CTL April/May Newsletter

The CTL Newsletter is distributed electronically every month during the academic year.

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Dates to Note!!

Summer Technology Explorations
Thursday, June 2
Thursday, June 9
Thursday, June 16
Thursday, June 23
Thursday, June 30
1 to 2:30 p.m.
Library room 110
(Lunch will be served at 12:30 p.m.)

To RSVP email us at CTL@stjohns.edu or call ext. 1859

Center for Teaching and Learning Newsletter

Vol. 16, No 8 April/May 2011
Vincentian Mission: Opportunity and Responsibility - No. XXXIII
Does Technology Enable Authentic Democracy and Development?
Brenda Lopez-Ortiz (School of Education, lopezb@stjohns.edu)

In this series, Vincentian Research Fellows from across the University share their experiences in actualizing the Vincentian Mission through their research, teaching and service. Below, Professor Brenda Lopez-Ortiz discusses the manner in which she develops a social justice-oriented context for students in her technology class. She describes conflicting trends in the complex area of technology and identifies the need for students to consider the social and ethical implications of technology on democracy and social development.

The title of the undergraduate course that I teach here at St. John’s is Technology & Society: School, Community & the Workplace. As a professor of instructional technology, when I first faced the task of developing this course, I decided to incorporate the study of general trends of technology use in American society with consideration of their social implications. This study would serve as one of the initial points of evidence to share my conviction that technology integration is essential to contemporary teaching and learning and also that technology is a major force on society and has justice implications.

A number of data sources would help to create that picture and support that judgment. First, national reports on the use of the Internet (e.g. Pew Internet & The America project) reveal trends on the use of technology in various aspects of daily life. Second, the students chose a specific workplace to analyze the technology needs of those particular workers. Also, an analysis of the various national reports that identify skills necessary for the 21st century helped students to connect the current trends with future goals of the overall work community. The analysis could also help students contextualize their own future roles in the workplace as well as the effect of technology on employment opportunities across the social sectors. This allowed them to see the need to integrate technology into the lesson plans they developed as pre-service teachers.

As students studied the increasing adoption of technology in the workplace, including schools and educational sites, the potential for a “digital divide,” became more obvious to the students and generated concern among them. The reality is that every new wave of technology initially seems to leave behind the same groups of marginalized people. We must all question whether today’s emerging technologies will change or repeat that pattern and whether the marginalized will be better or worse off. How can teaching and learning technologies be shared to achieve that desired “level playing field” especially for children?

The issue is very complex. The exponential growth in technological capacity in progressively smaller and cheaper devices has been widely documented. These recent developments have translated into an array of popular devices such as smart phones and tablet computers. The competition for the smart-phone market has driven the cost down sometimes up to 50% in a few years. Tablet computers, deliver increasingly more compelling content for a fraction of the cost of the previous models.
However, my students discovered that while the growth of home broadband adoption slowed down, the growth for the African American population had a 19-point increase. A report on cell phone usage indicated that ownership of such devices is higher for African Americans and English-speaking Latinos than whites by 8%. In addition, these populations use a greater range of features. This widespread adoption is not limited to the United States. Statistics from other countries suggest that mobile technologies have penetrated more markets because of their lower costs.

This dramatic increase in access to technology already has demonstrated transformative results. We live in a world where a young talented professional like the creator of Facebook with his programming skills is not denied success because he lacks experience and an impressive resume. He created a web application that allows people to connect with each other. People find the application valuable, thus validating his skills. Again with technology, a group of children do not have to go through auditions in front of elite music industry professionals in order to be selected to sing at the Oscars. They merely post samples of their work on an online video sharing website for others to “Like.” One million hits later, they get to walk on the red carpet.

Today, we do not hear about a significant natural disaster through the lens of a small group of editors. We learn about the earthquake in Japan via the lens of real people pointing their cameras at shaking buildings as they try to run to safety. We now live in a world where we can be an up-close observer of a government’s failure to suppress its people as in Egypt. We live in a world in which large media broadcasting companies are trailing behind the people when it comes to selecting what is worth paying attention to or what really constitutes “News.” We live in an era in which a snake can have a Twitter account to relate its experiences running free around the city!

