CTL October Newsletter

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

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At the end of each academic semester, our students are asked to complete a student evaluation questionnaire for each of their classes, rating how well the course and professor met the student’s expectations. The imperfect electronic evaluation process leaves many faculty feeling uncomfortable, due to low student response rates, worries that only students with negative opinions will take the time to respond, and concern about the wording of some of the questions. Still, the survey process gives the students a voice and allows academic administrators to gauge overall student satisfaction with a course and its professor. It has value as one component of our assessment of academic programs, if both professors and administrators follow up on the information that the survey provides.

To address the issue of low student response rates, the Provost’s office has asked faculty to have students bring their computers to class, and to set aside a block of class time when the questionnaire can be completed. I did this in my Fall 2011 classes and had response rates in the high 80 to low 90 percentages. I chose a day when the students would need their laptops for an exercise we would be doing in class, so that they would have two reasons to remember to bring their computers that day. I announced in the previous class that students should bring their laptops, posted a message on the NEWS section of the St. John’s Central course page, and sent an email reminder the night before. I also let the students know that I welcome their insight into the strengths and weaknesses of my teaching, and would use their comments in my preparation for the next offering of the course. Nearly all students remembered to bring their computers to class that day. By getting high response rates, the issue of only students with negative opinions responding is eliminated. The technique of having students complete the evaluation in class obviously does not apply to Distance Learning courses, and low response rates continue to be an issue for online classes.

I have concerns about the wording of some of the survey questions, particularly in the section on Course Difficulty, Workload, and Pace. I have found that students who give high grades for course outcomes, sometimes give lower scores in the challenge and pace section of the evaluation. This appears to be a contradiction; if the course was successful in its student outcomes, then the pace of the course must have been sufficiently challenging to fully cover all syllabus objectives. I believe that students who have a positive view of the course will choose the evaluation option that sounds most positive to them. For the pace and challenge questions, the wording that sounds most positive is “about right.” Unfortunately, the answers that have the highest numeric scores are those that say the pace was “very fast,” and the challenge was “very difficult,” both of which have a negative connotation. The questionnaire was developed by a faculty committee several years ago, and will be revisited in the near future. I believe the wording of the questions and answer choices in this section of the evaluation should be revised.

At the end of each semester, the evaluation results are emailed to each professor; the hope, of course, is that the professor will thoughtfully consider the feedback provided by the students, reflecting on how the evaluation responses can be used to improve pedagogy. The qualitative data provided in the Com-
ments section of the evaluation can be particularly helpful. It is not necessarily easy to accept evaluation from those we teach; it is human nature to prefer that students praise our work rather than criticize it. We are after all experts in our disciplines and dedicated to sharing our knowledge with these students who are newcomers to our fields. Sometimes, though, the students can provide us with valuable suggestions for elements that we can improve in our teaching. It may be a teaching technique that worked in another class they’ve taken, or a suggestion about the kind of feedback that they received on a research paper, or a comment on the size of the handwriting on the whiteboard or font on a PowerPoint slide, that only a student who sits in the back of the classroom can provide. A student once suggested to me that a computer programming exercise I had used as part of the active learning style of my class would be more helpful if it was done as a group exercise, so that less experienced students could benefit from the knowledge of some of their more advanced classmates. I use group work in my teaching, but had not considered it for this particular exercise. I tried it the next semester, and the group approach worked well. I definitely recommend that professors read the student comments thoughtfully, and reflect on whether any elements of their pedagogy can be improved.

