CTL December Newsletter

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

Highlights from our December issue include:

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Remember: The best places to look for faculty-related information are the CTL Webpage and the CTL Forum.

Dates to Note!!

Monday, December 19
Creating an ePortfolio
Noon to 1:30 p.m.
Newman Hall 242

Tuesday, December 20
Faculty Writing Retreat
10 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Library Room 150

Wednesday, January 11
Creating an ePortfolio
11:30 to 1 p.m.
Newman Hall 242

Friday, January 13
Faculty Writing Retreat
10 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Library Room 150

Tuesday, January 17
Conversations on Teaching
9 a.m. to 2 p.m.
Bent Hall 277A

Tuesday, January 24
Adjunct Faculty Colloquium
4:30 to 6 p.m.
Bent Hall 277A

To RSVP email us at CTL@stjohns.edu or call ext. 1859
Reacting to the Past Pedagogy as a Tool for Student Engagement
Paula Lazrus (Institute for Core Studies, lazrusp@stjohns.edu)

Although I have written and spoken about the Reacting to the Past (Reacting) pedagogy for CTL and T3 before, I write at this time to discuss how and why this pedagogy addresses many of St. John’s aims as we work to aid our students in mastering important reading, writing, speaking and research skills while striving to guide them in becoming more deliberate thinkers and more empathic individuals in local and global arenas. Our challenges continue as we consider how to evaluate and assess student work including how to apply the aforementioned skills to problem sets beyond the immediate disciplines in which they are acquired. Reacting incorporates in its most fundamental design an integrated approach to teaching and learning that addresses many of the goals just mentioned.

Reacting for those unfamiliar with the pedagogy employs structured simulations focused on pivotal events in world history, utilizing primary texts and role playing as tools to help students become truly active learners. Because Reacting creates opportunities for student leadership and both independent and group work, it allows students to be directly engaged in both the acquisition of new content and in the application of that knowledge to problem solving. In the place of a contemporary case study, students using Reacting will engage in research that is related to critical problems of an historical nature (for example the many faceted needs of Indian citizens emerging from colonial rule in 1945, or the political and scientific challenges surrounding the emergence of Galileo’s research). As the games are focused on events both ancient and contemporary, and with a global reach, they can be utilized by faculty in a very wide range of disciplines.

How can this pedagogy be of use to us here at St. John’s? In our efforts to engage students in the academic enterprise Reacting provides a method by which students acquire new knowledge (through faculty background lectures and their own research, presentations and interactions with their peers all guided by faculty comments, grades, and coaching) as well as new skills. Recently, content and skills have been positioned in the press as opposing methods of teaching and yet here they are seamlessly integrated (Berrett 2011). The melding of ideas and information with the skill sets to decipher, interpret and apply them to unforeseen circumstances is one of the strengths of this pedagogy.

Each Reacting simulation requires students to produce at least two well-researched papers that are the springboards for oral presentations. The presentations provide the impetus for student discussion and debate, all in keeping with the roles they have been assigned. By acting as figures that belong to a particular historical moment, students are freed from their contemporary personas to explore ideas that may be quite different from their own, and to take on challenges that they might otherwise shy away from. This allows them to explore ideas from different times and places in a manner that they might not use otherwise. Because the events that are central to each game are grounded in important primary and textual material, students must learn to read them more analytically or they will find it difficult to then apply the ideas and information to the problems that they will be trying to solve either individually or as a group.

(continued on next page)
If you are interested in learning how to use Reacting to the Past in your classroom, join ICS and the Scientific Inquiry Program for a Reacting to the Past Workshop to be held January 10-11 in the Library, room 110.

For more information contact Paula Lazrus at lazrusp@stjohns.edu.


From The Chronicle of Higher Education Forums
Phyllis Conn (Institute for Core Studies, connp@stjohns.edu)

Preparing for a new semester brings thoughts of course policies and what to add to syllabi. Course policies that worked in previous semesters may have become less effective; new classroom patterns may need to be addressed; new assignments may require new policies. A thread begun in October 2011 on the forums of The Chronicle of Higher Education might be helpful in thinking about ways to tweak course policies for a new semester: Humane Course Policies that Make Life Easier (http://chronicle.com/forums/index.php?topic=82798.0).