The work of technology in creating level fields is not done yet. While the reports about minority use of media are promising, the nature of the popular media is predominantly social and limited. Very simply for example, the limitations of these media to support activities like filling in job applications are very apparent. Computer professionals now are reflecting on the potential of the rising apps to diminish the freedom of information that the web makes possible. The apps provide the light (free) version that allows users “to fall in love” with their functionality. This then provokes need and stimulates the desire for and acquisition of the paid (full-featured) counterpart. This then is “the inevitable course of capitalism” which could limit full participation in the benefits of technology.

Educational efforts are necessary to grasp the two sides of technology today. We should strive to educate our students on the technology instruments and applications pointing up the benefits and the challenges on personal and social well-being. We must share the knowledge on how to find and utilize information and communications technologies that will promote healthy living, economic well-being, the enactment of our civil responsibilities, and advance professional and spiritual growth. We must motivate students to use social media as a powerful tool to reach and provide development opportunities for those persons who live on the margins. The benefits of technology, the “smart” devices should not be limited by educational, economic or social status. Teachers need to help students to understand and evaluate the impact of the technology on all segments of society and all citizens of the world. Perhaps we can find a special “app” for that! Then, justice will direct the benefits of increased availability of these “smart” devices and the advancing technologies.
Dr. Zhe-Sheng Chen (Pharmaceutical Sciences, chenz@stjohns.edu) invited a visiting scholar, Yueli Sun from Sun Yat-Sen University Cancer Center, to study at his lab (January 2011); was selected as an Editorial Advisory Board Member by the Journal of Carcinogenesis and Mutagenesis; published with Dr. Tanaji Talele (Pharmaceutical Sciences, talelet@stjohns.edu) an article, “Sildenafil Reverses ABCB1- and ABCG2-Mediated Chemotherapeutic Drug Resistance,” in Cancer Research (April 2011); presented an abstract with Dr. Vijaya Korlipara (Pharmaceutical Sciences, korlipav@stjohns.edu), “Analogs of OSI-930 as Potent ABCG2-mediated Multidrug Resistance Reversal Agents” and another abstract with Dr. Tanaji Talele: “Reversal of ABCB1- and ABCG2-Mediated Drug Resistance by Sildenafil,” at the American Association for Cancer Research (AACR) in Orlando, FL (April 2011).

Dr. Irene Dabrowski (Sociology and Anthropology, dabrowsi@stjohns.edu) co-presented a paper, “The Blind Spots of Intersectional Analysis,” at the annual meeting of the Eastern Sociological Society in Philadelphia, PA (February 2011).

Dr. Christopher Denny (Theology and Religious Studies, dennyc@stjohns.edu) presented two papers: “Pluralism’s Escape from the Soteriological Reductions in Christian Theologies of Religion” at the annual meeting of the Mid-Atlantic American Academy of Religion in New Brunswick, NJ (March 2011) and “Aquinas’s Interpretation of Denys’s Apophaticism: Its Consequences for Theological Aesthetics,” at the Metaphysics of Aquinas and its Modern Interpreters: Theological and Philosophical Perspectives conference at Fordham University in NY (March 2011).

Dr. Maura C. Flannery (Computer Science, Mathematics and Science, flannerm@stjohns.edu) published an article, “Biogeography: Where It’s Happening,” in The American Biology Teacher (February 2011).

Dr. Joseph A. Giacalone (Economics and Finance, giacaloj@stjohns.edu) presented a paper, “Modeling the Market for Medical Travel,” at the annual meeting of the American Society of Business and Behavioral Science in Las Vegas, NV (February 2011).


Rev. John H. McKenna, C.M. (Theology and Religious Studies, mckennaj@stjohns.edu) published an article, "Trinity, Holy Spirit, and Epiclesis," in Liturgical Ministry (Fall 2010); participated and was a respondent to five papers at the annual meeting of the North American Academy of Liturgy in San Francisco (January 2011) and delivered a lecture, “Eucharistic Presence: Context,” at a workshop at St. John’s University (February 2011).

Dr. Ralph Stephani (Pharmaceutical Sciences, stephanr@stjohns.edu) and Dr. Sandra Reznik (rezniks@stjohns.edu) are co-investigators of an NIH R01 grant entitled, "Cerebral Malaria: Mechanisms of Disease and Neurological Salvage," for the amount of $317,000 over a five year period (April 2011).