From an administrator’s perspective, I have considered how the evaluation results can be used to improve the quality of the education we are providing to our students. We have given a voice to the students through the surveys; we owe it to them to listen to what they tell us. This past semester, the CPS Dean’s Office asked Institutional Research to send to our Division Chairs the full Class Climate report, including student comments, for any professors who scored below a threshold level on any section of the report. The Chair was asked to speak to the professor about the student comments, to suggest changes to pedagogy for the next semester, and to strongly recommend that the professor attend one of the Conversations on Teaching workshops offered by the Center for Teaching and Learning during the summer. These workshops are attended by professors at varied experience levels and facilitated by a highly regarded teacher. They encourage an open and frank discussion of pedagogical successes and failures in a non-threatening setting with peers, and allow colleagues to learn from each other. The workshops are sure to provide some insights that a professor can use to refine teaching techniques to more fully meet student expectations. Attendance at the workshops, followed by application of lessons learned, closes the assessment loop: evaluation, reflection, intervention, improvement. It provides a pathway for professors to more fully realize their potential not only as experts in their fields, but also as master teachers. The development of a professor’s teaching skills will certainly benefit the next group of students, and add value to the overall student experience.

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

- November 5, 2012
- February 11, 2013
- April 22, 2013

If you have any questions regarding the application procedures look at our website under Growth Grant Program or email us at CTL@stjohns.edu.
The Traveling Former Provost
For those of you wondering where in the world Julie Upton, RSM might be, that isn’t an easy question to answer. Right now, she is on a round-the-world journey visiting Sisters of Mercy in a number of countries. If you want more information, Julie has a blog with fascinating stories about her travels: https://stjohns.digication.com/julia_upton_rsm/My_Travels.

RSA Animate: Changing Education Paradigms
Sir Ken Robinson, world-renowned education and creativity expert, gave a talk on reforming education. To view an interesting animated excerpt from this presentation go to: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zDZFcDGpl4U.

We would like to thank Professor Martin McGloin for sending this link to us.
Opportunities for Women in Science at St. John’s University

Marie Nitopi (IRB and Women in Science Coordinator, Office of Grants and Sponsored Research nitopim@stjohns.edu)

Women have made tremendous advances in educational attainment and in the workplace during the past 50 years. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2004) report, *Trends in Educational Equity of Girls and Women*, today, more women than men are enrolled in higher education, and women earn more than half of all Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees. In addition, in many occupations such as the health professions, education, and biological/life sciences, degrees conferred on females have exceeded those conferred on males. Yet despite these advances women continue to be underrepresented in many of the traditionally male-dominated professions and obvious gender differences still exist in some majors, with females less likely than males to major in computer science, math, engineering, physics, and the physical sciences (STEM professions). The question still remains: why are so few women becoming scientists and engineers?

St. John’s University provides a program that supports and encourages women who plan careers in these areas in which they have been historically underrepresented. The Women in Science Society offers this support through scholarships, workshops, lectures and an emphasis on student involvement and interaction with faculty members, professionals and peers.

A unique aspect of the Women in Science Society is the Clare Booth Luce (CBL) Scholarship program. Clare Boothe Luce (1903-1987) enjoyed a career that spanned seven decades and numerous professional interests including journalism, politics, the theater, and diplomacy. Under the terms of her will, Mrs. Luce established a legacy that benefits women with talent and ambition in areas where they continue to be underrepresented. Since its inception in 1989, the Clare Boothe Luce Program strives to increase the presence and strengthen the role of women in the STEM professions. The program offers undergraduate and graduate scholarships as well as providing funds that support CBL Professorships. St. John’s University is one of thirteen educational institutions specifically designated in Mrs. Luce’s will to receive these funds that support students and faculty in the STEM professions.

St. John’s University currently has two CBL Professors and seven CBL Scholars. Dr. Fatima Amir and Dr. Christina Schwieikert are the most recent recipients of the CBL award. Both professors are active participants in the Women in Science Society and advisory board, sharing their experiences and serving as role models to St. John’s women who major in science and mathematics.

Fatima Amir is a Clare Boothe Luce Assistant Professor of Physics in the Department of Physics, St. John’s College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. Dr. Amir received her Ph.D. in Physics, at the University of Houston-Texas in December 2003, her M.Sc. in Physics/Optoelectronic, at the Université D’Es-Senia, Oran-Algeria, September 1990, her M.Sc. in Physics, Université des sciences du Languedoc-Roussillon, Montpellier-France, June 1989 and her Bachelor in Physics/electronic, Université de Sidi Bel Abbes, Sidi Bel Abbes-Algeria, July 1987. An expert in x-ray characterization and material synthesis for energy applications, her research involves the study of novel materials for solar cell applications.