The posts on this forum includes issues such as accepting late work, using rubrics for grading and/or feedback, dropping the lowest quiz score, and many other items. I'm planning to try the suggestion about having students help develop a rubric for their research project next semester. What I find especially useful is the discussion about how particular course policies may affect students and faculty. Forum-ites who have tried a policy and found it effective discuss its advantages; those who have tried the same policy and encountered problems discuss the policy's possible side effects. Reading through the comments might spur a new idea or a way to tweak an existing course policy to make it more effective.

Using The New York Times in Your Courses
As you may know, copies of The New York Times are available to students during the week at several locations on our campuses. To help you make use of this resource in your classes, the Times has a website called In College at http://www.nytimesincollege.com/?page=home. Among the links to be found there is one to a Guide to the Front Page, where all of us can learn something about how the news is presented: http://www.nytimesincollege.com/pdf/NYT_Guide%20to%20Page1_2010.pdf.
Faculty News

Dr. Christopher Denny (Theology and Religious Studies, dennyc@stjohns.edu) presented a paper, “Purusha Sukta / Nirvana / Holy Saturday: Alternative Paths to Spiritual Kenosis,” at the annual meeting of the Society for Hindu-Christian Studies in San Francisco (November 2011).

Dr. Maura C. Flannery (Computer Science, Mathematics and Science, flannerm@stjohns.edu) published an article, “Accommodating Microbes,” in The American Biology Teacher (November/December 2011).

Dr. Sandra E. Reznik (Pharmaceutical Sciences, rezniks@stjohns.edu) gave an invited lecture entitled, “Dimethylacetamide Controls Infection-Associated Preterm Birth in a Murine Model: An Accidental Discovery,” at the Winthrop University Research Institute, Mineola, NY (November 2011).

Dr. Richard Stalter (Biological Sciences, stalterr@stjohns.edu) published “Biological Flora of Coastal Dunes and Wetlands: Heterotheca subazillaris (J. de Lamarch) N. Britton & H. Rusby” in the Journal of Coastal Research (November 2011).

Dr. Ann C. Wintergerst (Languages & Literatures, winterga@stjohns.edu) co-presented a talk entitled, “Six Ways to Teach Culture Effectively,” at the 41st Annual New York State Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages’ Conference, Melville Marriott, Melville, NY (October 2011); the J. William Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board, the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the U.S. Department of State, and the Institute of International Education presented her with a Certificate of Appreciation in recognition of her participation on the National Screening Committee for the U.S. Student Fulbright Program (November 2011).

Faculty News:
If you would like to send an entry to “Faculty News,” the deadline for the January issue is January 10. We prefer that you email the information to CTL@stjohns.edu. Please have your entries follow the style presented in “Faculty News.”

Electronic Portfolios
St. John’s University has recently partnered with the company Digication to make electronic portfolios available to all of our students over the next few years. All freshmen, most graduate students, and several other student cohorts have received e-Portfolio accounts, as have all full-time faculty and administrators. You may have already begun to create a portfolio. If not, simply go to http://stjohns.digication.com. Take a few seconds to watch the very short video, then log in as you would to St. John’s Central.

If you would like some guidance in creating a portfolio and engage in a discussion on how they can be used to promote student engagement and assessment, the Provost’s Office and the CTL are offering two sessions led by Derek Owens, Vice Provost, over the Winter break:

Monday, December 19, noon to 1:30 pm in the Provost’s Conference Room (Newman 242)
Wednesday, January 11, 11:30 am-1:00 pm in the Provost’s Conference Room (Newman 242)

Lunch will be served at both events. Please RSVP at ctl@stjohns.edu or call ex. 1859.

Teaching Videos
Academic Earth (http://academicearth.org) is a website that hosts scores of videos of college faculty teaching courses from biology to economics, engineering to theology. You might want to use a segment of one of them in a class or to learn a new subject or to get pointers on how to improve your delivery.
In 2010-2011, St. John’s University participated in the HERI Faculty Survey for the fifth time (previous years: 1998, 2001, 2004 and 2007). The survey has been administered on a triennial basis by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at UCLA since 1969. It is designed to provide colleges and universities with timely information about faculty workload; teaching, research and service practices; job satisfaction; professional activities; and perceptions about the academic environment, institutional priorities and other related areas. Results can be useful in many areas including discussions about pedagogy, and how it relates to students’ experience on campus; providing a faculty perspective on planning and policy analysis; enhancing faculty development programming; improving the student learning experience; and in self-studies for accreditation.

