2006 Teaching Award Recipients

The Center for Teaching and Learning is pleased to announce the recipients of its 2006 awards, which will be given at the Spring Commencement. The University is fortunate to have such gifted and dedicated faculty members, and the Center is proud to be able to honor them this year.

The Teaching Excellence Awards are given annually to professors who have established a record of continued excellence in teaching and scholarship. The recipients this year are:

Dr. Robert Fanuzzi, Associate Professor of English in St. John’s College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, will receive the award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching. Dr. Fanuzzi is known for his concern for students and enthusiasm for his subject. He is also interested in the use of technology in teaching. He sees the demands of becoming technologically literate as helping him to appreciate his students’ work in becoming comfortable in the world of literature.

Professor Diane Miller Himmelbaum, Professor of Fine Arts in St. John’s College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, will also receive the award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching. Professor Himmelbaum brings an active art career to her teaching, as well as a great deal of humanity. As one student notes: “Her classes are not easy, for she always challenges us to go beyond what we are comfortable and content with. But she tempers this with the constant support and help she gives students.”

Dr. Steven Papamarcos, Associate Professor of Management in the Peter J. Tobin College of Business, will receive the award for Excellence in Graduate Teaching. He is known for his work in the field of service learning. He incorporates into his courses ambitious service learning projects that support community development efforts. He has also contributed to scholarship in this field with an article in the journal, Academy of Management Learning and Education.
CTL Fellows on Research in Teaching and Learning

On April 25, the 2004-2006 CTL Teaching and Technology Fellows made presentations on their projects. The CTL is very proud of their accomplishments. The Fellows program has been a successful effort both to foster collaboration among faculty in diverse disciplines and to encourage pedagogically sound technological innovations in the classroom.

The Fellows had worked for two years on integrating more technology into their teaching and took this opportunity to share their work with the University community. Short descriptions of their projects follow, along with their email addresses in case you would like more information on their work.

Creating an Integrated Portal: www.researchlatinamerica.info
Elaine Carey, (St. John’s College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, careye@stjohns.edu)

For the fellows program, I proposed designing a more targeted approach to using technology to enhance HIS 2332 History of Latin America II and my other Latin American courses. With that initial concept, I envisioned a website as a resource with connections to syllabi, links, images, PowerPoints, and other course materials. Thus, it would not simply be a “course site.” Instead, it would serve as a platform for all my classes. I purchased a URL and embarked on designing www.researchlatinamerica.info. Although it is still in its infancy, it has taken on a life of its own. For the past two years, I have worked on the site, but more importantly, I have made connections with other Latin American historians and scholars interested in pedagogy and technology.

Taxes and Technology
Teresa M. Danile, (The Tobin College of Business, danilet@stjohns.edu)

The purpose of this Fellows project is to pursue the implementation of technology in my accounting and taxation classes. The first phase of the project makes use of St. John’s Central as the main platform to facilitate delivery of course material, web links and news alerts. PowerPoint lecture notes are posted on St. John’s Central and student access these during class time. They make notes and can save their revised notes on their hard drives for later use. These provide an excellent source for students, especially in such very technical areas as accounting and taxation. It helps students break down a very complicated textbook. During class time, students are directed to various websites as they relate to either accounting or taxation. Here they view accounting pronouncements or the latest issues in accounting and auditing. They are also able to obtain information in taxation, the latest tax law changes, and actually view and work on specific tax forms in a very “hands on” way. Students are taught to manipulate Excel spreadsheets in class and then instructed to provide completed spreadsheets as an assessment of what they have learned. The second phase of the project makes use of accounting and tax programs accessible from the University, and these are used to provide students with practical “hands on” experience.

(continued on page 5)
Dr. Dolores L. Augustine (History, augustid@stjohns.edu) presented a paper, “Going Where No Socialist Has Gone Before: Engineers and Industrial Scientists in East German Popular Culture and Propaganda,” at the annual conference of the European Social Science History Conference in Amsterdam (March 2006).

Dr. Frank Barile (Pharmaceutical Sciences, barilef@stjohns.edu) presented three papers: “Effect of Subacute Daily Repeated Exposure to Eighteen Chemicals on Cultured Immortal Human Intestinal Epithelial Cell Viability,” “Correlation of In vitro Cytotoxicity with Paracellular Permeability in Mortal Rat Intestinal Cells,” and “Effect of Trace Metals on B-Actin Expression and Newly Synthesized Proteins in Cultured Human Intestinal Epithelial Cells” at the Society of Toxicology in San Diego (2006).