Christina Schweikert is a Clare Boothe Luce Assistant Professor of Computer Science in the Division of Computer Science, Mathematics, and Science. Dr. Schweikert completed her undergraduate degrees in Computer Science and General Science at Fordham University, M.S. in Computer Science at New York Institute of Technology, and Ph.D. in Computer Science from the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. Her research interests include: programming languages, bioinformatics, and medical informatics. Dr. Schweikert teaches a variety of courses from introductory programming to advanced computer science and healthcare informatics courses. The Women in Science Society along with the Clare Booth Luce Program are helping to change the gender disparity in STEM by expanding the number of strong role models for women who plan careers in the sciences.
LIBRARY RESOURCES

Critical Thinking & Citizenship: Congressional Quarterly Researcher Plus
Kathryn Shaughnessy (University Libraries, shaughnk@stjohns.edu)

In anticipation of the upcoming elections, the “Library Resources” column focuses on the Congressional Quarterly Researcher Plus as a database to help citizens find timely, reliable information on the issues that feature in both headlines and campaign platforms. The CQR database offers reports written by professional journalists, in consultation with experts in the field to offer “unbiased coverage of health, social trends, criminal justice, international affairs, education, the environment, technology, and the economy” (CQ, About). The landing page features the most current report, generally covering a topic that is (or has recently been) in the news. Other “recent reports” are found a little farther down the page.

If you know of an issue you wish to look up, (e.g.: Dream Act or immigration) use the “Quick Search” box at the top of the page, click Go, and results are listed by frequency of word-use; note, you can also choose to switch to chronological listing of reports-results as well. If you are not sure of a search term or just wish to explore the reports, you can use the “Browse Reports” menu in the upper-left corner of the page in order to browse by topic, date or by Pro/Con debate.

The benefit of any given report is that it not only offers an overview, some background and the “current situation” for an issue, but also offers historical background in two additional ways: (1) the Chronology link, which breaks down the news & legal highlights of the issue in a timeline, and also (2) the issue tracker box on the side of report, which allows the researcher to access all the archived reports related to the topic (back to 1923), so that one sees, in effect, a series of snapshots of the issue for American citizenry.

For a quick overview of the issue in “debate” format, the Pro/Con segments of a report are written by invited experts in response to a question posed by CQR. The question is designed to tease out the legal or social import of an issue; if it is a legal issue, the question is geared toward whether current legislation is feasible or whether more/less regulation is desirable.

With the exception of the Pro/Con segments, these pieces on controversial topics are not merely opinion. Professors who focus on reinforcing research and critical thinking will be glad to see that research is cited throughout CQR. Students will encounter heavy-citation in the overview sections, and of course, graphs, bibliography and resources for further review are also offered. CQR has even made citing their reports easy by including a “CiteNow” feature at the top of the page, which encourages students to continue the cycle of research and citation.

To access CQResearcher, visit our Databases LibGuide: http://stjohns.campusguides.com/databasesA-Z
For more on critical thinking, reporting watchdogs and political fact-checking, visit our Information Ethics LibGuide: http://stjohns.campusguides.com/InfoEthics.

How to Use the Podium Classrooms
For helpful information on using Podium Classrooms take a look at the following eStudio tutorials:
Using the Podium Classrooms
New Podiums Rooms

To view a list of all tutorials go to: http://www.stjohns.edu/faculty/portable/tuorials.
Career Corner

The Art of Networking: Cultivating Relationships

Elisa Zervos (Career/Internship Advisor, Career Center, zervose@stjohns.edu)

Let’s face it… it is about “who you know” especially in this economy and for the foreseeable future. We are living in, what has been recently labelled, a “VUCA world” (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous). In order to gain control of what we can, the art of development of social skills as they relate to networking becomes quite significant for those navigating their career paths, especially students considering their first or second internship or graduates looking for a full-time job.

