CTL December Newsletter

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

Highlights from our December issue include:

- Academic Planning Committee Update  
  page 2
- Technology, Community and Writing: Who’s Afraid of Social Networking?  
  by Kristin Prevallet  
  page 3
- Faculty News  
  page 4
- Conversations on Teaching  
  page 5
- Write To Cleanse the Mind and Cleanse the Mind To Write  
  by Flora Keshishian  
  page 6
- Research Month  
  page 7
- Faculty Growth Grant Program  
  page 7

Faculty News

If you would like to send an entry to “Faculty News,” the deadline for the January issue is January 8. 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 place to look for faculty-related information is http://www.stjohns.edu/ctl.
Academic Planning Committee Update

September saw the successful launch of the Town Hall meeting on the University’s five-year Strategic Plan. In response to queries arising from that Town Hall meeting, this article serves as an overview of the formation of the Academic Planning Committee, and its role in the shaping of the Strategic Plan. It also serves as an invitation to faculty to contribute to the University dialogue regarding Mission, Engagement and Global Education over the next few years.

The Strategic Plan captures the genesis of the Academic Planning Committee: “At the beginning of September 2007, the President announced the formation of an Academic Planning Committee (APC) of 15 faculty members, with representatives from each academic unit, along with the support of select administrators from the academic sector. This advisory committee works in concert with the University’s Executive Planning Committee and the Office of Institutional Planning to engage the academic community fully and directly in the University’s Strategic Planning cycle” (Strategic Plan, 47).

APC members, including faculty representing College of Professional Studies, School of Education, School of Law, University Libraries, College of Pharmacy, St John’s College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, and The Peter J. Tobin College of Business, accepted the President’s charge. Members met approximately once a month to review institutional facts and data, and to report input from faculty colleagues across the University regarding the Plan’s three strategic themes – “Mission, Engagement and Global.”

The APC committee “developed a set of related recommendations which were submitted to and endorsed by the Provost’s Council and the EPC. Recommendations relating to scholarship, faculty research and global education were incorporated into the plan. At the request of the President, the committee developed an enhanced definition of “service” in faculty responsibility with related objectives and strategies. These were also incorporated into the plan” (Strategic Plan, 47). Some of the APC’s recommendations can be found in the strategic plan www.stjohns.edu/about/strategicplan; original reports and those APC recommendations which are still under discussion can be found on the APC’s newly-established Campus Guide: http://stjohns.campusguides.com/APC.

In 2009, APC members were invited “to continue to work in concert with the University’s Executive Planning Committee and other planning groups to engage the academic community fully and directly in the implementation of the University’s 2008-2013 Strategic Plan.” The APC committee looks forward to continued participation in this important University effort. We value your input. If you have any questions, comments or suggestions please contact any member of the current committee.

Vincent Alexander, Esq. (Law); Dr. James Benson (Vice Provost, Committee Co-chair); Dr. Timothy Carter (SJC); Dr. Maura Flannery (CPS, CTL); Dr. John Greg (SJC); Dr. Clover Hall (VP of Academic Planning and IR, Committee Co-Chair); Dr. Diane Hergenrother (Associate Provost); Dr. Grace Ibanez-Friedman (EDU); Dr. Derek Owens (SJC); Dr. Tom Kitts (CPS); Dr. Anna Martin (TCB); Sharon Norton, Esq. (Vice Provost, SI Campus); Dr. Linda M. Sama (TCB); Prof. Kathryn Shaughnessy (LIB); Dr. Nicos Scordis (TCB); Dr. Candace Smith (PHM); Dr. Mark Terjesen (SJC); Dr. Lou Trombetta (PHM).
Technology, Community, and Writing: Who’s Afraid of Social Networking?

Kristin Prevallet (Institute for Core Studies, prevallk@stjohns.edu)

According to the writer William Deresiewicz, the idea of the solitary mind – the student sitting alone at her desk surrounded by books, quietly taking notes or writing – is a thing of the past. “We no longer believe in the solitary mind,” he writes. “The current psychological model is that of the networked, or social mind. The great contemporary terror is anonymity.” To Deresiewicz (and to many of us I’m sure), there is something sad about the turn away from solitude. And yet, I wonder: is the networked, social mind so bad? Is it possible for the networked mind – reliant as it is on technology – to open a space for the introspection necessary for writing?

