Dates to Note!!

Wednesday, January 20
First Day of Classes

Thursday, January 21
How to Use the Podium Classrooms
3:30 to 4:30 p.m.
Location TBA

Thursday, January 21
Adjunct Faculty Colloquium
4:30 to 6 p.m.
Bent Hall Room 277B

Tuesday, February 9
Ken Bain
Author of the book, What the Best College Teachers Do
4:40 p.m.
Location TBA
For more information: www.t3portal.org

Thursday, April 8
Faculty Research Forum
11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

To RSVP phone us at ext. 1859 or email us at CTL@stjohns.edu.

Center for Teaching and Learning Newsletter

Vol. 15, No 3

November 2009

CTL November Newsletter

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

Highlights from our November issue include:

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Faculty News
If you would like to send an entry to “Faculty News,” the deadline for the December issue is December 1. 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.
A Taste for Teaching
Maura C. Flannery (College of Professional Studies, flannerm@stjohns.edu)

If you are looking for good advice on teaching, you probably wouldn’t head for the Wall Street Journal, but a recent essay in the “Taste” section of the paper is one of the best things I’ve read on teaching in some time. Though Naomi Riley’s article is called “America’s Top College Professor,” it is, thankfully, more about good teaching than about competition. It describes three college professors who are vying for the $200,000 Cherry Teaching Award sponsored by Baylor University.

Riley is in essence writing a review of the lecture styles of the three, which vary greatly. Yes, lecture is at the heart of what each of them does in the classroom. They don’t seem to use much technology, though Elliott West, who teaches history at the University of Arkansas, does have slides of maps and others images running on a screen behind him. He seems to be the most traditional lecturer of the trio. He says that a teacher has to find the style that suits and then fine-tune it. He found that he learned from his students; he could tell by looking carefully at them what got through and what didn’t. I couldn’t agree more. Sometimes it’s painful to see those yawns or worse those nodding heads, but it sends a message, loud and clear. West has found a lecture style that works for him. He talks, asks an occasional question, and according to Riley, keeps his audience mesmerized.

Edward Burger, a math professor at Williams College, also lectures but is much more dynamic and uses a great deal of humor. He sees empathy as at the heart of good teaching. He tries to keep in mind what it means to be sitting in a classroom and trying to figure out what is going on. However, he is also known as a tough grader and focuses on getting his students to think mathematically. While he may be tough on his students, he is also hard on himself, for example, by asking himself “the 10-year question:” what will a student remember from a course 10 years later? This is an issue I’ve been grappling with lately as I try to figure out what is really most important in what I teach. It truly is a difficult puzzle to answer.

The third finalist for the Cherry Award is Roger Rosenblatt, who teaches literature at SUNY, Stony Brook. He was a commentator on the PBS NewsHour, so he is accustomed to communicating with an audience. He sees teaching as involving some entertaining, but not too much—substance has to be the essence of the presentation. He notes that the best professors worry about their subjects in front of their students; if someone gets lost in thought in front of the class, that’s a sign of commitment to their discipline. Obviously, it’s not good to do this too often, but I think we’ve all had the experience of suddenly having a new insight about a topic right in the middle of teaching about it.

There are many more great ideas in this article. I suspect that Riley herself is a natural teacher, though she notes that all three professors emphasized that teaching doesn’t necessarily come naturally. Good teaching takes work: in preparing, in practicing, and in paying attention to feedback from students. She then goes on to bash the old publish-or-perish concept, without really exploring the link between teaching and research. Still, this is definitely an article that’s worth reading, especially if you are considering applying for next year’s Cherry Award.
Deep Learning

The CTL Teaching and Technology Fellows meet monthly for a discussion of their projects and other issues related to their teaching. Our last two conversations have dealt with a problem that is common to all the members: how to get students to go beyond just memorizing facts to understanding concepts and analyzing their consequences. Some of these faculty teach freshman core courses and others teach graduating seniors, but all want their students to dig deeper.

During our discussions, we've investigated several articles dealing with the issue of deep learning, and I'd like to mention them here because each provides useful viewpoints on this topic. The one that we began with was *Deep and Surface Approaches to Learning* which was particularly helpful because it has a chart comparing the characteristics of the two kinds of learning, and what they mean to both students and faculty. This helped us articulate precisely what we are looking for, so we could do on to discuss how to achieve our goals.

