Center for Teaching and Learning
Newsletter

CTL November Newsletter

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

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

Faculty News: If you would like to send an entry to “Faculty News,” the deadline for the December issue is November 28. We prefer that you email the information to CTL@stjohns.edu. Please have your entries follow the style presented in “Faculty News.”
Possibilities of a History Degree

Tracey-Anne Cooper (St. John’s College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, coopert@stjohns.edu)

On September 29, 2011 the History Department, St John’s College, in conjunction with Alumni Relations and the Careers Center held a very successful event for undergraduate and graduate students which invited some of our former alums to speak about their careers since graduating with a Bachelor’s Degree in History from our Department.

Ray Pun, Class of 2007, is currently a Research Librarian at the NYPL Stephen A. Schwarzman Building. He received his Masters Degree in Library Science from the City University of New York: Queens College in 2010. He is completing his second Master’s degree in Middle Eastern Studies, and he works in the General Periodicals and Research Divisions where he provides reference and research consultations for students and scholars in the fields of humanities and social sciences. In addition, he offers instructional classes in using the Library’s scholarly databases and electronic resources to the public. He started working at NYPL as a student intern in 2006, while he was still an undergraduate student, and things just took off from there.

Paul Joseph López Oro told the students how he fell in love with the notion that a history degree could develop his understanding of past and present structures of race relations, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, migration, and histories of people of color in the United States and in Latin America. He also emphasized how a history degree critically developed his writing and analytical skills. López went to graduate school at the University of New Mexico receiving a Masters degree in Latin American Studies and Community and Regional Planning. There, he began teaching Spanish to native speakers who wished to improve their writing and speaking capabilities. That experience inspired him to apply for the NYC Department of Education Teach for America program. He taught Spanish and Special Education while completing a second Master’s degree in Education. He is currently working on Ph.D. applications for Fall 2012 admissions into American Studies and/or Africana Studies programs in institutions across the country.

Philip Misevich, Class of 2002, achieved his Bachelor’s degree in History and went on to attain a Ph.D. at Emory University in 2009. He commented, “My degree in history from St. John’s inspired me to raise deep questions about the way the world works, and prepared me to articulate answers to those questions eloquently and thoughtfully. In fact, I loved history so much that I am now teaching it as a faculty member in the history department!” Philip has, indeed, come full circle and has been hired as an Assistant Professor in the History Department as a specialist in Atlantic History; this was a great opportunity for our majors to meet Philip as both a former student and a valuable new member of our team.

All three of our guests stressed the need to work closely with members of the faculty and the help that they had received in finding internships or crafting unique research projects. This was something that Michael Brady from Institutional Advancement and Alumni Relations also emphasized and advised students interested in exploring internship possibilities to make use of alumni contacts. He discussed how his office could help with this. Denise Hopkins from the Career’s Center spoke to the students about the advice and personalized sessions they could offer students as they began to focus on attaining their ca-
reer goals. Kristin Szylvian, who joined the History Department last year as our Public Historian, spoke about the possibilities of a history degree as a foundation for careers in public history that they may not have even considered; for instance, as archivists, in museums and or at public monuments or historic sites. Last year, Elaine Carey and I started using Facebook to post internship, fellowship, and grant possibilities. History Department alums also post information. Moreover, the History Department uses the Facebook site to post forthcoming events, meetings, and happenings in the city.

Finally, as an Assistant Professor in the History Department, I presented a pamphlet I had created for the students which highlighted the marketable skills history students gain in the course of attaining their degree and how to talk to potential employers about their abilities. These include:

- Effective written and oral communication skills
- Critical analysis skills
- Research skills
- Interdisciplinary thinking and training
- Curiosity and inquisitiveness

Plus many more skills employers are actively seeking, including the ability to:

- Connect choice and actions to ethical decisions
- Work in teams and collaborate
- Be innovative and creative
- Locate, organize and evaluate information
- Understand global issues and the global context of situations
- Understand the role of the US in the world
- Appreciate cultural diversity in the US and the world
- Understand and work with numbers and statistics, apply civic knowledge and participate in community engagement

The event was very well attended and generated a lively question and answer session, as well as one to one conversation with our guests. The overall message of the event was to help students to think about their undergraduate experience as more than just obtaining credits and grades; but, rather, as an opportunity to collaborate with faculty, alumni, and the Career’s Center in building a firm foundation for their future careers and to think expansively about the skills they are acquiring and where they may take them.