Dr. Charles Wankel (Management, wankelc@stjohns.edu) published the books: Global Sustainability as a Business Imperative (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), Educating Educators with Social Media (Bingley, UK: Emerald Publishing Group, 2011), Higher Education Administration with Social Media: Including Applications in Student Affairs, Enrollment Management, Alumni Relations, and Career Centers (Bingley, UK: Emerald Publishing Group, 2011), and Teaching Arts and Science with the New Social Media (Bingley, UK: Emerald Publishing Group, 2011); presented two papers and received the Management Education Scholar of the Year Award from the Business and Economics Society International at its St. Thomas, USVI, meeting (January 2011).

(continued on next page)
Student Engagement: Findings from the National Survey of Student Engagement

Yuxiang Liu (Director of Institutional Assessment in the Office of Institutional Research, liuy@stjohns.edu)

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), which has been administered annually since 2000, collects data from random samples of first-year and senior students about the nature of their undergraduate experience. The survey is designed to evaluate the extent to which students engage in effective educational practices empirically linked with learning, personal development, and other desired outcomes, including student satisfaction, persistence, and graduation. St. John’s University has participated in NSSE six times (2001, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008 and 2010) since its started in 2000.

Following are some highlights from the NSSE 2010 results. St. John’s 2010 data are mainly compared to the 2004 data, and also compared with the results for Carnegie peer institutions. The complete report is available at http://www.stjohns.edu/about/ir/surveys.

HIGHLIGHTS

In general, the NSSE data indicate that both first-year and senior students at St. John’s have become more engaged than before, especially in the areas of Active and Collaborative Learning, Student-Faculty Interactions, and Enriching Educational Experiences. Following are some highlights of survey results.

A. Areas in which first-year students became more engaged in 2010 than in 2004

- In 2004, St. John’s first-year students spent an average of 10.5 hours a week preparing for class (studying, reading, writing, doing homework, rehearsing, and other academic activities), and it increased to 12.7 hours in 2010.
- In 2004, 52% of students Often / Very Often worked harder than they thought they could to meet the instructor’s standards or expectations, and the percentage increased to 59% in 2010.
- In 2004, 56% of students Often / Very Often asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions, and the percentage increased to 64% in 2010.
- The percentage students, who Often / Very Often worked with other students on projects outside of class, increased from 24% to 36%.
- The percentage of students, who Often / Very Often participated in a community-based project as part of a regular course, increased from 17% to 39%.
- The percentage of students, who Often / Very Often discussed ideas from their readings or classes with others outside of class (students, family members, co-workers, etc.), increased from 44% to 55%.
- In 2004, 14% of students Often / Very Often discussed ideas from readings or classes with faculty members outside of class, and the percentage increased to 28% in 2010.
The percentage of students, who *Often / Very Often* worked with faculty members on activities other than coursework (committees, orientation, student life activities, etc.), increased from 9% to 24%.

The percentage of students, who indicated that they received prompt written or oral feedback from faculty on their academic performance, increased from 38% to 59%.

In 2004, 28% of students did community service or volunteer work, and the percentage increased to 67% in 2010.

The percentage of students, who participated in a learning community or some other formal programs where groups of students take two or more classes together, increased from 9% to 35%.

The percentage of students, who had done foreign language coursework, increased from 9% to 20%.

The percentage of students, who had serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity, increased from 60% to 66%.

The percentage of students, who perceived that campus environment *Very Much / Quite a Bit* encouraged contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds, increased from 60% to 66%.

In 2004, 45% of students perceived that campus environment provided *Very Much / Quite a Bit* of the support they needed to thrive socially, and the percentage increased to 52% in 2010.

### B. Areas in which first-year students became less engaged in 2010 than in 2004

There are no areas in which St. John’s first-year students were significantly *less engaged* in 2010 than in 2004.