So, how do we teach students to be savvy at networking? There are a variety of ways to go about it, some easier than others. Building one’s “brand” requires introspection, taking inventory of one’s talents, formulating a statement and a lot of practice. Sending emails and connecting on social media are the simpler ones, however, it becomes more complicated when we have to pick up the phone, meet face-to-face, “sell” ourselves during an interview or interact with an industry professional at a moment’s notice. Faculty can play an integral role and begin to prepare students as early as their freshman year. Now is the time for them to begin cultivating friendships with fellow students, developing relationships with their professors, and choosing campus activities and organizations that grant them the opportunity to learning the art of networking.

Social Media

By now, most of us have received at least one invite from Linkedin from a former colleague, classmate, friend or family member. Once you have officially registered on the site, the return on investment is well worth your time and effort in doing so. Linkedin launched officially in May of 2003 and, to date, has over 170 million users worldwide. According to the Jobvite Social Recruiting Survey 2012, “93% of US companies are planning to recruit through social media this year (90% going straight to Linkedin), up from 83% in 2010.”

The site is based on connecting to people through “degrees of separation,” much like most of the social media websites out there. However, the difference between Linkedin and Facebook for example, is that Linkedin is strictly professional and should be used that way, even down to your profile picture.

Classmates, colleagues, co-workers (present and former) are usually your first degree connection, so it is easy to get started. Keep in mind that it’s not about the quantity of connections, instead, it is all about the quality or relevancy of potential referrals and/or introductions. There isn’t any value in connecting with someone you know nothing about. The value of a Linkedin contact is predicated on your familiarity with someone’s work and accomplishments and/or their character.

Simple and free of charge, Linkedin permits students to begin establishing their brand or “virtual business card” on the internet. Joining industry groups, being searched upon based on their skills or finding local networking events are additional benefits of the site. Today, 90% of recruiters and hiring managers will refer to a Linkedin profile if they are considering an individual for a position at their company and any recommendations a student can capture and post on their personal profile will come in quite handy.

Student Organizations

Joining at least one or two organizations, even volunteering their time to various charities and/or community outreach organizations are musts for all students. Most employers find this to be quite desirable and search for “well-rounded individuals” who are developing soft-skills as they form committees, organize and delegate tasks for events, set timelines and due-dates for deliverables, and learn how to overcome obstacles as the project progresses. Additionally, students are exposed to and learn how to relate to diverse populations, gain perspective on different cultures and religious beliefs, interact with multiple (continued on next page)
generations and begin to collaborate with specific types of personalities as they move toward a collective goal.

As they get closer to their Junior and Senior years, it is beneficial to advise and encourage students to network at national chapters and outside of St. John’s, by attending events in person and beyond the internet/campus.

**Internships**
Getting in front of executives and key players in a company by arriving early and grabbing a cup of coffee or sharing a lunch hour is a great networking strategy during an internship. We all know how important internships are as students begin to apply their knowledge to a “real-life” situation. Every experience should be optimized by meeting as many department heads as possible, being enthusiastic each and every day, proactively reaching across functions when there is low activity in their hired position and always walking through the door every morning with “an appetite” to learn as much as possible about the inner workings of an organization. Make sure to encourage students to continue to nurture their contacts by staying connected on LinkedIn during and after their internship in addition to keeping those contacts updated on their status and direction. Sending a mutual “article of interest,” a “congratulations” to someone who was promoted, or a “request for an opinion” on a significant industry or organizational development is a sure way to remain memorable to anyone they’ve met along the way.

**Alumni & Mentors**
As most of us would agree, finding the right mentor is key in any company, since it allows us to learn the ropes on a one-on-one basis, understand the company’s “unwritten rules,” navigate the politics of an organization and have a confidant when needed as our sounding board. At the Career Center, we are continuously developing our roster of Alumni who wholeheartedly want to “reach back” and help a fellow St. John’s student and are situated in a variety of industries, graduating with a broad spectrum of degrees. Pointing our students to this program will allow them to begin reaching out to a professional in their field, require students to research the various companies and/or an alumni’s professional path, and compose a well-written email to introduce themselves as they form their “personal statement.”