Sources: Dr. Debra Humphreys, “Liberal Education and the Liberal Arts: Outcomes that Matter in Today’s Global Economy,” presentation, St. John’s University, September 22, 2011.

“Raising the Bar: Employers’ Views on College Learning in the Wake of the Economic Downturn” (AAC&U and Hart Research Assoc. 2010)

Faculty News

Dr. Dolores Augustine (History, augustid@stjohns.edu) presented a paper entitled, “Fighting Hard for Peace, and Other Paradoxes in East German Press Coverage of Western Peace Protests, 1949-68,” at the annual German Studies Association conference in Atlanta, GA (September 2011).

Dr. Elaine Carey (History, careye@stjohns.edu) co-edited Smugglers, Brothels, and Twine: Historical Perspectives on Contraband and Vice in North America’s Borderlands (Tucson: University of Arizona Press: 2011); was named to the editorial board of Criminal Justice and Law Enforcement: Global Perspectives.

Dr. José G. Centeno (Communication Sciences and Disorders, centenoj@stjohns.edu) presented a paper titled, “Agrammatism in Spanish-English Speakers,” at the Academy of Aphasia in Montreal, Quebec, Canada (October 2011).

Dr. Guofang Chen (Chemistry, cheng@stjohns.edu) published an article, “Synthesis of Polymer Nanograss and Nanotubes by Surface-initiated Photopolymerization in Cylindrical Alumina Nanopores,” in the Journal of Materials Chemistry.

Dr. Zhe-Sheng Chen (Pharmaceutical Sciences, chenz@stjohns.edu) invited a visiting scholar, Dr. Danwen Yang from Central South University, to study at his lab (September 2011); was selected as an Editorial Advisory Board Member by the Journal of Pharmacy and Nutrition Sciences; published a book chapter entitled, “Molecular Mechanisms of Methotrexate Resistance,” in Nova Science (2011); presented the abstracts: “B2B1, One of the 23-hydroxybetulinic Acid Analogues, Can Modulate ABC Transporters Mediated MDR,” “XR9576 (Tariquidar) is a Potent Reversal Agent for MRP7-mediated Multidrug Resistance,” “Tandutinib Targeted to Stem-like Cells by Inhibiting the Function of ATP-binding Cassette Subfamily G Member 2,” and with Dr. Ralph Stephani (Pharmaceutical Sciences, stephanr@stjohns.edu) “PD173074, a Selective FGFR1 and FGFR3 Inhibitor, Reverses ABCB1-mediated MDR” at the 8th North American ABC workshop, NCI-Frederick, MD. (September 2011).

Dr. Tracey-Anne Cooper (History, coopert@stjohns.edu) published the chapter, “The Shedding of Tears in Late Anglo-Saxon England,” in the book Crying in the Middle Ages: Tears of History edited by Elina Gertsman as part of the Routledge Studies in Medieval Religion and Culture series (October 2011).

Dr. Maura C. Flannery (Computer Science, Mathematics and Science, flannerm@stjohns.edu) presented a poster on “Custer and the Herbarium” at the annual meeting of the History of Science Society in Cleveland, OH (November 2011).

Dr. Anna D. Martin (Economics and Finance, martin@stjohns.edu) and Dr. Rong Qi (Economics and Finance, qir@stjohns.edu) presented their co-authored paper, "Information Content of Reiterating Events," at the Financial Management Association annual conference held in Denver.

Dr. Judith A. Ryder (Sociology & Anthropology, ryderj@stjohns.edu) coauthored and presented “Dynamics of Teen Relational Violence and the Social Policy Sphere,” at the Working Within the Forensic Paradigm: Developing Effective Responses Across Health, Helping and Legal Professions Conference at Monash University Centre for Forensic Behavioural Science, Prato, Italy. (September 2011).

Dr. Richard Stalter (Biological Sciences, stalter@stjohns.edu) presented “The Oaks at Bostwick Forest, Gardiners Island, New York” at the annual Metropolitan Association of College and University Biologists meeting; and published the article, “What Happened to the Atlantic White Cedar Swamp on Plum Island, New York?,” in the Long Island Botanical Society.
Vincentian Mission: Opportunity and Responsibility- No. XXXV
Integrating Mission-Based Learning and Service into Academics at TCB: The Case of GLOBE

Linda Sama (The Peter J. Tobin College of Business, samal@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 Linda Sama describes GLOBE (Global Loan Opportunities for Budding Entrepreneurs), a course in which students not only gain knowledge of entrepreneurship but they use their knowledge of microlending to change lives for their brothers and sisters in developing countries. The experience has proven to be mutually transformative.