For this we looked to articles with rather unusual approaches. One is *Building Cognitive Assemblies: An Exercise in Course Design*. The author, Carolyn G. Shapiro-Shapin, compares structuring a course to organizing an automobile assembly line (I said the approaches were unusual). This may seem a rather mechanistic metaphor, but she is drawing on her husband's experience in the automotive field, where cars are put together, not piece by individual piece, but in modules with, for example, the engine being assembled and then inserted into a chassis that has also been preassembled. As far as her course is concerned, Shapiro-Shapin has decided that putting concepts together into unifying modules also makes sense. Instead of a new topic each week, she has linked the topics together into three themes for the semester. This way it's easier for students to go deeper, because there are less separate concepts to juggle. Like many good ideas in course design, this one was born out of the frustration of students not digging into the material. Shapiro-Shapin has found one approach to at least alleviating this problem.

Another approach comes from *A Fractal Thinker Designs Deep Learning Exercises* by Ed Nuhfer. It appeared in *The National Teaching and Learning Forum* (Vol. 18, No. 6) which is available in the CTL office, Bent 281. Nuhfer is the author of a long series of articles on “fractal” approaches to teaching, meaning that he views issues from a variety of perspectives. In this case, he begins with an issue the Fellows had discussed: that the approach to deep learning depends on the learner. Those of us teaching freshman have many students who are still very concrete thinkers, while others are dealing with students who may be able to think more abstractly, though they don’t necessarily want to do it. The lessons for each group of students would be designed differently. Nuhfer also suggests we remember to craft lessons having an “affective hook,” that literally grab the students’ hearts as well as their minds. They are more likely to dig into a topic if they have some interest in it. And finally, he thinks we shouldn’t be afraid of ambiguity, of exploring concepts that are muddy and have no satisfying answers. Students aren’t fond of such ideas, but that’s really the point: these ideas make them do much deeper thinking.

(Continued on page 5)
Dr. Blase Billack (Pharmaceutical Sciences, billackb@stjohns.edu) gave a seminar entitled “Reduction of Vesicant Toxicity by Ebselen and Its Analogs” at the New Jersey Institute of Technology in Newark (October 2009); also presented this in poster form at the GHSI Public Health Emergency Medical Countermeasures Workshop in Washington, D.C. (November 2009).

Dr. Zhe-Sheng Chen (Pharmaceutical Sciences, chenz@stjohns.edu) published three articles: “Lapatinib and Erlotinib are Potent Reversal Agents for ABCC10/MRP7-mediated Multidrug Resistance” in Biochemical Pharmacology, “Current Advances in Modulation of ABC Transporter-mediated Multidrug Resistance in Cancer” in International Journal of Pharmaceutical and Clinical Research, and “FG020326 as a Third Generation of Special Targeted P-glycoprotein Inhibitor: In Vitro and In Vivo Therapeutic Effects and Pharmacokinetics” in Biochemical Pharmacology (2009); was selected as an Editorial Advisory Board Member by The Open Breast Cancer Journal, Chinese Journal of Cancer, and The Open Drug Resistance Journal.

Dr. Maura C. Flannery (Computer Science, Mathematics and Science, flannerm@stjohns.edu) presented a paper, "Cranes in the Demilitarized Zone," at the National Conference on Liberal Arts and the Education of Artists in New York (October 2009).

Professor Connie J. Frisch-Cherniak (Fine Arts, frischccc@stjohns.edu) showed her artwork in the exhibit, "Wish You Were Here," in the Loretto Memorial Library on the Staten Island Campus (October 2009-January 2010); presented "Meet the Artist" as part of the Academic Lecture Series in the Kelleher Center; her work was in group exhibitions entitled "The Body Politic," (October-November 2009), "Music for My Eyes" (September-October 2009), and "Portals" (August-September 2009) at the CPG Gallery, Staten Island.

Dr. Anne Ellen Geller (English, geller@stjohns.edu) published “The Difficulty of Believing in Writing Across the Curriculum” in JAEPL: The Journal of the Assembly of Expanded Perspectives on Learning (November 2009).

Dr. Vivian Valvano Lynch (English and Speech, lynchv@stjohns.edu) published a review of “The Myth of an Irish Cinema: Approaching Irish-Themed Films” by Michael Patrick Gillespie in The Irish Literary Supplement (Fall 2009).

Dr. Paul D. Molnar (Theology and Religious Studies, molnarp@stjohns.edu) published the book Thomas F. Torrance: Theologian of the Trinity (Surrey, England: Ashgate Publishers, 2009); presented a keynote address entitled “The Role of the Holy Spirit in Knowing the Triune God” at an International Symposium: Trinitarian Theology After Barth held at Carey Baptist College in Auckland, New Zealand (May 2009); taught a graduate course entitled "Contemporary Theologies of the Trinity" and gave a lecture comparing Karl Barth's early and later theology of the incarnation at Laidlaw-Carey Graduate School of Theology (May 2009); gave two lectures: “What Difference Does it Make if Jesus Really is God?” and “Karl Barth's Christology” at the University of Otago in Dunedin, New Zealand (June 2009); published an article, “The Centrality of the Doctrine of the Trinity in the Theology of Thomas F. Torrance,” in Participatio (July 2009); published book reviews of: Jesus’ Revelation of His Father: A Narrative-Conceptual Study of the Trinity with Special Reference to Karl Barth by Damon W. K. So in the International Journal of Systematic Theology (April 2009), The Resurrection in Karl Barth by Robert Dale Dawson in the International Journal of Systematic Theology (April 2009), Barth & Schleiermacher on the Doctrine of Election: A Systematic-Theological Comparison by Matthias Gockel in the International Journal of Systematic Theology (October 2009), and Wolfhart Pannenberg on Human Destiny by Kam Ming Wong in Theological Studies (September 2009).