Dr. Craig A. Baron (Humanities, baronc@stjohns.edu) published an article, “Sacraments Really Save in Disneyland: Reconciling Bodies in Virtual Reality,” in Questions Liturgiques: Studies in Liturgy (Winter 2005).

Drs. Blase Billack and Diane Hardej (Pharmaceutical Sciences, billackb@stjohns.edu and hardejd@stjohns.edu) presented two papers: “Evaluation of the Antimicrobial and Antifungal Properties of Ebselen” and “Reduction of Mechlorethamine Cytotoxicity by Ebselen in Normal and Tumor-Derived Cell Lines” at the Society of Toxicology in San Diego (2006).

Dr. William Boyle (Humanities, boylew@stjohns.edu) presented a paper, “Philosophy and the Catholic University,” at the Annual Meeting of the American Maritian Association in Washington, D.C. (October 2005).

Dr. Joseph M. Cerreta and Professor Jerome Cantor (Pharmaceutical Sciences, cerretaj@stjohns.edu and cantorj@stjohns.edu) presented two papers: “Short-Term Cigarette Smoke Exposure Potentiates Endotoxin-Induced Pulmonary Inflammation” and “Dichotomous Effect of Aerosolized Hyaluronan in a Hamster Model of Endotoxin-Induced Lung Injury” at the Society of Toxicology in San Diego (2006); Dr. Cerreta also presented “Z-VAD FMK and Z-FA-FMK Rescue Rat Pleural Mesothelial Cell From Cadmium Chloride Induce Apoptosis” at the same meeting.

Professor Emeritus Michael F. Capobianco (Mathematics and Computer Science, capobiam@stjohns.edu) presented a reading of his novella, The Villa, at the 28th Annual Conference of the International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts in Ft. Lauderdale, FL (March 2006).

Dr. Dennis J. Carroll (Early Childhood, Childhood and Adolescent Education/English carrolld@stjohns.edu) published two articles: “Teen Dating Can Carry the Dangers of Toxic Relationships” (September, 2005) and “A Christmas Gift from Aunt Marion” (December 2005) in The Towne Crier; published two short stories: “Dealing and Dancing” (January 2006) and “Mothers and Daughters” (February 2006) showcased on Amazon.com.

Dr. Michael Dempsey (Humanities, dempseym@stjohns.edu) presented a paper, “Revelation, Experience, and the Spiritual Dimensions of Theology: Toward an Understanding of Karl Barth as Theological Master of the Christian Life,” at the Mid-Atlantic Meeting of the American Academy of Religion in Baltimore.

Dr. Christopher D. Denny (Theology and Religious Studies, denny@stjohns.edu) presented a paper, "Medieval Damnation or Modern Tragedy? Heuristic Frameworks for Christian Alienation," at the Mid-Atlantic American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting in Baltimore (March 2006).

Dr. William DiFazio (Sociology and Anthropology, difaziow@stjohns.edu) published a book, Ordinary Poverty: A Little Food and Cold Storage (Temple University Press, 2006).

Dr. Maura C. Flannery (Computer Science, Mathematics and Science, flannerm@stjohns.edu) was invited to make a presentation, “Drawing as a Cognitive and Affective Act in Science,” at the conference on The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning: The Cognitive-Affective Connection at Oxford College of Emory University (March 2006).

Dr. Sue M. Ford (Pharmaceutical Sciences, fords@stjohns.edu) presented a paper, “Transport of Acyclovir By LLC-PKI Cells Grown on Filters,” at the Society of Toxicology in San Diego (2006).
Dr. Jeffrey Nevid (Psychology, nevidj@stjohns.edu) published an article, “In Pursuit of the Perfect Lecture,” in the Association for Psychological Science Observer (February 2006); presented two papers: “Mastery Quizzing: A New Signaling Technique” at the Conference on Undergraduate Teaching of Psychology in Monticello, NY and “In Pursuit of the Perfect Lecture” at the 13th Midwest Institute for Students and Teachers of Psychology (MISTOP) in Glen Ellyn, IL (March 2006).