Some find it oxymoronic to speak of business and social justice or social responsibility in the same breath. But the reality of economic activity is a moral reality that tests our commitment to the principles of social justice at every juncture, and in every transaction. Do we fall to temptation that feeds our greed and egos, or do we strive to consider the ethical consequences of our decisions for the larger society? Do we operate business in a manner that is antithetical to the very values that have founded our personal lives and religious education – do we, in fact, abandon those values at the doors of our offices - or do we invite them in to inform our decisions and our interactions with various stakeholders? Do we reserve participation in significant economic activity for those who have ample resources to pay for the privilege to play, and the power to make the rules of the game, or do we encourage and facilitate the participation of all—including those traditionally left behind or operating on the margins—in the dream of prosperity, the fulfillment of hard work, and the rewards that come with the successful attainment of one’s goals? Do we treat the natural environment with neglect and abuse it with abandon, or do we respect the earth that provides so many of the rich resources to fuel the corporate engine? To these ethical dilemmas, we come as teachers, armed with the tools to not only educate students and perform research on the fundamentals of business, but also armed with the tools necessary to imbue those teachings and research with a concern for justice and an acknowledgment of the rights of man.

Coming to St. John’s some five years ago with an established research agenda in the field of business ethics and corporate social responsibility, I found myself in a strange new world. This place, I thought, has a mission and tradition that so perfectly align with the nature of inquiry that has captivated me for so many years – inquiry around creating a more level playing field for economic activity; inquiry about doing well and doing good and the tension that surrounds the pursuit of both; and inquiry addressing the fundamental concerns of a modern society that enjoys some of the greatest prosperity in human history while evidencing some of the greatest injustices ever propagated on those whom progress leaves behind.

While I admit to feeling a bit at sea on arriving to my new surroundings and somewhat unprepared to engage in student learning activities that could be categorized as espousing the tenets of the Vincentian Mission, which I knew so little about early on, I soon came to realize that the natural inclinations of my value set rested squarely with the aims of St. Vincent de Paul’s teachings. It is with my greater immersion in this tradition that is Vincentian, that is Catholic, that is Metropolitan, and that is executed in a way that is comfortable for my individual spirit and foundational values, that I have been able to more consciously enhance my efforts to bring key elements of the University’s mission alive in the classroom and in my scholarly endeavors. As stated in a Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy at a meeting of the U.S. Catholic Bishops in 1986: “Every perspective on economic life that is human, moral, and Christian must be shaped by three questions: What does the economy do for people? What does it do to people? And how do people participate in it?” I strive to keep these questions in mind as I shape my course objectives and my research agenda.
An example of how these values come to life in the classroom is the program called GLOBE. At TCB – GLOBE stands for “Global Loan Opportunities for Budding Entrepreneurs,” and this is how it looks: Imagine, if you will, a classroom of some 20 students in a business school, huddled in teams, the words “poverty,” “charity,” “social justice,” “the plight of women,” and “triple bottom line” floating up to your ears as they develop lending strategies for the poorest of the poor in developing countries. Their excitement, palpable to you, mounts as the class period progresses. The nearly 3-hour class is officially over, but not one student makes a move to leave the room. They speak with pride of the difference they are making in the world; they refer with apparent expertise to the tenets of microlending that they have gleaned from readings, lectures and guest speakers; they quote Muhammad Yunus liberally and with an almost reverent tone; and they lament that they have only one semester to do the work that they think of as their own, to help lift entire families out of poverty around the world.