### C. Areas in which senior students became more engaged in 2010 than in 2004

- In 2004, St. John’s senior students spent an average of 10.2 hours a week preparing for class (studying, reading, writing, doing homework, rehearsing, and other academic activities), and it increased to 12.4 hours in 2010.
- In 2004, 19% of seniors *Often / Very Often* worked with faculty members on activities other than coursework (committees, orientation, student life activities, etc.), and the percentage increased to 28% in 2010.
- The percentage of seniors, who indicated that they received prompt written or oral feedback from faculty on their academic performance, increased from 58% to 65%.
- In 2004, seniors spent an average of 3.2 hours a week participating in co-curricular activities (organizations, publications, student government, sports, etc.) and it increased to 5.8 hours in 2010.
- The percentage of seniors, who did community service or volunteer work, increased from 60% to 69%.
- The percentage of seniors, who participated in a learning community or some other formal programs where groups of students take two or more classes together, increased from 24% to 35%.
- The percentage of seniors, who had done foreign language coursework, increased from 32% to 60%.
- The percentage of seniors, who had studied abroad, increased from 6% to 16%.
- The percentage of seniors, who had had culminating senior experiences (capstone course, senior project or thesis, comprehensive, etc.), increased from 18% to 23%.
- The percentage of seniors, who *Often / Very Often* used an electronic medium (listserv, chat group, Internet, instant messaging, etc.) to discuss or complete an assignment, increased from 51% to 60%.
- The percentage of seniors, who perceived that campus environment *Very Much / Quite a Bit* encouraged contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds, increased from 52% to 68%.
- In 2004, 26% of seniors indicated that campus environment helped them *Very Much / Quite a Bit* cope with their non-academic responsibilities (work, family, etc.), and the percentage increased to 38% in 2010.
- The percentage of seniors, who perceived that campus environment provided *Very Much / Quite a Bit* support they needed to thrive socially, increased from 31% to 48%.
D. Areas in which senior students became less engaged in 2010 than in 2004
- In 2004, 82% of seniors perceived that coursework emphasized Very Much / Quite a Bit application of theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations, but the percentage decreased to 75% in 2010.
- In 2004, 62% of seniors indicated that they had done practicum, internship, field experience, co-op experience, or clinical assignment, but the percentage decreased to 53% in 2010.

E. Areas in which St. John’s 1st-year students were more engaged than Carnegie peers in 2010
- In 2010, 39% of St. John’s first-year students Often / Very Often participated in a community-based project as part of a regular course vs. 16% of Carnegie peers.
- 24% of St. John’s first-year students Often / Very Often worked with faculty members on activities other than coursework (committees, orientation, student life activities, etc.) vs. 17% of Carnegie peers.
- 67% of St. John’s first-year students had done community service or volunteer work vs. 43% of Carnegie peers.
- 35% of St. John’s first-year students had participated in a learning community or some other formal programs where groups of students take two or more classes together vs. 18% of Carnegie peers.
- 66% of St. John’s first-year students Often / Very Often had serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity vs. 53% of Carnegie peers.
- 66% of St. John’s first-year students Quite a Bit / Very Much experienced a campus environment that encouraged contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds vs. 60% of Carnegie peers.

F. Areas in which St. John’s 1st-year students were less engaged than Carnegie peers
There are no areas in which St. John’s first-year students were significantly less engaged than their Carnegie peers.

G. Areas in which St. John’s senior students were more engaged than Carnegie peers
- In 2010, 25% of St. John’s seniors Often / Very Often participated in a community-based project as part of a regular course vs. 20% of Carnegie peers.
- 28% of St. John’s seniors Often / Very Often worked with faculty members on activities other than coursework (committees, orientation, student life activities, etc.) vs. 24% of Carnegie peers.
- St. John’s seniors spent an average of 5.8 hours participating in co-curricular activities (organizations, publications, student government, sports, etc.) vs. 3.9 hours by Carnegie peers.
- 69% of St. John’s seniors had done community service or volunteer work vs. 60% of Carnegie peers.
- 35% of St. John’s seniors participated in a learning community or some other formal programs where groups of students take two or more classes together vs. 29% of Carnegie peers.
- 60% of St. John’s seniors had done foreign language coursework vs. 37% of Carnegie peers.
- 66% of St. John’s seniors Often / Very Often had serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity vs. 57% of Carnegie peers.
- 68% of St. John’s seniors Quite a Bit / Very Much experienced a campus environment that encouraged contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds vs. 54% of Carnegie peers.
- In 2010, 38% of St. John’s seniors Quite a Bit / Very Much experienced a campus environment that helps students cope with non-academic responsibilities (work, family, etc.) vs. 30% of Carnegie peers.
- 48% of St. John’s seniors Quite a Bit / Very Much experienced a campus environment that provides the support needed to thrive socially vs. 38% of Carnegie peers.

H. Areas in which St. John’s senior students were less engaged than Carnegie peers
- In 2010 St. John’s seniors spent an average of 12.4 hours preparing for class (studying, reading, writing, doing homework, rehearsing, and other academic activities) vs. 14.2 hours for Carnegie peers.
83% of St. John’s seniors *Quite a Bit*/*Very Much* had coursework emphasizing analysis of the basic elements of an idea, experience or theory vs. 88% of Carnegie peers.