As a participating institution, we received three sets of results from HERI – Institutional Profile, CIRP Constructs, and Themes. Each set includes comprehensive, interesting and fairly self-explanatory data specific to St. John’s plus comparative data for private universities and all 4-year institutions. The Office of Institutional Research will be developing summary reports for St. John’s from the detailed data. These will be shared in future issues of the CTL newsletter and added at the link below. In the interim, we have placed the files on our website for your review and analysis at http://www.stjohns.edu/about/ir/surveys/heri/heri_2010.stj. A brief explanation of each file follows.

The Institutional Profile - Overall Report - provides results on individual survey items for our faculty as well as national normative data. Topics covered include institutional priorities, goals and expectations for students, pedagogical strategies, sources of stress and satisfaction, and demographics. There are separate reports for faculty and administrators.

CIRP Constructs as described by HERI “are designed to capture the experiences and outcomes institutions are often interested in understanding, but that present a measurement challenge because of their complex and multifaceted nature.” HERI uses Item Response Theory (IRT) to combine individual survey items into global measures that capture these areas. Results are shown in both graphical and tabular form. Constructs allow us to determine if the experiences and outcomes for our faculty differ from our comparison groups. An example of a CIRP Construct is: Student-Centered Pedagogy, a measure of the extent to which faculty use student-centered teaching and evaluation methods in course instruction.

Theme Reports combine relevant survey items for easy access. By examining these items together, these “reports illustrate what contributes to specific areas of interest on campus and can be used to facilitate discussion.” The HERI themes include professional practice of teaching, scholarship and service; institutional support and resources; goals for undergraduate education; diversity; satisfaction; institutional priorities; interaction with students; habits of mind; health and wellness; relationship with administration; and underprepared students. Theme reports are generated for full-time undergraduate faculty.

For additional information, questions or comments, please contact Dr. Piyaporn Nawarat, Associate Director of Institutional Assessment, at nawaratp@stjohns.edu or Dr. Yuxiang Liu, Director of Institutional Assessment, in the Office of Institutional Research, at liuy@stjohns.edu.

Faculty Growth Grant Program
The upcoming deadlines to apply for a Faculty Growth Grant are:

February 6, 2012 and April 30, 2012

If you have any questions regarding the application procedures look at our website under Growth Grant Program or email us at CTL@stjohns.edu
Reframing the Question
Justin Krass (Career Counselor, krassj@stjohns.edu)

Upon meeting someone new or just making small talk a common first question is “What do you do?” For most people, their career and/or job makes up a large part of their identity, and this question can serve as a quick introduction without being too personal. At the college level, this question often is phrased in the form of “What is your major?” or “What do you want to major in?” For the student that has already declared and feels confident about his or her major, this question is easy to answer. However for the student who is unsure about what to major in, or has serious doubts and concerns about his or her current major, this question can cause a lot of stress and anxiety. To those students, the question sounds more like “What do you want to do with your life?” This is a question that can be difficult for anyone to answer, let alone a student who is still trying to figure out his or her identity, goals, and personal beliefs. It is hard enough trying to predict two or three years into the future, let alone figure out one’s entire life. With this in mind, one of the best things that someone can do to help a student decide on a major and feel comfortable with that choice is to reframe the question into something more specific and manageable.

A key part of this process is looking at some of the factors that influence decision making and career decision making in general. At the Career Center, we use the acronym “VIPS” to highlight four of the biggest factors involved in this process: Values, Interests, Personality, and Skills. When discussing these factors, we use the following definitions:

**Values:** The standards and beliefs that relate to what is important to someone and guide the choices he or she makes in life. This does not necessarily relate only to morals and what we see as ethically right and wrong, but also to the key things that we believe are important for our lives. For instance, many students in the helping fields place a high value on making a positive contribution to others and/or society. Alternatively, someone who places a high value on having a regularly defined schedule so that they can have an active social life would not want to work in a field like the medical field that has many emergencies.

**Interests:** These are the topics that are able to hold our attention over long periods of time, get us excited when we learn about them, and keep us motivated even after we have spent years learning and applying our knowledge about the field. Our interests often represent the subjects that we are most passionate about learning, like the government and politics major who will debate government policy until 2:00am while watching C-SPAN with their friends.