The mission of GLOBE—a student-managed, academic microlending program—is to “… build a global community (starting here at St. John’s) that is going to contribute to the goal of eradicating poverty within our lifetime.” This is the Vincentian social mission at work in, of all unlikely places, a course on entrepreneurship. With the assistance of a large network of Daughters of Charity as field agents, student GLOBE managers act as social entrepreneurs, vetting loan applications from budding entrepreneurs – virtual strangers to them – in 3 countries in Africa, and eventually in other countries in SE Asia and Latin America. Empowered to supervise all aspects of the program, they seek to raise awareness around issues of poverty and social injustice, and offer feasible solutions. Students devise the technological and financial means to sustain GLOBE, making small loans that have large consequences, not only for the people they are helping as far away as Nigeria and Kenya, but also for the learning that goes on right here in Jamaica, Queens. Their GLOBE tagline is: Students Changing the World One Loan at a Time. These future leaders are learning to embrace a concept of themselves that extends beyond the self and a concept of a business model that accommodates social aims as well as profit goals. Armed with the GLOBE experience, many of these students will enter their chosen professions as advocates for the ideals that have inspired them to go beyond what is required in order to create transformative, systemic change. This program is an academic experience that beautifully weaves together Catholic social values into a tapestry of an improved society, improved through education, at the hands of students, and with the guidance of those steeped in the tenets of Catholic social thought.

While my business ethics research has inspired my work with and in developing GLOBE, so has GLOBE inspired my ongoing research, and I have been able to take these experiences to the Academy in papers and presentations around topics such as the ethics of microfinance, the relationship between the goals of microfinance and those of sustainability, empirical studies of the impact of microfinance on the empowerment of women in rural communities, and the development of assessment tools for evaluating the effects that microfinance has on the lives of those it is destined to help.

To conclude, let me quote from a translation of Pope John Paul II's pastoral letter from 1991 that speaks directly to the concept of and motivation for GLOBE that so resonates with my students: “Every individual has a natural right to procure what is required to live. And the poor can procure that in no other way than by what they earn” and further “It will be necessary above all to abandon a mentality in which the poor - as individuals and as peoples - are considered a burden, as irksome intruders trying to consume what others have produced... The advancement of the poor constitutes a great opportunity for the moral, cultural and even economic growth of all humanity.” Indeed, as GLOBE graduates will attest, our efforts to help those in poverty help themselves has enhanced our lives and broadened our thinking. We are grateful for the lessons GLOBE teaches us, and for the unique occasion we have to extend our hands and touch the hope of those whose lives, however distant from ours geographically, resonate with our hearts and minds.
Making the Grade: Recruiters’ Assessment on STJ Students
Lydia Horemis (Employment Specialist, Career Center, horemisl@stjohns.edu)

It is hard to believe that midterms are over and we have already had our first snow storm of the season. As students are beginning to write their end of term papers, and prepare for their exams, the Career Center is still busy with our fall recruitment season. So far this semester we have hosted over 180 companies and organizations through our various recruiting events, fairs, information sessions, and on campus interviews, and we still have several events planned to connect students with alumni and employer partners.

Our largest event for the semester was the Fall Career Fair on October 4th, which featured 107 employers and over 1,100 student participants. This event, which came at the end of our largest Career Week in history, featured a diverse selection of employers including retail establishments, banks, hospitals, government agencies, and non-profit organizations. Also, if you have stopped by the Career Center recently, you may have seen juniors and seniors dressed in suits as they prepare for interviews through our signature On Campus Recruiting program. Since September, 27 companies have conducted 458 interviews with our students on both the Queens and Staten Island campuses for both internship and full-time positions. Traditionally, this type of program features primarily public accounting firms, however, we’re happy to report that this year we have also offered students the opportunity to interview with other diverse organizations including the Comptroller of the Currency, Target, Macy’s and Con Edison.

As we continue to connect students with company representatives for networking, internships, and employment opportunities, we strive to assure that we are helping our employer partners find qualified candidates to fill their vacancies. We also continuously work with the employers to assess the areas in which our students need to improve so that we can adapt our educational programming to meet the needs of our students as they prepare to enter the workforce.

Through our conversations with our employer partners, we have found that they have chosen to recruit at St. John’s for a variety of reasons. Employers regularly cite the reputation for our academic programs as a primary reason for their choosing St. John’s students. They also note that our students are well-rounded and diligent, while also reflecting the diversity that is central to so many of their recruitment strategies. Other company representatives tell us that their long-standing relationship with St. John’s results from the many alumni that already work for their firm – and the high level of achievement they have witnessed from the candidates that they have hired in the past.

Our current students continue to impress employers during their interviews in a variety of ways. Many employers have indicated that students seem well prepared for their interviews and that they felt the students were very smart, well spoken, high quality candidates. Many recruiters seem quite impressed with the fact that our students balance demanding schedules that include working many hours and activities on campus, while still maintaining high GPAs.