Ideally, the University community should function like the Shaungha of Buddhist monks. This doesn’t mean that we all need to behave like monks, but it does mean that we are all here, on this campus, with a common goal, vision, or purpose. That goal or purpose may be that we are all here to realize the purpose of our lives, and to grow in knowledge, compassion, and fruitful productivity. Realization of these lofty goals will not happen on our own – we need the network, the community of our teachers and peers, to engage us in conversation and move our ideas into deeper and deeper levels of inquiry and growth.

The same goes for writing. There is plenty of research to show that people who feel connected to a larger network participate more fully in their own education, are healthier, less depressed, and feel more fulfilled. We’d like to think that it is our inner genius or personality that makes things happen in our lives. And yet, it’s a fact: our understanding of what is meaningful is socially constructed. This means that we learn by being immersed in conversations with other people. Or, to put it simply, we need an audience, and feedback, to become better writers.

Technology seems to be moving very swiftly to facilitate the creation of these kinds of networks. Social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter are putting millions of people in contact with each other. Certainly lots of that communication is trivial, but it’s not the content that matters. Technology in the classroom is no longer simply about effectively using teaching software like Blackboard and Gateway. Rather, it is about understanding that technology is a state of mind. It’s a way of thinking that is based not on individual students doing their work in isolation, but on the class as a whole, working as a network to facilitate each other’s learning processes.

Although Blackboard and Gateway are very efficient in organizing course materials, I do not find that they facilitate the kind of community that inspires an immersion into genuine learning. In other words, my students were not engaging with each other’s writing or giving the kind of feedback that is, to my mind, imperative to meet the new demands for the network-mind model of student engagement. This doesn’t actually have anything to do with the features these sites offer – rather, it is that their institutional design controls the quality of the content.

(continued on page 5)
Dr. Sandra Schamroth Abrams (Curriculum and Instruction, abramss@stjohns.edu) presented a paper, “Virtual Contexts, Real Connections: Video Gaming and Meaningful Learning Inside and Outside the Classroom,” at the National Council of Teachers of English annual convention in Philadelphia (November 2009).

Dr. Zhe-Sheng Chen (Pharmaceutical Sciences, chenz@stjohns.edu) published an article with Dr. Ashby (Pharmaceutical Sciences, ashbyc@stjohns.edu) “Imatinib and Nilotinib Reverse Multidrug Resistance in Cancer Cells by Inhibiting the Efflux Activity of the MRP7 (ABCC10)” in the online publication, PLoS ONE (October 2009); invited a visiting scholar, Dr. Xin from Sun Yat-Sen University Cancer Center in China, to work at his laboratory; and was selected as an Editorial Advisory Board Member by Drug Discoveries and Therapeutics.

Dr. Maura C. Flannery (Computer Science, Mathematics and Science, flannerm@stjohns.edu) a synopsis of her presentation on linking art and science at the symposium, “Science Education: Linking Science with Society,” was published in a booklet on the symposium; the presentation is also available on the web at: http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/steinhardt/alumni/selby/panel_two.php (April 2009).

Professor Caroline Fuchs (University Libraries, fuchsc@stjohns.edu) presented a paper, “Where’s the Party? New York Celebrates the Opening of the Erie Canal,” at the annual Researching New York History Conference at SUNY Albany (November 2009).

Dr. Flora Keshishian (Rhetoric, Communication & Theatre, keshishf@stjohns.edu) led a discussion on “What Color Box Do You Check? A Call to Demystify Race” at the National Communication Association meeting in Chicago (November 2009); and presented the paper, “The Free Market Economy, Not the Medium, As the Message,” at the Eastern Communication Association convention (April 2009).

Dr. John McKenna, C.M. (Theology and Religious Studies, mckennaj@stjohns.edu) reviewed Eucharistic Sacramentality In An Ecumenical Context: The Anglican Epiclesis by David J. Kennedy in Worship (November 2009); published the book, Eucharist: Symbol And Reality (Chicago: Hillebrand Books, 2009).