74% of St. John’s seniors *Quite a Bit*/*Very Much* had coursework emphasizing synthesis and organization of ideas, information, or experiences into new, more complex interpretations and relationships vs. 80% of Carnegie peers.

75% of St. John’s seniors *Quite a Bit*/*Very Much* had coursework emphasizing application of theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations vs. 84% of Carnegie peers.

73% of St. John’s seniors *Quite a Bit*/*Very Much* had a campus environment emphasizing time studying and on academic work vs. 81% of Carnegie peers.

In 2010, 75% of St. John’s seniors *Often*/*Very Often* asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions vs. 79% of Carnegie peers.

51% of St. John’s seniors *Often*/*Very Often* worked with other students on projects outside of class vs. 59% of Carnegie peers.

58% St. John’s seniors *Often*/*Very Often* discussed ideas from readings or classes with others outside of class (students, family members, co-workers, etc.) vs. 66% of Carnegie peers.

13% of St. John’s seniors had done independent study or self-designed major vs. 19% of Carnegie peers.

23% of St. John’s seniors had done culminating senior experiences (capstone course, senior project or thesis, comprehensive, etc.) vs. 38% of Carnegie peers.

60% of St. John’s seniors *Often*/*Very Often* used an electronic medium (listserv, chat group, Internet, instant messaging, etc.) to discuss or complete an assignment vs. 66% of Carnegie peers.

The results of the NSSE survey results are the perceptions of students about their engagement status in curricular and extracurricular activities. The data are very useful, and can be used with other data for action plans and improvement purposes. Please share any initiatives you develop to respond to these results, with Dr. Yuxiang Liu, Director of Institutional Assessment, in the Office of Institutional Research at LiuY@stjohns.edu.

**STJ Joins Council on Undergraduate Research**

St. John’s has just become an institutional member of the Council on Undergraduate Research (CUR). This membership provides a number of benefits for both faculty and students.

Among the services CUR provides is a **Registry of Undergraduate Researchers**. The purpose of this registry is to facilitate matchmaking between undergraduates who have research experience and a desire to pursue an advanced degree, with graduate schools seeking high quality students who are well prepared for research. The Registry is open to students and graduate schools in the fields of Anthropology/Archaeology, Arts/Humanities, Biology/Biochemistry, Business, Chemistry/Biochemistry, Economics, Education, Engineering, English and Linguistics, Environmental Studies, Geosciences, Health Professions, History, Journalism and Communications, Mathematics/Computer Science, Physics/Astronomy, Political Science, Psychology, Social Work and Sociology.

Any undergraduate may go to [https://www.cur.org/ugreg/reg1.asp](https://www.cur.org/ugreg/reg1.asp) to fill out a simple curriculum vitae form. There is no charge to the student or the student’s institution and records will be made available to bona fide Graduate Schools that contract with CUR for this service. Organizations or companies seeking the students’ information for other marketing purposes will not be granted access. Graduate School representatives may contact students to invite applications or visits to the campus and laboratory, or to share information about their research programs and financial support opportunities. Please visit the CUR [website](https://www.cur.org) to find out more.
CTL Fellows on Research in Teaching and Technology

On April 7, the 2009-2011 CTL Fellows made presentations on their projects which deal with integrating technology into their teaching. Over the two years of their fellowship, they explored active learning strategies and technologies that you might also find useful in your teaching. Short descriptions of their projects follow:

**Flipping Out: Using Flip Camera Solutions to Orient Students Toward Understanding Higher Order Classroom Concepts**

*Benjamin Silliman* (The Peter J. Tobin College of Business, sillimanb@stjohns.edu)

My CTL Fellows Project involved using the flip camera to film short teaching segments that I plan to use for my upcoming distance learning course. The entire process was not as easy as one would think, but it was not that difficult once I got the hang of things. My instructional “nugget” was filmed on the Manhattan campus, where we could better control the light. I did a 16-minute segment on how annual appropriations budget is adopted for ACC 639, Accounting for Government and Not-for-Profit Organizations. The flip camera comes with a mini-isle, which you can move to get the best static shot for filming. I had to insure that the PowerPoint slides that I developed were clear and legible, would fall inside the shot, and capture the essential points that I wanted to make.