For instance, one corporate representative reported that STJ students’ work ethic is demonstrated by their “ability to take on multiple responsibilities, i.e. school, work, internships.” Positive feedback has also been provided on the students’ preparation for their interviews, with another recruiter stating, “All interviewees came prepared with questions and having done basic research on the company.” When we tell the employer representatives that we require the students to attend a workshop on interview skills, they indicate that it is largely reflected in the students’ preparation and performance on their interviews.

Although we appreciate this feedback, we do also seek constructive criticism that we can share with our students to help them improve. One recruiter noted that “Some [students] were very nervous,” and suggested more students participate in mock interviews through the Career Center to gain experience and increase their comfort level with the process. Additionally, some recruiters felt that students seemed too
rehearsed with their answers, not focused enough with career aspirations or unable to articulate their specific career goals within a given industry. One employer indicated that several students he had met with were not verbal enough and could not articulate answers effectively. Others suggested that some students need to conduct more research on the firm, and go beyond the basic information found on the company’s web site.

The Career Center offers classroom presentations, one-on-one advisement, and video-taped mock interview sessions to help students prepare for their interactions with employers. If you are interested in learning more about these programs, or about how we can work together to help our students make the best impression possible, please contact Dr. Michelle Kyriakides at kyriakim@stjohns.edu.

How to Read a Student Evaluation
Since we are now in the midst of the student evaluation season, this is a perfect time to take a look at “How to Read a Student Evaluation,” an article by David Perlmutter that appeared in the October 30, 2011 issue of The Chronicle of Higher Education (http://chronicle.com/article/How-to-Read-a-Student/129553). Perlmutter gives several pieces of advice for how to approach the results faculty receive from these evaluations. He begins with a very simple suggestion: read them. Now, I don’t know about you, but I always open the file with the results of the semester’s evaluations with some trepidation. No matter how many years I teach, I still find student comments unsettling. Perhaps this is because sometimes they are right on the mark. During a semester I may be unhappy about the way some particular part of the course is going, and sure enough, at least one student mentions that very thing. I may not feel good about this, but it does get me to make changes the next time.

Perlmutter himself alludes to such situations in suggesting “scan for red flags” and “evaluate yourself first.” He also warns not to take comments personally, and not to read too much into them. One lousy comment really doesn’t mean much in the grand scheme of things. In other words, use student evaluations for the guidance they can give you for improving your teaching, but don’t get too upset about them.

Reacting to the Past
The Institute for Core Studies at St. John’s University and the Scientific Inquiry Program invite you to a Reacting to the Past Workshop on January 10-11, 2012.

“Reacting to the Past” is a form of active and highly engaged teaching/learning in an interdisciplinary fashion. The process involves role playing simulations informed by critical texts in complex contexts. Students drive discussions, present oral arguments, and write papers, coached and advised by professors. Along the way they hone their critical thinking and research skills, are challenged in their writing and oral presentation abilities, work in groups, and gain an appreciation for the contingency of many important events and ideas.

Join us on January 10 and 11 to learn how to teach with this method by playing a compact version of the game Charles Darwin, the Copley Medal and the Rise of Naturalism, 1861-64, designed and written by Marsh Driscoll, Elizabeth Dunn, Dan Siems, Kamram Swanson. You need not teach any subject related to this game to join us; there are many games covering a wide range of topics. Because it can be very difficult to teach “Reacting” without experiencing the dynamics of a game, we hope this workshop will give participants a sense of the problems and possibilities related to this innovative teaching method.

Space is limited and all participants will be actively involved in the simulation. Please register by emailing Paula Lazrus lazrusp@stjohns.edu, no later than Nov 30, 2011 as we need to send you materials via inter-office mail before school ends. Additional information about the “Reacting to the Past” project can also be found online at http://www.barnard.edu/reacting.
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/econtent.php?pid=71651&sid=589816.

A Serious Look at Graphic Novels and Comics

A few weeks ago, Caroline Fuchs of the University Libraries gave a workshop on using graphic novels in teaching. Presenting along with her were Sophie Bell and David Farley of the First Year Writing Program. Among the resources that were discussed was a website called comicsclassroom. While that might not seem like a serious source of information, it is, with links to all kinds of other great sites. Why not visit it and find out for yourself: http://comicsclassroom.wikispaces.com/links.

Faculty Growth Grant Program

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

February 6, 2012
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.