Dr. Charles Wankel (Management, wankelc@stjohns.edu) published “Management Education Using Social Media” in Organization Management Journal (December 2009), Management Education for Sustainability (Information Age Publishing, 2009), and Higher Education in Virtual Worlds: Teaching and Learning in Second Life (Emerald, 2009); published book reviews of Making Virtual Worlds: Linden Lab and Second Life by Thomas Malaby (December 2009), Managing Across Cultures: The Seven Keys to Doing Business with a Global Mindset by Charlene M. Solomon & Michael S. Schell (October 2009), The Social Media Bible: Tactics, Tools, and Strategies for Business Success by Lon Safko and David Brake (September 2009) and SocialCorp: Social Media Goes Corporate by Joel Postman (August, 2009) in Choice.

Faculty News
If you would like to send an entry to “Faculty News,” the deadline for the January issue is January 8. We prefer that you email the information to CTL@stjohns.edu. Please have your entries follow the style presented in “Faculty News.”
There are social networking sites that, because of their design, allow students to take more risks in terms of their writing. On Ning (which is currently in use by hundreds of classrooms and school districts around the world) students upload their pictures and design the background for their blogs. This instantly opens them up to the realm of the social, where they know that their writing will be read and interpreted by others in the class. (The public does not have access.) Knowing that I am not the sole responder changes their relationship to the audience and makes their focus much more deliberate. Students establish a network of peer-review “friends” whose work they will comment on for the duration of the course. As I had hoped, it was in this comment log that the students were motivated to interact with each other’s writing without my prompting. Because I wasn’t overshadowing every comment, the writing that they did for each other has the aura of freedom, spontaneity, and engaging inquiry.

In a recent article in *The Chronicle for Higher Education*, John Seely Brown defines immersion as “being surrounded by others talking and conversing… nearly everyone is a teacher for us – albeit an informal teacher – urging us to say new things, correcting us, and extending our vocabulary.” Brown uses the idea of the extended network of social teaching to advocate for the “broader learning milieu” we must consider in working with this generation of students. Encouraging students to take on the role of teacher in offering feedback and assistance to their peers is one of the unexpected benefits realized by transforming my classroom into a social network. The immersion into learning comes from the activation of the social mind in my classroom—facilitated by a website, but reinforced by its actual, student-motivated use.

**Works Cited:**

**Conversations on Teaching**

Conversations on Teaching is designed to explore some of the basic issues in teaching at the college level. They 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. These conversations are designed to introduce topics that are relevant and useful to all teachers. The topics include planning the course, encouraging active learning, and developing good classroom management practices.

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 12  
**Time:** 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.  
**Location:** Bent Hall 277B  
**To register:** Call the CTL at ext. 1859 or email us at CTL@stjohns.edu
Write to Cleanse the Mind and Cleanse the Mind to Write
Flora Keshishian (St. John’s College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, keshishf@stjohns.edu)

Writing is a creative act and one of the major requirements of our profession as academicians. Anyone who attempts to write knows that writing isn’t always easy. After all, when written down, ideas reflect more permanently the writer’s knowledge, concerns, values, and more. The source of such difficulty, which can vary from one writer to another and from one piece to another, may be conceptual, organizational, grammatical, etc. Often, however, the difficulty is due to nothing but a cluttered mind.

My purpose here is to share with you what I consider a magical mind-cleansing technique that Julia Cameron introduced in her book titled The Artist’s Way: A Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity (1992). Its premise is this: as human beings we are all creative by nature but if the mind is preoccupied by many unresolved issues, it can’t be productive; and so she suggests “morning journal” as a remedy. Cameron recommends that you spend about 20 minutes every morning writing freely about whatever comes to mind, without being concerned about the grammar, spelling, punctuation, etc. Do this before being distracted by your daily routine (reading the newspaper, watching TV, talking to someone, etc.). In her words: “All the angry, whiny, petty stuff that you write down in the morning stands between you and your creativity. Worrying about the job, the laundry, the funny knock in the car, the weird look in your lover’s eye—this stuff eddies through our subconscious and muddies our days. Get it on the page.” (p. 11)