Dr. Richard Stalter (Biological Sciences, stalter@stjohns.edu) presented the paper, “Shamistic Medicinal Plants of the High Ecuador
A recent article in The Chronicle of Higher Education (available on the University Libraries web site) also came up at our meeting. David Glenn’s report on an approach seems the antithesis of Shapiro-Shapin’s. In “A Teaching Experiment Shows Students How to Grasp Big Concepts,” he describes how a small group of history faculty at Indiana University at Bloomington tackled the problem of “bottleneck concepts,” those ideas in a discipline that are important yet difficult to grasp. They found that by dividing large concepts into smaller, evidence-related steps, students were better able to grasp them because they were led through exercises where they had to think more deeply about the evidence and the ideas.

I don’t think that the approaches described by Glenn and Shapiro-Shapin are necessarily mutually exclusive. The large ideas are still there; they are just approached in a segmented fashion. In fact, these two methods may work well together. At the very least, each of these articles got the Fellows to think more deeply about their teaching.

The CTL is Proud to Announce the Launching of a New Resource

Besides providing up-to-date information to faculty on teaching and learning issues, the site’s main aim is to highlight the great teaching strategies developed by St. John’s faculty. There are a great many wonderful things going on at the University, yet these good ideas are often only known within a particular department or college.

Here’s a chance to share your teaching approaches with others. Just send a few sentences about your idea along with any materials you would also like to share. This is a public site which means that you are also contributing to by making St. John’s better known as a great teaching institution.

As you can see if you visit the site, we are just in the early stages, but we hope to keep expanding if you provide us with the information.

Please join us in the endeavor. We hope the CTL Forum will be a great meeting place for good ideas, as well as where you can find out what’s going on at the CTL.
Engaging Students and Developing Leadership Skills Through St. John’s Legal Society
Linda T. Chin (College of Professional Studies, chinl@stjohns.edu)

St. John’s Legal Society is a student-run organization that works to enhance the relationship of the Legal Studies Program to the legal profession by various student-organized activities. The Legal Society has sponsored and organized many different types of activities and events for its members. It has sponsored guest speakers, visits to courts, a workshop on preparing for the law school application with LSAT review courses, and a workshop on how to pass the Notary Public test. It also has published a bi-annual newsletter written entirely by the students and helped organize the Annual Legal Studies Award Ceremonies for the past two years. In addition, the Legal Society has sponsored several fundraising events benefiting the homeless and supporting cancer research. This year the Legal Society implemented two new activities: A Legal Book Club and a Mentor/Mentee Program for Legal Studies students.

Students in the Legal Society are engaged in every aspect of organizing and following up to ensure that the sponsored events or activities are successful. For example, the student editors of the legal society newsletter solicit and edit articles, design the graphics, prepare the newsletter for printing, and disseminate it to the college community. These activities provide opportunities for the students to develop their leadership skills in areas of risk-taking, time management, organization, follow-up, and collaboration with their peers.

Another activity that fosters engagement by the students is the Legal Society’s book club where students can read fiction or non-fiction work related to law. During this Fall semester the students read The Nine: Inside the Secret World of the Supreme Court and met once a month to discuss various chapters. I was pleasantly surprised that students who participated in the book club were not solely Legal Studies majors; there were students who majored in Public Relations, Human Services, and Political Science. The average attendance for each of the meetings was about 20-25 students.

The students are encouraged to write a book review article when they finish reading the book with the expectation that the articles will be published in the Spring edition of the Legal Society newsletter.

The Legal Society also sponsored a new Mentor/Mentee Program for Legal Studies students which provided another opportunity to engage students and also develop Mentors’ leadership skills. Students must have at least a 3.5 GPA, write a short essay, and submit two references to serve as a Mentor. This term seven seniors were chosen to mentor seven underclassmen. These mentors can provide advice and peer tutoring to students who may need additional academic help outside the classroom. This project benefits all students. It provides an opportunity for student mentors to engage in leadership activities and also allow other students to receive helpful advice and guidance from their peers during their academic career.