**Professional Associations**
Discovering niche websites catering to specific industries helps a student uncover trends, industry outlooks, networking events/conventions or on targeted articles, blogs and white papers. It also introduces and familiarizes a student with the industry “jargon/vocabulary” and allows them to begin the process of bridging over from an academic environment to a professional mindset. Job postings can also be found on these sites that might not have been “caught” on a query simply because the keyword used was described differently. Students often are allowed to join events as guests, and if they are very interested, many associations will allow students a significant discount to become a member. It is good practice to research associations that may “partner” or compliment a specific occupation to broaden awareness of future professionals that could potentially be part of their team. In addition, you can follow a site’s news by subscribing to a monthly newsletter or follow an employee on Twitter, Facebook, Foursquare, or their blog.

Networking has always been one of the best strategies to find a job, however today there are so many more “artful” ways that fit our particular style. Encouraging students to stretch and give themselves weekly and monthly goals to experiment in each of these networking areas will not only help them build a professional circle, but will most definitely create greater awareness and confidence as they begin to take steps towards their ideal job.
Writing Biography
Derek Owens, Vice Provost
Professor of English, St. John's College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
Executive Director, Institute for Writing Studies

*Memory's Wake* is a work of hybrid nonfiction consisting of family biography, regional history, memoir, photo essay, and staggered narrative. The book revolves around the author's mother's traumatic childhood during the 30s and 40s in the Finger Lakes of New York state, and how that history hibernated in her head until surfacing forty years later. The manuscript blends her account with General Sullivan's genocidal campaign against the Iroquois, the cult of the Publick Universal Friend, and weird religious visionaries from the “burnt-over district” of New York, while also offering glimpses into the author's own childhood.

This book will be available at the University bookstore at the customer service counter.

**Date:** Monday, October 29  
**Time:** 1:50 to 3:15 p.m.  
**Location:** Law School Private Dining Room, Queens Campus  

**REGISTER NOW!**

Faculty Writing Retreat

**Location:** Institute for Writing Studies, Library Room 150, Queens Campus  
**Date:** Monday, December 17, 2012 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.  
**REGISTER NOW;** participation is limited.

The Faculty Writing Retreat offers 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 12:30 p.m. We hope you will be able to join us. Please remember that participation is limited; to register go to [www.stjohn.edu/ctl](http://www.stjohn.edu/ctl). If you have any questions, email Anne Geller ([gellera@stjohns.edu](mailto:gellera@stjohns.edu)) or Maura Flannery ([flannerm@stjohns.edu](mailto: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/aeccontent.php?pid=71651&sid=589816](http://stjohns.campusguides.com/aeccontent.php?pid=71651&sid=589816).
Connecting Colleges and Universities Globally to Explore and Discuss Innovative Ideas and Strategies at The 2012 Annual Electronic Portfolio Conference

Gina Marandino (Educational Technology Specialist, University Libraries, marandig@stjohns.edu)

In July, I had the opportunity to attend a conference that brought together colleges and universities from around the world that were interested in the positive effects that electronic portfolios have on higher education. The 2012 Electronic Portfolio Conference, *ePortfolios as a Catalyst for Connections: Celebrating the Curious, Creative, and Capable Learner*, held from July 16th-July 19th at the Seaport World Trade Center in Boston Massachusetts, was organized by the Association for Experiential and Evidence-Based Learning (AAEEBL). This conference was very valuable. I learned a lot and made connections with other universities, some in the metro area.

