CTL November Newsletter

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

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Faculty News: If you would like to send an entry to “Faculty News,” the deadline for the December issue is November 29. We prefer that you email the information to CTL@stjohns.edu. Please have your entries follow the style presented in “Faculty News.”

Remember: The best places to look for faculty-related information are the CTL Webpage and the CTL Teaching and Learning Forum.
Using the Web to Engage Students Part II: Using the Web’s Rich Visual Resources

Maura C. Flannery (College of Professional Studies, flannerm@stjohns.edu)

Last month, I discussed a number of web resources you might be able to use in your classes; many of them, such as Archive.org and TED Talks, are visually rich. In fact, most websites are visually interesting and complex. However, what I am going to focus on this month are sites that provide visual archives as well as information on how to improve our visual literacy.

Image Archives

There are many archives of images, often with a particular focus, such as photography or historical illustrations. I’ll just mention a few; these are resources where many of the images are available to educators for free. However, please check each site for their individual requirements, which usually involve citing the image source. I happen to like Wellcome Images because it is sponsored by a medical foundation so there are a lot of biological images and there is a heavy emphasis on the historical. But the site is billed as providing images of “2000 years of culture” and it does, so you are likely to find something that will intrigue you. Also, the images come with the Wellcome Images tag on the bottom of the image so you don’t have to worry about attribution.

The Victoria and Albert Museum has a wonderful website with a huge number of images. They used to charge for images, but found it became too difficult to manage, so their solution was to open their image bank to those who are using it for education purposes. In this country, Smithsonian Images has a similar policy and great images, not just for historians, but for almost any discipline. Ditto for Library of Congress Images and the New York Public Library. If you are interested in animals, then ARKive is for you and PLANTS database from the US Department of Agriculture is great for flower images.

If I haven’t provided you with any sources that whet your appetite, then just type in the name of an image you would like to see and search in Google images. It is very unlikely that you’ll be disappointed, but very likely that you will be overwhelmed with choices.

As for moving images, YouTube has become almost too obvious a resource to mention, but it is still full of surprises. I’ve become interested in herbaria, collections of dried plant specimens, and searched for YouTube videos on a whim, thinking that I wouldn’t find much, if anything. As usual, I was wrong. There are great items (at least from my perspective) with tours of herbaria, directions on creating herbarium specimens, and even a slide show on the weeds of New Zealand. So type in one of your favorite topics and see what you get. And remember, there are other video archives besides YouTube, such as Vimeo, and sites that specialize in particular subject areas such as ScienceHack.

There are also wonderful websites that delve into what visual literacy means and how it can be honed. I particularly like Information Aesthetics and Information Is Beautiful. Click on either of these, and you will be brought into a world of information-rich images. For practical advice on devel-
oping students’ visual literacy, there is What Makes an Effective Visualization and Visual Literacy in Higher Education. These last two sites help you to see beyond just beautiful images to seeing images as an important part of learning.

**Exam Week Mystery**

Is the disappearance of exam week an unsolved mystery for you? What will you do now that the last week of the semester is a regular class week, and there are no longer two-hours blocks of time for finals?

There are several ways to solve this mystery. The most obvious is to just give an exam on the last day of class. The only problem with this solution is that if everyone chooses it, then students could end up with all their exams on Thursday and Friday. So consider giving your final earlier, and using the last class for presentations or a case study or a discussion of the semester—with mandatory attendance, of course. Now might be the time to ponder the radical question of whether or not you even want to give a final exam. Maybe some other form of assessment might be more appropriate in your course.

**Reminder**: Grades are due 72 business hours after the last class.

**Distance Learning Faculty Forum Invitation**

The Fall 2010 Distance Learning Faculty Forum will be held on Monday, December 13th. We invite you to join us for this lunch-time meeting, from noon to 1 p.m., to be held in Bent Hall Room 277A.

The format for this session will be an open forum to discuss distance learning at St. John’s University, followed by a brief update, however if there are other items of particular value you would like to see on a formal agenda, email your suggestions to Elizabeth Alexander at alexande@stjohns.edu. Lunch is included so please RSVP to Elizabeth (alexande@stjohns.edu or ext. 2353) if you plan to attend.

**Publish and Flourish**

This workshop is designed for junior faculty who would like to become more familiar with the ins and outs of publishing, but all faculty are welcome. We will discuss manuscript preparation for both articles and books, as well as strategies that could increase chances of successful publication.

**Date**: Tuesday, November 30  
**Time**: 1:30 to 2:50 p.m.  
**Location**: Library room 110 in the back of the University Learning Commons, Queens Campus  
**To register**: Contact the CTL at CTL@stjohns.edu or ext. 1859.
Faculty News

Dr. Zhe-Sheng Chen (Pharmaceutical Sciences, chenz@stjohns.edu) published an article, “Marine Sponge-derived Sipholane Triterpenoids Reverse P-glycoprotein (ABCB1)-mediated Multidrug Resistance in Cancer Cells,” in Biochemical Pharmacology (October 2010); invited Dr. Sidong Chen (Vice President of Guangdong Pharmaceutical University, Guangdong China) to visit his laboratory (October 2010); and was selected as an Editorial Advisory Board Member by Bioinoeganic Chemistry and Applications.