The flip camera is quite easy to operate and you can edit your feature once it is “in the can,” as they say. Many years ago while living in California, I took a class using a Super-8 camera, so I was familiar with the impact that light has on shooting a segment, even with a flip camera. Never shoot without testing how well lit the shot is—it takes quite a bit of light to film a quality product. When filming the segment in Manhattan, it took three takes in total. I was nervous at first but I shot the entire segment without notes on the third try (something I do not recommend for everyone). I realize that students will view it just as if I were standing in front of them in class, describing the details in a manner that they are used to. My goal is to allow students enrolled in either a live or distance learning course to have the opportunity to re-acquaint themselves to some of the challenging concepts through these teaching nuggets. Using the flip camera will also create for the instructor a historical archive that can be use for several years—or added to a teaching portfolio.

**Core Audio Tours: Material Culture in English 1100**

*Kathleen Marks* (College of Professional Studies, marksk@stjohns.edu)

Kathleen presented on two completed audio tours to be used in conjunction with core English 1100C courses. The first tour links objects housed within the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s Greek and Roman Gallery to two works covered in the course: Homer’s *Odyssey* and Vergil’s *Aeneid*. Since so much about the Greeks is learned through Roman copies and since Roman imitation of the Greeks is a topic discussed in the course, rather than tying objects to one or another text too closely, the tour is divided into three themes: War, Fame, and Home. Thus, objects such as helmets, statues, and whole bedrooms are spoken about in terms of both *Odyssey* and *Aeneid*. The second tour—conducted in the Cloisters, the Met’s Medieval branch—takes into account Dante’s *Divine Comedy* and the Anonymous epic romance *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Looking first at a copy of Augustine’s *City of God*, the occasional *memento mori*, and a variety of saints in light of Dante’s cosmological work, the tour then moves to *Sir Gawain*, where hunts, game-playing, knights, ladies, and even a tapestry of King Arthur, allow us to see some of the material culture of the marvelous Middle Ages. Each tour takes about thirty minutes and tries to forge an organic path through each space. The Audacity site with its free download was used to record the tours and for now they are stored and are available for student to access on St. John’s Central.
A Comparison Between Maple and Wolfram Alpha in Math and Physics Teaching
Qi Lu (St. John’s College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, luq@stjohns.edu)

Maple is a symbolic mathematical software product, which was first developed in 1980 by a Canadian computational group based at University of Waterloo. Years of development has led to the recent Maple 14 version. Wolfram Alpha is a knowledge-based answer engine developed by Wolfram Research, the maker of another powerful mathematical program, and was first released in 2009. Maple is a commercial product that can be purchased at $99 for the basic student version and Wolfram Alpha is a website that can be accessed for free.

In terms of the facility of math computation and graph plotting, both are capable of delivering with satisfactory results. However, Wolfram Alpha allows for minimum customer dictation of how the results should look while Maple provides the maximum flexibility of formatting and scheming.

The platform of Maple is intrinsically document-centered. A document builds along with the mathematical operations; adding furnishing with images and tables can be done conveniently with side and top tool boxes. In this regard, Maple is suitable for building instructional documents and student projects. Advanced model building and simulations are also possible with Maple, but only for those with rich experience and proficient skills.

Wolfram is much like a search engine which doesn’t offer a full breadth of user interactive facilities. But it’s more than a search engine, as it produces computed answers based on data from reliable resources such as encyclopedias, handbooks and peer-reviewed publications. In this regard, Wolfram is an effective research tool that covers a broad range of disciplines concerning quantifiable information such as science, technology, finances, history, etc. It can be introduced to students of various backgrounds as a cross-disciplinary research tool to acquire citable evidences which are not readily available elsewhere.

A comparison between the two math-themed tools allows me to see their strengths and drawbacks. In my future teaching practices both will be adopted in accordance with appropriate class content. In an information explosive society, it’s urgent that students be exposed to powerful tools that help them to obtain and generate information efficiently. To learn more about them, visit maplesoft.com and wolfra-malpha.com.