A point presented in one of the workshops which resonated with me was that universities will probably have false starts when implementing a portfolio program. In their workshop *Starting with ePortfolios: Where to Begin and What Next*, Susan Scott and Susan Kahn from Indiana University-Perdue University discussed the process they went through when implementing ePortfolios. In their first attempt they tried things that did not work out, such as starting with the most logical courses rather than approaching interested faculty, starting too big, assuming that one size and strategy fit all, trusting that the software was mature, providing too little faculty development, and failing to grasp the magnitude of the paradigm shift for teaching and learning that ePortfolios represent. Once they recognized that their plan was not working, they revised it to include seeded experimentation at the departmental level to address self-identified needs, extensive faculty support that included groups workshops and intensive consultations, and technology support. With their new plan in place they started to see positive outcomes and patterns emerging. Some faculty members really took to the ePortfolio tool and shared their experiences with others. Departments increased their collaboration around learning outcomes, curriculum planning, and rubric development. Authentic assessment started emerging in professional disciplines. Kahn and Scott gave some recommendations, such as: start small, plan carefully and flexibly, attend to student and faculty needs, and draw on institutional strengths and culture. Although they gave useful advice, they wanted the audience to recognize that there is no single right way to run an ePortfolio implementation.

When choosing the workshops I attended, I made sure to include some that discussed reflection. I feel that this is something that is overlooked, and although I always remind students to incorporate reflection, I want to be able to give them better ideas for doing so. In the workshop *Designing Meaningful, Reflective Activities for Student ePortfolios*, Marc Zladivar, Teggin Summers, and Jacob Grohs, gave some innovative ideas for incorporating reflection. Zladivar, Summers, and Grohs consider reflection to be part of a cycle of learning and doing. They believe that reflection can be messy and ill-structured. Reflective portfolios can be separate from showcase portfolios, which are typically ordered and neat. Instructors should promote reflection in the following ways: asking questions that have no clear-cut answers, setting challenges that promote reflection, giving tasks that challenge learners to integrate new learning into previous learning, giving tasks that demand the ordering of thoughts, and assigning work that require evaluation. Grohs discussed how he incorporates safe, messy, open, reflective spaces with students in a service learning community at Virginia Tech. They create portfolios that are private and focus on themselves as the audience. He encourages students to try things out even if they don’t work. For example, he says they could put up several pictures of different things on their ePortfolio and try to make a connection between them. He also has the students write a letter to themselves reflecting on what worked and didn’t work during their service experience.

Another workshop that discussed innovative ways of reflecting was *Promoting ePortfolio Usage Through Digital Storytelling*, presented by Kristen Norris and Annie Weiss, from Indiana University-Perdue University. They feel that digital stories are beneficial because the majority of ePortfolios are too text heavy. Digital stories add voice, they are more fun to assess, they are attention grabbing, they engage students
differently by allowing them to visually communicate a message, and they develop or highlight students' technical skills. Norris and Weiss suggest students include the following in their digital story: an overall purpose, a narrator's point of view, and a compelling question. For more information Norris and Weiss suggest reading *The New Digital Storytelling: Creating Narratives with New Media* by Bryan Alexander and *Learning Through Storytelling in Higher Education: Using Reflection and Experience to Improve Learning* by Max Alterio and Janice McDrury.

This conference was very worthwhile. I came away with knowledge and strategies that I can begin to implement into my ePortfolio trainings. If you would like my complete conference notes, email me at marandig@stjohns.edu. For more information about AAEEBL visit [http://www.aaeebl.org/](http://www.aaeebl.org/).

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**Global Certificate Program**

As part of the University's Global Initiative, the Office of Global Programs and the Center for Teaching and Learning designed a Certificate Program in Global Education for faculty. The certificate will be awarded to those who complete at least three of the six workshops being offered in the program this semester.

*Arrangements have been made for a conference call between the Queens (location listed below) and the Rosati Conference room on the Staten Island Campus.*

The next sessions are:

- **Helping Non-native Speakers of English Succeed Academically**
  Thursday, October 25, 1:50 to 3:15 p.m., Bent Hall 277A

- **Using The New York Times to Encourage Your Students to Think Globally**
  Monday, November 5, 1:50 to 3:15 p.m., D'Angelo Center 416A

- **What International Education Means at St. John's**
  Wednesday, November 14, 12:15 to 1:40 p.m., Library 110

- **How to Write a Study Abroad Course Proposal**
  Monday, November 26, 1:50 to 3:15 p.m., Bent Hall 277B

For more information and to register go to: [www.stjohns.edu/ctl](http://www.stjohns.edu/ctl).