As the Legal Society’s faculty moderator since 2006, I have witnessed the growth of student participation in these activities. Attendance at the Legal Society's meetings were high, averaging at least 50 students. I believe that engaging students in the activities described here enhances students' classroom learning, promotes a greater sense of community involvement, and makes their college experience more meaningful.

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.
Web Riches

The end of the semester is approaching and during the break, you might want to take the opportunity to investigate the Web and explore the ever-widening world of online resources. There is no way to provide a comprehensive road map for your travels, but here are a few places you might want to stop along the way.

**The New York Times**

This may seem like an obvious one, but representatives from the *Times* recently made a presentation to University faculty about how the newspaper can be used in supporting teaching, with a particular emphasis on global issues. Along with print copies available to students on campus, there are also a host of web resources. Just go to nytimes.com/edu. At the top of the page, click on “Faculty Resources.” On both pages, you will also find a link to an Instructional Strategies Library where faculty at many institutions share their approaches to using the *Times* in their courses. Also from the *Times* homepage you can get to the global edition by a link in the upper left-hand corner of the page. In addition, the *Times* has a great handout for students on how to use the *Times* for research.

For those seeking more information on globalization, here are three other great links:

- **Globalization 101**
  This website provides resources for educators interested in incorporating global topics into their courses. This is a rich source of good information and is sponsored by the Levin Institute of SUNY.

- **Internationalizing the Campus**
  Here is a collection of articles about successful global studies programs at a variety of colleges and universities.

- **Higher Education for Development**
  This organization’s web site provides access to a wide variety of reports on US higher education’s role in development around the world.

After you’ve done some intense web browsing, you might be ready for a break. Here are four sites where you can have fun and please your eyes as well:

- **Wordle**
  This tool is hard to describe, but easy to use. You simply type in a list of words, and Wordle makes a picture out of them. Heidi Upton (DNY/ICS) demonstrated this at a CTL workshop and it is addictive.

- **Image-Swirl**
  This is a tool being developed by Googlelabs. It’s a way to explore related visual images. It is a step beyond another tool that originated with the labs. If you go to Google Images now, you’ll notice that below some of the images is a link labeled “find similar images.” This is a way to fine-tune to your search. Image-swirl does the same thing, but in a more visually interesting way.

- **Cell Size and Scale**
  For biologists, this is a great page if you are trying to help your students (or yourself) understand the relative sizes of cells and molecules. Just use the slider under the image and have fun.

- **Library and Archival Exhibitions on the Web**
  Sponsored by the Smithsonian Institution, this is a tool for finding the wealth of exhibits available online, particularly those hosted by libraries.

**Note:**

After you explore some of these sites, you’ll want to remember them for future use. Sure you can use “favorites” with your web browser, but those favorites get stored on your computer. What if you have an urgent need to make a Wordle picture and you are away from your computer? The answer is delicious a site where you can store and organize your favorites and have them available to you on any computer. It’s free and it’s a wonderful convenience. And before you close your browser, take a look at one more great site, the new CTLForum, a valuable source of teaching ideas and information.
Junior Faculty Research Colloquium

“Habitat”
Claudia Sbrissa, Assistant Professor of Fine Arts
Thursday, December 3, 2009
Claudia Sbrissa’s richly colored mixed media drawings, collages, and installations explore the physical geography of the landscape, both natural and urban. She is interested in the architecture, infrastructure, and history of urban environments; how human activity transforms landscape; how landscape can transform us.

All meetings are held from 12:15 to 1:30pm in the Library 150 (Writing Center Seminar Room, Queens Campus). If you have any questions please contact Tracey-Anne Cooper (coopert@stjohns.edu) or Nerina Rustomji (rustomjn@stjohns.edu).

Distance Learning Peer Sharing Forum

Please join us on Thursday, December 3 from 12:10 to 1:10 p.m. in Bent Hall room 277B for this semester’s Distance Learning Peer Sharing Forum. We will have two speakers in addition to time for Q&A and general comments and sharing:

* Brenda I. Lopez Ortiz (lopezorb@stjohns.edu), Assistant Professor, Dept of Curriculum & Instruction, will speak on the topic of Facilitating Collaborative Work Online.
* Susan Glanz (glanzs@stjohns.edu), Administration and Economics, will speak on the topic of Setting Up and Using Skype for Optional Virtual Office Hours.

Please send your RSVP to Elizabeth Alexander, Assistant Director, Online Learning & Services, at alexande@stjohns.edu.

Fall 2009 Exam Schedule

Undergraduate Schedule
http://www.stjohns.edu/services/registrar/finalexam.stj
Graduate and Evening Schedule
http://www.stjohns.edu/services/registrar/eveningfinalexam.stj