?

Dr. Milsky teaches ethics classes. Integrating realistic cases (often directly out of the day's newspapers) into his classes is natural. He has used Bowl team members as group leaders in his classes to have little mock competitions and help students follow the Bowl procedures. It's a fun and engaging activity for the students, who tend to enjoy it. Dr. Casey also finds it easy to include Ethics Bowl practice in his teaching. He teaches critical thinking courses, so applied critical thinking activities work well in his classes. Skillful Ethics Bowl contestants need to be able to construct logical arguments and uncover fallacies in the opponents' line of reasoning. Both faculty also recognize how the Bowl has changed their relationship with students. Acting as coaches (rather than "professors") creates informal connections with students that make classes all the more pleasant. Both faculty can frequently be seen in engaged conversations with their students in the cafeteria or elsewhere on campus. It has created a sense of community that, if anything, has raised academic standards because coaches have more credibility than anybody to be demanding of their charges. This esprit de corps also seems to have benefitted the program: Philosophy majors have increased from 12 to 60 in the last five or six years.

Would this approach work for other departments?

Some faculty in Political Science take a similar approach. They have students debate legal cases in a Model United Nations or a Moot Court and in front of sitting judges in Springfield. The idea is the same: Make it realistic, take it outside of the classroom, have others judge the students' performance, and have fun with it. As John Casey says: "It's teaching without grades" or having "a reading group without a book." And what do the faculty get out of it? "It's the singularly most satisfying experience I have ever had as a professor," says Milsky.

Why did NEIU students do so much better than many expected?

Many of the students from the prestige institutions in the competition are traditional-age students in their late teens/early twenties. They can make a logical argument, maybe dazzle with their rhetorical skills, but they don't really feel the application of the cases they are discussing. Here is where NEIU students' diversity shows itself as a strength. NEIU team members were somewhat older than students on the other teams. They have life experience. There were two single parents in the group and a former soldier with leadership experience. One of the students had joined the group partially to overcome a speech impediment, and that required courage. The students were not coached to "win." Their practice sessions challenged them to explore all different perspectives on a case. They were trying to develop nuance and, of course, they had the advantage of often speaking from experience.

Why are students attracted to Philosophy at this day and age?

Part of this is speculation, although Nick Jolly in the *New York Times* about a year ago explained increasing numbers of philosophy majors across the country with students' confusion about the types of jobs associated with any number of academic fields. While philosophy may not have a specific career goal (unless one wants to teach philosophy), the skills and intellectual qualities it fosters are quite obvious. Students understand that the development of critical thinking and good writing skills are definite assets of a philosophy degree. Law schools have become very interested in students with a B.A. in philosophy, and increasing numbers of NEIU philosophy students are making it into graduate school. The sense of community in the department and the close relationships with professors are another selling point that has not gone unnoticed by students choosing a major.

CTL Bulletin

No. 65 – October 15, 2009

A bi-weekly information sheet by the Center for Teaching and Learning

Special-Interest Groups for Faculty

The Center for Teaching and Learning invites you to join any of the Special-Interest Groups listed below. The topics range from teaching to research, not to forget opportunities for socializing. We think that faculty will enjoy the company of colleagues from different disciplines for informal meetings once a month. Please let us know if you are interested in any of these topics. E-mail the contact person for the respective group and join us for stimulating discussions that might even develop into a collaborative project for some of the participants.

Topics (in alphabetical order) include:

1. **Instructional technology/Online teaching**
   (meets 2nd Friday of the month in Library 349. Next meeting: Nov. 13, 12-1:30pm)
   Contact Person: Angela Velez a-velez4@neiu.edu
   A brown-bag series to discuss and showcase new tools, approaches, and ideas. Besides faculty, CTL-members and maybe members from University Computing will participate.

2. **Interdisciplinary learning & teaching**
   (meets one Friday per month at the CTL, Library 310. Next meeting: Nov. 13, 1-2:30pm)
   Contact Person: Edmund Hansen e-hansen@neiu.edu
   Faculty interested in issues of teaching and learning across disciplines meet to discuss strategies for integrative and interdisciplinary teaching and scholarship.
   Reading: R.J. Sternberg, "Interdisciplinary Problem-Based Learning: An Alternative to Traditional Majors and Minors." http://www.aacu.org/liberaleducation/le-wi08/le-wi08_inter_prob.cfm