Dr. Michael Dempsey (Humanities, dempseym@stjohns.edu) published a chapter, “Divine Action and Biblical Interpretation: How the Ordinary Words of Men and Women Become the Living Word of God in Scripture,” in The Bible as a Human Witness to Divine Revelation: Hearing the Word of God through Historically Dissimilar Traditions (T & T Clark, 2010).

Dr. Maura C. Flannery (Computer Science, Mathematics and Science, flannerm@stjohns.edu) was invited to present on “What Henslow Taught Darwin” at a symposium on the history of biology and also presented a paper, “Mapping Biology,” both at the annual meeting of the National Association of Biology Teachers in Minneapolis, MN (November 2010).


Dr. Shamima Khan (Pharmacy Administration and Allied Health Sciences, khans2@stjohns.edu) co-published “The Effect of the Vermont Diabetes Information System on Inpatient and Emergency Room Use: Results from a Randomized Trial” in Health Outcomes Research in Medicine (2010); and co-presented “The Continued Impact and Issues of Medicare Part D in Community Pharmacy” at the American College of Clinical Pharmacy annual meeting (October 2010).

Rev. Robert Lauder (Philosophy, lauderr@stjohns.edu) was inducted into Xavier High School’s Hall of Fame (November 2010).

Dr. Susan Schmidt-Horning (History, schmidts@stjohns.edu) was a guest speaker on the panel, “Who was Bill Savory?” at the National Jazz Museum in Harlem (September 2010) and was an invited speaker in the lecture series, “Sonic Impressions,” at Green College, University of British Columbia (October 2010).

Professor Michael Perino (School of Law, perinom@stjohns.edu) published the book, The Hellhound of Wall Street: How Ferdinand Pecora’s Investigation of the Great Crash Forever Changed American Finance (Penguin Group, 2010).

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Vincentian Mission: Opportunity and Responsibility-No.XXX in the Series: The Vincentian Mission as Seen Through the Visual Arts

Joseph Adolphe (St. Johns College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, adolphej@sjtohns.edu)

In this series, Vincentian Research Fellows from across the University share their experience in actualizing the Mission through their research, teaching and service. Below Joseph Adolphe, presents artistic talent as a language and describes its unique, individual expression as a vehicle of prayer and personal development.

To me, the Vincent Mission as seen through the lens of the visual arts is encapsulated within the understanding of the purpose of a talent.

Wrapped up in one’s talent is everything the person is, everything the person is not and everything the person hopes to become. It is through the use of one’s talents that one conveys to God in a very unique, sublime and personal way one’s anxieties, joys, hopes and dreams. Talent is a language that allows one to communicate in a specific way with God, the primary creator and artist. In short, the use of one’s talent is a profound form of prayer. This I suppose is another reason why a talent is also known as a gift, not an entitlement.

It is important here to consider that if the above is true then some obvious things must naturally follow, one of which has to do with the content in art. My sister who has been a great source of encouragement for me throughout my career has always maintained (very subtly) that artwork that is more literally in the service of the apostolic mission of the church is of greater importance than artwork that is not. In other words, to her my paintings of a saint are of greater value than paintings that I have done of less obvious spiritually-based subjects. That view presents a problem and is the wrong approach.

The modern artist does not, nor should not, try to capture the great religious themes in the same way the ancients have done. The simple reason for this is that when the modern artists cause the process of making pictures to be subservient to the content, they run the risk of muffling that unique expression of prayer. It is unique because it is particular to the individual artist’s process. In other words, trying to paint like the masters (if this can be done at all given the limitations of the formal education of contemporary artists) simply attempts to retell the same story in the same manner. The goal is to plunge deeper into the story, rendering from it a greater relevance for the person living in the present, struggling in the present and trying to make sense of the present. And in any case it is an uphill battle trying to paint like someone else. As Lucien Freud once remarked, “you can’t paint the way you want to,
only the way you do."

However, the artists of today, myself included, may try to communicate the same things as the artists of the past. But rather than using the subject matter to tell the story, I may use the formal constructs of a picture to tell the story. In other words, instead of using two human figures and a dove to describe the Trinity, I may use a composition that is based on the number three instead—*for example in a painting of a building all by itself, there may be three windows.*

It is important to understand that the entire history of the human person and his/her relationship with God is a very simple story. *Alexander Dumas had said that there are only 5 or 6 different stories that make up the entire deposit of the human experience.* In any case the history of painting, and of art in general, is repeating a story in a constantly new and refreshing way. This story can be told not just in terms of pictures but within the idiom of every field of human endeavor. Can these stories be told through the actions of athletes and scientists, construction workers and doctors? Of course!