Disembodied Debating
Stephen Llano (St. John’s College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, llanos@stjohns.edu)

What does it mean to have an argument? This ancient question has been grappled with for thousands of years. Even today, we have no clear understanding of this very human and very messy endeavor. We find ourselves in arguments daily. Like the summer shower, we are inattentive to our potential soaking until we are stunned into awareness by that first clap of thunder - “Are you arguing with me?” Add to this minefield of interpersonal relationships the advent of the internet, Web 2.0, social networking, and other cutting edge computer developments and the complexity becomes exponential. Through my project, I sought an exploration of the use of social internet technologies such as Second Life and Adobe Connect Pro to explore teaching argumentation via debate. Initially, these were very successful experiments, and in the future I hope to continue them, expanding my work to the asynchronous world and disembodied world of the internet to help our students learn how to effectively argue when their interlocutor is not physically present. Since most of our daily communication is becoming less about the phone and more about the phone’s apps, these abilities as a part of formal teaching cannot go overlooked for much longer.
Twitter in Education?
Caroline Fuchs (University Libraries, fuchsc@stjohns.edu)

Twitter, a “real time” microblogging platform, allows users to post and share messages and updates on the internet (or via SMS) in 140 characters, or less.

But seriously, can Twitter be used as an educational tool? How can anyone learn – or teach—using a program that limits each correspondence to only 140 characters? Isn’t the use of Twitter, and text messaging, actually destroying a generation’s writing and communication skills?

Not so! It is because of its seeming simplicity that Twitter has such an enormous potential for application in education. Twitter is free and easy to set up. With just a little training, it can be used effectively in an educational environment. Above all else, the character limit imposed by Twitter forces the user to be clear and concise. If a Tweeter (i.e. “one who uses Twitter”) wants to be heard (and taken seriously), she must make the most of the limited space available. There is no place for excess in the Twittersphere.

So how can Twitter be used in education? Twitter can be used to increase student engagement and participation; to collaborate and network with colleagues, both near and far; to keep up-to-date on breaking news; to stay current on discipline-specific and general higher education trends; to promote awareness of departmental and campus programs and services; to participate in a conference backchannel; and for notifications of new publications – to list just a few of the possibilities. In the classroom – particularly in a non-traditional setting that lacks face-to-face interaction, Twitter allows for immediate response and feedback: conversations and information can be identified and searched through the use of keywords (hashtags). Faculty can pose questions and discussion points. Students can respond publicly to the group, or privately through a direct response. Everyone can join the conversation.

Twitter can be used successfully by educators and by students. All it takes is a dab of imagination, a sprinkle of creativity, and touch of some good old-fashioned know-how. For more on Twitter in education, see http://stjohns.campusguides.com/twitter. Caroline Fuchs: http://twitter.com/cgfuchs

Putting Theory into Practice - A Simulated Approach
Jennifer Chiu (College of Pharmacy and Allied Health Professions, tomj@stjohns.edu)

One of the most challenging tasks in Radiologic Science education involves teaching students how to select the proper exposure factors to produce a high quality diagnostic radiograph. The students are taught the theories and then apply these theories to patients during rotations in hospitals and imaging centers. Currently, the students are unable to practice technique selection prior to exposing patients. Many students feel that the absence of practical application results in their lack of exposure knowledge.

The ability to select proper exposure factors is a main component of clinical competence. This ability is important as it has a direct effect on patient radiation dose and the quality of the diagnostic image. The utilization of incorrect exposure factors can result in misdiagnosis and excessive radiation exposure to the patient.

SimXray is a software program that allows students to visualize the resultant image after the selection of exposure factors. This program allows the student to apply the theories through practice by inputting different factors and visualizing the results of each selection. Guided exercises have been created to facilitate the application of radiation theories and an analysis of the resultant radiographs. Favorable feedback was received during pilot testing. The Radiologic Sciences program will adopt the program and possibly implement it in the Medical Imaging: Principles of Radiation Exposure course.
American Women Writers Wikipedia Project—A Work in Progress

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On January 30, 2011, The New York Times ran an article on Wikipedia. The headline ran: “Define Gender Gap: Look up Wikipedia's Contributor List.” The article reported that despite its more than 3.5 million articles in English and hundreds of thousands of contributors, scarcely 15% of those contributors were women. What Wikipedia’s directors found was that the disparity in the gender of its contributors is resulting in vast disparities in terms of the topics and subjects covered by the encyclopedia. No surprise. For me, this article was confirmation of what I had already experienced as I planned my American Women Writers course for the English Department in the fall of 2010. Searching on Wikipedia for the names of the writers we would be reading in the course, I was shocked to find that writers like Zora Neal Hurston and Harriet Wilson (long credited as the first African American woman novelist in the United States) were merely what Wikipedia calls “stubs” (the start of an article that requires amplification and references). Together in the course, students and I would work to correct this imbalance.