I found out about the book at a peculiar time in my life: I had finally finished my doctoral studies and was trying to turn my dissertation into a journal article while teaching five courses as an adjunct. I needed to earn enough money to visit my family in Australia for the first time in seventeen years. I desperately wanted to submit my manuscript before going away, but it wasn’t happening. Sometimes I’d get stuck on a sentence or paragraph for endless hours only to change it completely the next day and get stuck again. I felt frustrated, disappointed, and sad about wasting so much time and producing nothing. The more I felt so, the less productive I got. Although my heavy teaching load definitely made it difficult for me to write, it wasn’t the main obstacle. What The Artist’s Way helped me to realize was that my mind needed a good cleansing first. My morning journal pages soon became filled with thoughts about my homesickness, my father’s death, the anxiety I was feeling about my upcoming trip, as well as health concerns, relationship problems, just name it. You guessed it: the morning journal serves as a shrink, and what shrink can you find better than yourself—the one who knows you best. A few days into this routine, I finished the manuscript that I had been struggling with for a long time.

The technique’s impact on me was so great that I would set the clock 20 minutes earlier than my usual wake-up time so I could write my morning journal before starting my long busy day. Sometimes, all I wrote was about a dream or nightmare I just had. Other times, I quickly filled pages with ideas for articles and how to approach them, or I jotted down the concerns for an upcoming activity. At rare moments when I couldn’t think of anything to write about, I’d repeatedly write, “I don’t know what else to say….” To this day, when certain thoughts wake me up in the middle of the night because they so desperately want to be acknowledged, I just get up and transfer them onto paper, then go back to sleep. Morning journal helps to free hidden thoughts, and the logic is simple: by writing down thoughts which preoccupy your mind hence block your creativity, you give them a voice and, in so doing, you gain control over them instead of letting them control you. You set them free to feed your mind.

If you haven’t read the book yet, I highly recommend it to you. I also believe we should suggest it to our students who sometimes feel too overwhelmed to write or study. If you’ve already done these things then Kudos to you!
Sloan-C Online Courses about Online Teaching

The Sloan Consortium on Quality Online Education (Sloan-C) is offering workshops about online teaching.

To find out more information on these Sloan-C online workshops visit: http://www.sloan-c.org/2010_workshop_schedule.

To enroll in a workshop, please email us at CTL@stjohns.edu and we will send you the Sloan-C College Pass code needed to enroll online.

Research Month 2010

This annual celebration of St. John’s faculty and student research involves a month of activities, which highlight the current research efforts of both faculty and students in a series of events.

Some of the events that will be sponsored during Research Month are:

- Thursday, April 8
  - Faculty Research Forum
  - Reception Honoring Recipients of Grants

- Thursday, April 15
  - Reception for Faculty Book Authors

- Wednesday, April 21
  - CTL Fellows’ Presentations on Research in Teaching and Technology

- Thursday, April 22
  - Student Research Day: Queens Campus

- Tuesday, April 27
  - Student/Faculty Research Day: Staten Island Campus

- Mondays, April 12, 19, 26
  - Interdisciplinary Research Roundtable Lunches

The Faculty Research Forum and the Reception for Grant Recipients are scheduled to overlap on April 8. Since grants are so intimately involved in the research process, it seems appropriate to celebrate grant seekers and awardees at the same time that we come together to share the broad research interests of the faculty.

More details will follow in the coming months, with specific invitations to participate in each event. Please keep an eye out for notices regarding them. The research activities of St. John’s students and faculty are increasingly diverse and intense: grant dollars continue to rise; publications are flourishing; students are presenting papers at conferences. We have good reason to celebrate our accomplishments. We expect that through Research Month activities the St. John’s University Community will become increasingly aware, mutually supportive and proud of these impressive activities.

Faculty Growth Grants Program

The upcoming deadlines to apply for a Faculty Growth Grant are: January 25, 2010, and April 12, 2010.

If you have any questions regarding the application procedures look at our website under Growth Grants Program (http://www.stjohns.edu/academics/centers/teach/growth) or email us at CTL@stjohns.edu.