3. **Scholarly writing**
   (The activities room of the Center for Academic Writing, Library 467, is reserved for this group every Friday morning, 10am-12noon)
   Contact Person: Kate Hahn mk-hahn@neiu.edu
   Open to all faculty who wish to have a space to work on their scholarly writing. The group uses the CAW (Library 467) for individual work, group work, and the occasional speaker. The space is reserved for faculty use only during this time. Come to do some work without the distractions of home or office. Come to collaborate. (Come to commiserate!). The group is informal in nature and is still brainstorming about how the time and space can be used to best support faculty in their scholarly writing work. For example, we are exploring having occasional speakers on topics such as resources to help you in your research and writing, use of LiveText, and grant writing. We are also planning to have writing supplies and donuts on hand. Please see the NEIUport Group titled "Scholarly Writing" under the Faculty and Academic Departments heading in NEIUport Groups.

4. **Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL)**
   (meets one Friday per month at CTL, Library 310. Next meeting: Nov. 13, 10:30am-12noon)
   Contact Person: Edmund Hansen e-hansen@neiu.edu
   Faculty identify relevant research and discuss study designs that would address their questions regarding issues and practices in their teaching
   Reading: Vanderbilt Ctr. f. Teaching: "Scholarship of Teaching and Learning"
   http://www.vanderbilt.edu/cft/resources/teaching_resources/reflecting/sotl.htm

5. **Socializing**
   (meets either on or off-campus)
   Contact Person: Edmund Hansen e-hansen@neiu.edu
   After an initial meeting at the CTL, groups of faculty who have non-academic interests in common, e.g. parents of young children, faculty with particular hobbies, international faculty, etc., establish their own meeting place and time and provide the CTL with contact info for new people to join the group.

6. **Teaching undergraduate students**
   (meets one Friday per month at CTL, Library 310. First meeting: Oct. 16, 10:30am-12noon)
   Contact Person: Edmund Hansen e-hansen@neiu.edu
   Faculty who are teaching Gen-Ed courses discuss what it takes to engage our undergraduate populations in challenging learning experiences. Participants might take turns in presenting promising teaching & curriculum approaches from own experience or the literature.

7. **Understanding & developing an inclusive campus climate**
   (meets one Friday per month at CTL, Library 310. First meeting: Oct. 16, 1-2:30pm)
   Contact Person: Edmund Hansen e-hansen@neiu.edu
   Faculty discuss and develop strategies and tools to facilitate inclusion on campus, both in and outside the classroom. Might involve also members from Student Affairs.

A quick reminder about our special **Blackboard Training for Novices**. There is a full schedule of workshops available next week. If you are interested, please join us. Sessions are conducted by either Mark Raskinski or Angela Velez in LIB 349:

M, 10/19: 9-10am	T, 10/20: 2:30-3:30	W, 10/21: 4-5pm	R, 10/22: 5-6pm	F, 10/23: 1-2pm

These sessions are for those of you who have not used Blackboard before. We will just go over the basics. Please **bring an electronic copy of your syllabi** and any other key documents you want to put online, such as your weekly assignments with instructions. We will help you put these documents into the Blackboard shells that have already been created for your courses and show you how to use the simple Communication functions available in Blackboard. By the end of the workshop, you will have a functioning Blackboard site to help you stay in touch with your students.

All CTL Bulletins are available on our website at: www.neiu.edu/~ctl/

CTL Bulletin

No. 66 – November 1, 2009

A bi-weekly information sheet by the Center for Teaching and Learning

NEIU's First Graduating Class in Online Teaching Preparation

The Center for Teaching and Learning would like to congratulate the first graduates of the Online Teaching Preparation Course, which started on October 5, 2009 and ended this past Sunday, November 1st. The course was designed and facilitated by the CTL's Coordinator of Learning Technologies, Angela Velez. The course was completely online, and the faculty participants were immersed in the online environment, both as students and as teachers. The esteemed graduating class members are:

Shelley Bannister (Just. St.), Suzanne Benson (ELAD), Julia Berkowitz (Teacher Ed), Anita Bross (El Centro), Vicki Byard (Engl.), Ingrid Castro (Sociol.), Crystal Chen (Acct.), Suzanne Gaskins (Psych.), Katherine Gleiss (Learn. Ctr.), Donna Goering (ELAD), Charletta Gutierrez (Acct.), Jean Hemzacek (Earth Sci.), Elizabeth Iehl (El Centro), Leslie Kleinmuntz (Manage.), Elizabeth Landerholm (Teacher Ed), Paul Lempke (Art), Jian Li (Manage.), Mary Ellen McGoey (For. Lang.), Dragan Milovanovic (Just. St.), Adeline Pierre (Poli.Sci), Elisa Rzany (Engl.), Laura Sanders (Earth Sci.), Rose Sperrazza (Music), Wendy Thomas (CTC), Daniela Truty (ELAD), Cris Toffolo (Just. St.), Jacquie Ward (Econ), and Mickie Wong (Special Ed.).