I began with several questions: How many of our students regularly use Wikipedia? How many of our students are told not to Wikipedia? My informal poll in my American Women Writers course suggest the numbers are about the same: close to 100% on both counts. Wikipedia is the fifth most trafficked site on the web and, yet, it is anathema in many college classrooms. What if uncritical consumers of the site became its producers? What if students were asked to share their production of knowledge in the classroom with a larger reading public? How would students feel about their writing? How would they feel about their study and analysis of the literature we were reading? These are some of the questions that motivated my Wikipedia project last semester.

American Women Writers introduces students to many authors they have not encountered before such as Hannah Webster Foster, Fanny Fern, Harriet Wilson, and Rebecca Harding Davis. The course emphasizes reading, discussion, and strategies for deepening our literary analysis; it also guides students in scholarly research methods and requires substantive research and writing. As a fellow in the WAC program last year, I spent a lot of time thinking about student writing and how I could redesign my classes in order to maximize student potential, interest, and investment in their writing. Inspired by Anne Geller’s collaborative presentation on Wikipedia in the Classroom at the WAC International Conference last May 2010, I felt that Wikipedia might be one such avenue for students to see their reading, research, and writing abilities in a new light (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/User:Awadewit/TeachingEssay).

Although my informal poll of students suggested that every one of them had used Wikipedia recently and repeatedly, had anyone ever edited a Wikipedia page? The answer was no; not one of my 30+ students had ever created an article or edited a page on Wikipedia. My goals were to have them engage in discipline specific research and writing that would help develop the Wikipedia web presence of the writers we were studying. I began by guiding students in the search for secondary articles on the authors we were reading and, first individually and then in small groups, students worked to summarize the articles’ main arguments. I omitted one part of the writing practice that is often stressed in literature courses: the original, unique observations about the text at hand; I decided, rather, to defer the cultivation of individual insights for the reflection essay that students would write at the end of the semester in which they analyzed their experiences (see some of the student comments below). Our focus was on the importance of secondary research and the need to understand and accurately summarize and synthesize the critical voices of others. Our goal was to enhance the Wikipedia pages of American Women Writers, especially those writers whose articles lacked sections on criticism and theory, accurate critical resources, and other relevant material. Students first talked through the secondary materials together in groups and then posted their consensus contributions to the article’s “talk page:” the area where potential contributors can discuss edits, information, and other issues about the article. Students were cautious, nervous, and finally even elated at seeing their work move from the talk page to article “publication.”
Students in this course also worked with Wikipedia mentors. Seasoned Wikipedians and those Wikipedians committed to the Wiki Novels Project (a Wikipedia project to enhance coverage of literary works) helped students to clarify their research, to be rigorous in their citations, and to be “bold” in their edits. These online ambassadors gave students motivation, made them aware of what was at stake in their writing, and embraced them as part of a virtual community. As one of the few literature courses to work with the Wikipedia’s mentor program, students were excited about this unique opportunity and ultimately emboldened to take ownership of their writing in a way that I was struggling to see happen in the conventional literary essay.

Not only did the Wikipedia project give students a sense of authority in their writing but it also gave them a healthy dose of skepticism; after all, it may be students like themselves who write and edit the articles they read on Wikipedia. What I was struck by the most, however, was the passion with which students worked on this project. One student wrote that “the several sentences that were published to Wikipedia may have been the sentences that I have spent the most discussion and research on in my life” and “I think I finally grasp just how invaluable sources are.” Another student wrote, “I was pretty surprised with the appearance of my own input on such a public popular site. I even showed my boyfriend when I got back to my dorm after class because I felt a sense of pride and accomplishment about my work.” Students embraced their writing and research with enthusiasm and they successfully shared rigorous scholarship with a wider audience.

Final Exam Week Will Be Making a Comeback!
Beginning with the fall 2011 semester, there will again be a Final Exam Week (Monday, December 12 to Friday, December 17). To accommodate this change, the class meeting times have also been adjusted slightly. And there will be two Common Hours each week, on Monday and Thursday from 1:50 pm to 3:15 pm.

The full 2011-2012 Academic Calendar and the new Class Meeting Schedule (just scroll down past this year’s schedule) are now available so you can plan accordingly for the fall semester.

Process-Oriented Guided-Inquiry Learning Workshop
St. John’s College of Liberal Arts and Sciences is sponsoring a three-day workshop on POGIL which is Process-Oriented Guided-Inquiry Learning. This approach is learner and learning centered. The workshop is being held from May 11 to May 13. Information on the approach and on registration is available here.