**Personality:** The preferred way that someone likes to work with others as well as his or her overall behavior, routines, and characteristics. In other words, how we interact with the world in general. For example, if someone really dislikes being in front of a room and is uncomfortable with public speaking, then they would not do well in the field of public relations where they might have to serve as the face of an entire company.

**Skills:** An individual’s strengths and the subject areas where they succeed. Everyone wants to work in a job where he or she is able to handle the daily tasks and responsibilities. For this reason, it is important to pick a major that utilizes your key strengths and abilities. Someone that has a hard time with math would not want to go into the field of accounting.

There are many opportunities for students to evaluate these four factors as a part of their college experience. With the VIPS in mind, the question “What do you want to do with your life?” can be rephrased to help students get an answer:

“What is important to you? How does it relate to your major/career? How can your job help you
achieve it?*—Using these forms of the question can help students address the values portion of the equation. It will get students thinking about their priorities and the different areas that will help them find satisfaction from their job – two keys to a rewarding professional life. This phrasing also brings attention to the fact that there is a strong connection between our professional and personal lives.

What are you passionate about doing? What do you truly enjoy?—These questions relate to interests. The popular saying “If you do what you love you will never work a day in your life” speaks to the importance of this factor when picking a major and career. Chances are good that someone who graduates in today’s economy will work for at least 25 years. If you are going to spend at least 46,785 hours doing something, it is important to make sure that it’s something you enjoy and will hold your interest over that time.

“In what environment/situations are you most comfortable? What environments give you the best opportunity to use your skills?”—No one is able to reach their potential if they are regularly in a situation where they do not feel comfortable. Using these versions of the question will not only motivate students to start thinking about how the workplace environment influences their overall job satisfaction, but will also empower them to choose a workplace setting that fits their personality.

“Which strengths and skills are you comfortable using on a daily basis?”—It goes without saying that we all want to do something that gives us the opportunity to excel. While we often focus on what we cannot do, it is important to draw attention to what we do well and encourage students to focus on areas that will give them opportunities for success. This phrasing will help students stay positive and consider how their skills influence their major and career.

Now that the question is framed in a less intimidating way, what parts of the college experience allow students to explore and address it? First and foremost, classes will help students become more familiar with who they are, what their strengths are, and what they are truly interested in. A liberal arts education ensures that a student is exposed to many different subjects and will help them identify the ones that are the best fit for them. Additionally, class assignments will help students figure out what type of work environment is best for their personality. Do they enjoy group projects or would they rather work independently on a research paper? Assignments that encourage exploration and the development of new skills help students address these questions.

Another key component of college that helps students address these questions is found through on-campus activities, clubs, and programs. College represents a safe place to try and explore new things. Aside from the fact that participating in a student organization looks good on a resume, it can also help someone see whether the values of that field fit with their own values, learn more about a particular field and/or occupation, and discover their personality. There are a number of on-campus programs offered by the different departments and offices. Students should be encouraged to attend these programs to get first-hand information from individuals working in the field so that they can become more confident in their choices.

A third component of a college education that can help students address the question is the opportunity for real-world practical experience. There are numerous programs specifically designed for college students, such as internships, community service, and shadowing, which offer students a safe way to explore and try a new field. Participation in these programs allows a student to actually experience a job to see if the lifestyle fits their values, whether they feel comfortable in that type of workplace, and much more.

Using this framework shifts the focus away from a large, difficult-to-answer question, to more manageable questions that help students identify the connection between their personal and professional lives. It offers the opportunity to help students start developing their career plan and select a major in a positive and safe manner. Once a student picks a major, it’s time to help with the next question – “What steps do I need to take to be successful in my field?”
Online Course Evaluations at St. John’s University – A Step in the Right Direction
Steven W. Glogocheski (Associate Director of Academic Assessment, glogochs@stjohns.edu)

St. John’s switched from paper course evaluations to the online system in the Fall of 2007. Since that time, and in line with national trends, the participation rate has been declining. Over that period we have continued to encourage students to participate in the process, through emails, advertising and more recently, the use of social media. At its meeting of September 12, 2011, the faculty, students and administrative members of the University Senate discussed the declining participation rate at length and recommended that professors be asked to set aside class time during which students can complete the online Class Climate Course Evaluation. The provost communicated this recommendation to deans and faculty and suggested that time be set aside during the first week of the fall course evaluation period – “evaluation week” - for this purpose. We thank the deans for reinforcing this to the faculty, and faculty, we thank you for your efforts in this important endeavor. Although results were not as significant as we anticipated, preliminary analysis has shown a slight improvement in participation rate this fall compared to a year ago. With continued effort, we can have significant improvement going forward.