Congratulations for all of your hard work and dedication!

What did they learn?

Faculty members who participated in this class learned how to navigate a Blackboard course, add items, add website links, create discussion forums, create discussion threads (or conversation starters to which students respond), grade student participation quickly and efficiently, create a test or quiz, design a comprehensive syllabus appropriate for the online environment, facilitate an online discussion, the importance of instructor participation, give quality feedback to students, and so much more. Here are some quotes from the course participants:

"Early on I stated that I had a very steep learning curve because although I use and love technology, I had never taught or taken an online course. Yes, I had researched it with a colleague that is very well versed in this format, but I did not have the skills to teach it myself; I keep thinking that this is something I would do one day. I have learned so much in such a short period of time that I can hardly believe it!"

"This online training course is very important in order to prepare the instructor to get ready for online teaching. I think it should be a required program for all the instructors who would teach an online course in NEIU."

"This truly felt like a playground, i.e., a site where I could be me and where I could play, explore, discover, and ultimately learn. I learned so many new functions in Blackboard that I haven't used before. Additionally, I learned about some of the theory that underlies Blackboard use. I'm ready and willing to learn how to do these things and to seriously consider implementing them as quickly as possible."

"I was one of those more skeptical and perhaps also less technologically sophisticated with on-line work. But the course, and [Angela], has made me appreciate what a quality on-line course could look like. I appreciated the continuous feedback, with humor. I liked the two-pronged direction: we as teachers, we as students. That rounded things off nicely. I really appreciated the terrific dialogue amongst colleagues."

How can you learn some of these functions of Blackboard?

Angela Velez and Marc Raskinski from the CTL have recently added many videos to the CTL website that narrate Blackboard tools and processes. You can find a list of these videos on the CTL website at: http://www.neiu.edu/~ctl/blackboard.html. Access the video by clicking on the video title; you will need your speakers on in order to listen to the narration.

Videos are added often, so check back on occasion. You can also call the CTL to request a tutorial if one is not available for a process you would like to know. As you can see in the picture, a video called "Blackboard tutorial for students" is included as well. This is a 16 minute tutorial that takes a student through an example NEIU course that is offered through Blackboard. The video shows students how to navigate, how to email their professor, how to check their grades, how to respond to a discussion board post, and more.

"How To" Videos

- Make course available
- Remove old courses from the menu
- Upload syllabus
- Create assignment link
- Grade assignments electronically
- Creating discussion forums and discussion threads
- Reading, replying to, and grading student discussion posts
- Provide feedback on discussion grades using discussion grader
- Helpful, time-saving discussion board tips
- Blackboard tutorial for students
- Upload the Blackboard tutorial for students to your course
- Grade electronic copies of papers efficiently with Annotate for Word Pro
- Track face to face class attendance through Blackboard
- Add grades quickly to the gradebook for a face to face assignment
- Set up and use student groups through Blackboard

You can put this video in your Blackboard class (yes, there's even a video that shows you how to do that) and your inexperienced students can learn how to do necessary processes.

What else can you do to become more tech savvy?

If you would like to participate in the online teaching preparation course, you can email Angela at a-velez4@neiu.edu. Another set of courses will begin in the Spring semester; currently two sections are filled and no more than three sections will run during the semester.

You can also request to be added to the "Distance Instructor Collaboration Station", which is a Blackboard course filled with helpful tools, articles, and websites that make using Blackboard fun, exciting, and engaging! Email Angela to have access to this growing repertoire of educational resources.

If you have a technical or "how to" question, call Marc at x4463; if your question is pedagogical or design related, call Angela at x4497.

CTL Bulletin
No. 67 – November 15, 2009
A bi-weekly information sheet by the Center for Teaching and Learning

The Future of Educational Technology in Higher Education

The last two decades in higher ed have moved the focus of the teaching-learning process from instructor input to learner outcomes, and from relatively inert content knowledge to the learners' ability to do something with that knowledge. The classroom is no longer the only learning environment, and no effective teacher can ignore technology's capacity for putting the learner into the educational driver's seat. We will outline in this and the next issue of the *CTL Bulletin* four developments in educational technology that will likely effect significant changes in the next decades of higher education. We start with a brief overview of these developments, and then address the first two here and the remaining two in the next *Bulletin*.