Let me consider now how this approach to understanding talent as a gift impacts young artists and the students in our classes. With the notion that one can create solid, spiritually rich works without competing with the giants of the past, our students can with confidence find their own way. They will find contentment in the knowledge that even though they may not join the pantheon of famous and renowned artists, they may find within their daily toil a satisfaction that comes from honest hard work, which has a real living and regenerative power, not unlike that of prayer. This is at the heart of my understanding of the Vincentian mission when applied to the arts. When students comprehend the true value of their endeavors and the exercise of their talents, it is my hope that this knowledge impacts every aspect of their lives. It is a hard fight to maintain these ideals but in the end the process becomes an effort to sanctify the daily toil of the artist. Every struggle, every picture becomes an opportunity for an encounter with God. And these opportunities are not necessarily dependent on the subject matter of a picture, no matter how lofty the content.

**International Education Week**

International Education Week (November 15th – November 19th) was a nationwide effort intended to celebrate the benefits of international education and exchange throughout the world. The U.S. Departments of State and Education ask institutions across the country to host programs that “prepare students for a global environment” and lead to collaborations that “attract future leaders from abroad” to study and learn in the United States.

With activities sponsored by the Offices of Global Studies, the Office of Student Life, and the Center for Teaching and Learning, St. John’s International Education Week sought to give the university community opportunities to reflect on the central role of internationalization in our academic conversations. Included were presentations by Chris Bazinet on his Biology course on the Galapagos Island, and Wafa Daoud on her strategies for her Language and Literature course in Egypt.

Here is a complete schedule of this year’s International Education Week activities. Please feel free to contact the Office of Global Studies (ext. 6105, globalstudies@stjohns.edu) with any questions or ideas.
Faculty Growth Grant Program

The upcoming deadlines to apply for a Faculty Growth Grant are:
- January 24, 2011
- April 11, 2011

If you have any questions regarding the application procedures look at our website under Growth Grant Program or email us at CTL@stjohns.edu.

Oral History

Mauricio Borrero (St. John's College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, borromeo@stjohns.edu)

I received a Faculty Growth Grant to support professional development in the area of oral history. Funds from the grant allowed me to participate in the two-week Columbia University Oral History Summer Institute, and I was also able to attend that year's national conference of the Oral History Association (OHA), held in Oakland. The Oral History Summer Institute was built around the theme of human rights. Under the guidance of several leading oral historians in the U.S. and abroad, the institute brought together about twenty participants, mostly Americans, but also some from as far away as Russia and Cambodia. We were introduced to basic texts in oral history, interviewing techniques, and issues in video and sound recording and project design. The OHA conference was a traditional conference with a wide range of panels on research and pedagogy, but smaller and more informal than others, reflective of the tight-knit community that oral historians have developed.

I have used the methodologies of oral history several times in the sections of Emergence of Global Society (HIS 1000C) that I have taught. In this broad survey of modern world history I have asked my students to write an oral history based on interviews with relatives or acquaintances who immigrated to the United States in their lifetimes. Oral history prefers that interviews follow an open-ended, free-flowing format rather than a set questionnaire, but I do require students at least find out why their subjects immigrated to the United States and what was the socio-political environment in their country of origin when they left. The assignment then calls on students to work as historians by providing the interpretive framework that places their interviews in the context of the world historical themes and patterns they are studying. I used to schedule this assignment towards the end of the semester when we were covering twentieth-century events, but have begun to wonder whether it is better to schedule it earlier to help students develop a greater “emotional investment” in the course material, as it helps them understand the lives of the individuals they have interviewed.

I benefited from the grant in another important way. By getting a first-hand look at the world of oral history, I had a better vision of how oral history can serve as the glue for several interdisciplinary possibilities at St. John's. A more immediate example is our new M.A. program in Public History, recently approved by New York State. This new program in turn is part of a new interdisciplinary alliance that brings together the Division of Library and Information Science and the departments of History and Fine Arts. To lead the new program we were able to recruit one of the nation’s leading public historians, who will have a joint appointment in History and LIS. One of the first courses she will be offering when she arrives in the spring is a graduate course in Oral History. An undergraduate oral history course is in the works.

But the pedagogical possibilities that oral history provides for us at St. John's can be even broader. With its emphasis on individual interviews and self-narratives, oral history can provide fertile ground where traditional departments (such as History, English, Fine Arts, Sociology and Anthropology, and Psychology) and our own distinctive units (Institute for Core Studies, Discover New York, and the Institute for Writing Studies) can meet and engage students in research and writing. Our borough of Queens and our own diverse student body hold incredibly rich histories—local and yet very global—that are waiting to be told.