To make this a reality, we need your continuing support and encouragement to your students to complete the course evaluations. The spring 2012 course evaluations will be administered from April 10th – April 30th. Please consider including these dates on your spring course outline/syllabi and discussing with your students at the beginning of the semester. In continuation of the University Senate’s recommendations, we encourage you to plan to set aside time in class during the first week of this period - to the extent possible – for students to complete the evaluation. We also encourage you to share with your students how you are using their feedback to improve the learning experience.

Deans and department chairs will be receiving the course evaluation results (aggregated by course) for their faculty during the week of December 18th. All faculty members will receive their individual course evaluation results the week of December 25th. Aggregated results by college (separated by undergraduate and graduate responses) can be found online at: http://www.stjohns.edu/about/ir/surveys/sir2

For more information regarding student course evaluations, please contact Steven Glogocheski (glogochs@stjohns.edu)

Blackboard Help for Students
Many faculty teaching online courses are concerned about where to find help for students who are new to this environment. Blackboard has an On Demand Learning Center for Students that is available at http://ondemand.blackboard.com/students.htm. There are a number of videos dealing with such subjects as submitting an assignment, checking grades, and replying to a discussion board thread. On the right-hand side of the page there is also a link to Blackboard Help for Students, with assistance on many common issues students encounter: http://help.blackboard.com/student/index.htm.

Google Scholar Citations
Google Scholar has a new service where anyone can check to see how often one of their publications has been cited. Just enter your name, and a list of publications with citation data comes up. You can then eliminate any articles that aren’t yours from the list, and even make it public if you think it will impress people. This is obviously not a perfect resource, but it’s easy to use and definitely interesting. Information is available at: http://googlescholar.blogspot.com/2011/11/google-scholar-citations-open-to-all.html.
Remember:
The best places to look for faculty-related information are the CTL Webpage and the CTL Teaching and Learning Forum.

www.stjohns.edu/CTL

This newsletter is published monthly during the academic year by the Center for Teaching and Learning.

Managing Editor:
Lisa Getman

Faculty Writing Retreats
Location: Institute for Writing Studies, Library Room 150, Queens Campus
Dates: Tuesday, December 20, 2011 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Friday, January 13, 2012 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.
To Register: Contact the CTL at ctl@stjohns.edu or ext. 1859; participation is limited.

The Faculty Writing Retreats offer you the opportunity to commit to a day of writing surrounded by your colleagues who will have made the same commitment as you. Published research – and our own experience from previous St. John’s Faculty Writing Initiative writing retreats we’ve held – tells us the positive energy of being around faculty peers who are also writing (and struggling to write) helps faculty get substantial work done, even in one day.

As to the schedule for the retreat, you will arrive and begin writing. We are certain there will be much writing advice to be shared during lunch, which will be served at 12:30pm. We hope you will be able to join us. Please remember that participation is limited; please RSVP at ctl@stjohns.edu or ext. 1859. If you have any questions, email Anne Geller (gellera@stjohns.edu) or Maura Flannery (flannerm@stjohns.edu).

If you would like to learn more about writing retreats or you are interested in research about faculty writing productivity, go to the CTL Forum Writing Page at http://stjohns.campusguides.com/aecomment.php?pid=71651&sid=589816.

Conversations on Teaching
Conversations on Teaching is designed to explore some of the basic issues in teaching at the college level: course planning, student engagement, and classroom management. This may be particularly useful for those who have less experience in the classroom—new full-time faculty, new adjuncts, and administrators teaching for the first time. We also feel that even experienced teachers would enjoy and profit from this event. There is always something new to learn about teaching, especially these days with so many exciting new findings about cognition, innovative approaches to teaching, and new uses of technology in the classroom.

Date: Tuesday, January 17
Time: 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.
Location: Bent Hall 277A
To register: Contact the CTL at CTL@stjohns.edu or ext.1859.