1. Web 2.0 Knowledge Organization Tools
   New knowledge organization and production tools, such as Wikis, Social Bookmarking, Blogs, and Podcasting provide the potential for collaborative knowledge construction that is targeted at real audiences. Students can take an active role in this process.

2. Virtual Realities for Case-Based Learning
   Virtual Reality Programs offer students authentic performance tasks that resemble real-world challenges and engage them in realistic problem-solving activities.

3. Blended Learning
   Instruction can no longer use a "one size fits all" approach. The merging of computer-mediated and live instruction now allows us to optimize every student's personal learning processes and accommodate diverse preferences for pacing and learning style.

4. Electronic Learning Portfolios
   Learning happens across the whole curriculum and requires ongoing reflection and synthesis across classes and semesters to accomplish personal growth. E-portfolios can support this in new ways.

Web 2.0: Collaborative Knowledge Organization Tools

In previous *CTL Bulletins (#55-57, 61)* we have described the educational capabilities of the new Web 2.0 tools. These innovations not only have great potential for improved education for everybody, they also make new demands on helping our students become information-literate. In his recent book, Will Richardson (2009) observes some of the trends and literacy demands that innovations such as Wikis, Blogs, Social Bookmarking, Podcasting, etc. are creating:

Trend #1: To quote Thomas Friedman (*The World is Flat):* "We are now in the process of connecting all of the knowledge pools in the world together." The Internet has become the most comprehensive source of knowledge in history and the go-to-place for anybody seeking information on any topic imaginable.

Trend #2: More and more, the creation of that knowledge is collaborative. Students need to develop the ability to work closely with others in *virtual* environments. Employers have been telling higher education for years that our

graduates need to be able to function in teams. That bar has now been raised: face-to-face collaboration remains important, but students must also be able to collaborate online and around the globe.

Trend #3: Consumers of Web content need to be editors as well as readers. That means that we must teach students to become more *active* consumers of information instead of just passively accepting it as legitimate.

Trend #4: We must be literate in the ways of publishing. Since everyone now can have a voice, instructors must increasingly teach and model the ways in which ideas and products can be brought online.

Trend #5: We need to know how to manage the information that we consume. The good news is: these new virtual tools help us manage information more effectively and efficiently. The bad news: they are also the main culprits for creating the information explosion that needs to be managed.

This new technological potential and these new literacies that technology requires, make learning more learner-centered, more collaborative and much more oriented beyond the classroom.

Virtual Realities for Case-Based Learning: Authentic Performance Tasks

For decades educators have searched for richer and more realistic (less text-bookish) learning environments, in which students acquire complex skills that typically can only be acquired in real-life. New technologies are making this possible. We can now provide students with problem-solving tasks that closely resemble the real world with its messy complexity that presents too much information, much of which turns out to be irrelevant for the issue at hand. These new simulated environments become the proving ground for students to demonstrate what they have learned.

A variety of tools exist that challenge students to explore complex virtual realities: WebQuests, simulation games, online science labs, virtual field trips, etc (see Bonk & Zhang, 2008). Probably the biggest such environment is "Kelsey," a virtual town recently created by the University of Phoenix. Fictional companies were designed with great attention to detail in order to simulate the experience of working in a typical corporation, school, or government agency. Each fictional entity comes with detailed, simulated scenarios designed by professionals in the respective field.

This virtual town is used for Phoenix's business, information technology, education, and health-care courses, in other words: its usability cuts across a wide section of the curriculum.

- The virtual schools and businesses function like case studies that students use to diagnose and solve typical problems of organizations
- Teachers can have a hundred scenarios and randomly assign them to different students
- Students then have to hunt for data in multiple files, documents, and records, some of them confusing and incomplete, just like in real life
- For example, a student can track an imaginary child's progress from Kelsey's elementary school to community college through files of report cards and e-mail messages between teachers and parents

The advantage is that the software lets students examine an organization at a level of detail not accessible even to most employees. Students can work on cases that have no more disciplinary boundaries. For example, an educational issue can be connected to business decisions affecting the school, health care issues affecting the town, and problems with information technology affecting businesses and schools alike.

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The Future of Educational Technology in Higher Education, Part 2

Our last *Bulletin* described two promising trends in educational technology: (1) Web 2.0 Knowledge Organization Tools, and (2) Virtual Realities for Case-Based Learning. The current *Bulletin* adds two more: (3) Blended Learning and (4) Electronic Learning Portfolios. Each one of them provides some unique capabilities, but together they share three general pedagogical strengths that face-to-face teaching has struggled with in recent years. Those strengths include:

1. Increasing students' time-on-task and their persistence in practicing crucial skills
2. Engaging students through collaborative, inquiry-based projects that mimic realistic tasks
3. Providing diagnostic (self-) assessment opportunities to better understand what learning/teaching approaches are effective in courses and curricula.

The following paragraphs will illustrate how new technologies support these functions.

Blended Learning: Coordinated Learning Environments

Coordinated Learning Environments—typically called Blended Learning—are named for their ability to combine physical and virtual spaces as well as social groupings in order to optimize students' academic success. In recent years, blended learning has taken off as an instructional format that combines the best of face-to-face and online instruction. Not surprisingly therefore, leaders in educational technology recently concluded: "In the long run, almost all courses offered in higher education will be blended... It is almost a certainty that blended learning will become the new traditional model of course delivery in ten years." (Ross & Gage) The important question is: How do you structure Blended Learning so that the different parts actually benefit each other? Carol Twigg, founder of The National Center for Academic Transformation (NCAT), has identified several Blended Learning models, two of which are described in the following. The models are characterized by (a) the number of students served in one course, (b) the degree to which in-class meetings are eliminated, (c) the main delivery environment for instruction, and (d) the types of instructional staffing required for face-to-face teaching. The first model probably comes closest to what is typically called "blended learning":

1. The *Replacement Model* maintains regular class sizes and:
   - Reduces (but does not completely eliminate) the number of in-class meetings
   - Replaces some in-class time with online, interactive learning activities
   - Is typically taught by one instructor
   - Gives careful consideration to why (and how often) classes need to meet face-to-face
   - Assumes that certain activities can be better accomplished online—individually or in small groups—than in a face-to-face class.
2. The *Buffet Model*—admittedly a somewhat unfortunate name for a pedagogical approach—typically accommodates large class sizes by combining multiple sections of a course. It:
   - Eliminates duplicate effort of several faculty who divide tasks among themselves by offering particular learning opportunities on the "buffet"

- Customizes the learning environment for each student based on background, learning preference, and academic/professional goals
- Requires an online assessment of students' learning styles and study skills
- Offers students an assortment of individualized paths to reach the same learning outcomes
- Provides structure for students through an individualized learning contract
- Includes an array of learning opportunities for students: lectures, individual discovery labs, group discovery labs, small-group study sessions, videos, remedial training modules, etc.

The final technology differs from the previous three, which could be described as learning/teaching tools that are attached to specific courses. This fourth technology cuts across courses and semesters and deals with students' ongoing progress throughout their whole college studies.

Electronic Learning Portfolios: Diagnosing Learning Over Time

If the college of the future is to ensure the success of students with increasingly diverse academic backgrounds, abilities, and interests, we need to better understand our students' strengths and weaknesses. We also need to understand what structures and approaches in the curriculum and co-curriculum facilitate and hinder student success. How does a given sequence of courses benefit some or inhibit other students' learning? How do successful students go through their program, and what can "at risk" students learn from this?

Currently, a number of tools exist that can help us with these questions. The previous segment on Blended Learning referred to the use of diagnostic tutorials that assess certain prerequisite skills for specific courses or track students' performance, including aspects such as time-on-task, or the improvement of conceptual understanding. Some institutions have created E-portfolio systems that provide important information for program review and accreditation purposes. Probably the most comprehensive and well thought-out initiative has come from Alverno College, whose Diagnostic Digital Portfolio integrates both the need to better understand student learning over time as well as institutional performance across the curriculum. Alverno's Diagnostic Digital Portfolio:

- Follows every student's learning progress throughout their years of study
- Helps students process the feedback they receive from faculty, external assessors, and peers
- Enables them to look for patterns in their academic work to become more autonomous learners
- Is used by faculty for program assessment (because the database is relational and searchable)
- Allows students and faculty to select "best work samples" (since entries can be coded)
- Thereby also allows students to create an electronic resume
- Can be used for faculty development by picking selected work samples to help new faculty members develop expertise in designing assessment, grading criteria, and good feedback.

The current and previous edition of the *CTL Bulletin* have showcased emerging educational technologies that we feel have the potential for inducing significant changes in higher education over the next decade. They provide the tools for engaging students more in their own learning by making it more collaborative and hands-on. They also provide faculty and administrators with new opportunities to better understand their students, and devise new course and curriculum-based structures for making higher education more effective.

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