Professor Mary Noe (Criminal Justice and Legal Studies, noem@stjohns.edu) published two articles: “The Burden of Proof in IDEA due process hearings,” (Quinlan publishing) and “Burden of Proof Implications of Schaffer v. Weast,” in Quinlan’s Special Education Law Bulletin (March 2006); spoke at the Special Education Parent Teacher Association (SEPTA) in the Farmingdale, NY school district (January 2006).

Dr. Sang-Ki Park (Pharmaceutical Sciences, parks@stjohns.edu) presented a paper, “Modulation Of Hypoxia-Inducible Factor Mediated Gene Expressions By Flavonoids,” at the Society of Toxicology in San Diego (2006).

Dr. Miguel Roig (Psychology, roigm@stjohns.edu) presented “Avoiding Plagiarism and Other Unethical Writing and Authorship Practices” to faculty of the Borough of Manhattan Community College (January 2006); published “Highlights of the Conference on Plagiarism in the Sciences Held in New York City” in Science Editor; presented two papers: one with a SI campus psychology undergraduate, Amanda Marks: “An Exploration of Students’ and Professors’ Authorship Contributions to EPA Conference Presentations” and another titled “Affective Characteristics of Academic Excuse-Use” at a symposium on fraudulent academic excuses also at the 77th Annual Meeting of the Eastern Psychological Association in Baltimore, MD (March 2006).
Sr. Nivard Stabile, O.P. (Theology and Religious Studies, stabilen@stjohns.edu) facilitated a presentation on The Purpose-Driven Life at St. John’s University (April 2006).

Dr. Richard Stalter (Biological Sciences, stalterr@stjohns.edu) published an article, “Effect of Wrack Accumulation on Salt Marsh Vegetation in South Carolina Salt Marsh,” in Southeastern Biology (March 2006).

Dr. Ralph A. Stephani (Pharmaceutical Sciences, stephanr@stjohns.edu) presented a paper, “Neurotoxicity Of Some Anticonvulsant N, N’-Substituted Spirohydantoins,” at the Society of Toxicology in San Diego (2006).

Professor Anne Tedesco (Fine Arts, tedescoa@stjohns.edu) performed a solo piano concert at the Hofstra Cultural Center, Monroe Theater (April 2006).

Dr. Joseph Trumino (Social Sciences, truminoj@stjohns.edu) presented a paper, “Ball Field as Catalyst for the Creation of Community,” at the Eastern Sociological Society annual meeting (February 2006); presider at a session on “Gender Construction.”

Professor Ellen Tufano (Computer Science, Mathematics and Science, tufanoe@stjohns.edu) received an award for the paper, “Models for Instructional Systems Design and their Application to University Faculty Development Programs,” in the Long Island University Doctoral Student Research Paper competition; the paper was also presented at the University’s Doctoral Research Colloquium (April 2006).

Dr. May A. Webber (Humanities, webberm@stjohns.edu) presented a paper, “Embryonic Stem Cell Research: For the Good of Humanity?,” at the Virginia Humanities Conference on Ethics in Fredericksburgh, Virginia (March 2006).

Dr. Ann C. Wintergerst (Languages and Literatures, winterga@stjohns.edu) published two articles: “Give a Man a Fish” (with Dr. A. DeCapua, New York University) in TESOL’s Intercultural Communication IS Newsletter (December 2005) and “Assessment and Alternatives in Assessment” in Idiom (Spring 2006); presented “Promoting Cross-cultural Awareness through Experiential Activities” (with Dr. A. DeCapua, New York University) at the 40th Annual International Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages Conference in Tampa, FL (March 2006).

Faculty News
If you would like to send an entry to “Faculty News,” the deadline for the September issue is August 14th. We prefer that you email the information to CTL@stjohns.edu. We reserve the right to edit all material received. Material included in CTL Faculty News will be sent to Dominic Scianna for distribution in a news release.

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**e-Portfolios: An Overview of Applications in a Sport Management Course**

Carol A. Fletcher, (College of Professional Studies, fletchec@stjohns.edu)

The purpose of this presentation was to provide a synopsis of work on the utilization of e-portfolios in sport management professional preparation (students). The benefits of the e-portfolio development process are similar to the benefits of the more traditional hardcopy portfolio. However, the enhanced medium of the e-portfolio offers more creative ways to exhibit and demonstrate unique abilities and talents. Whether the portfolio is in digital format or in the traditional hardcopy, it serves as a display of accomplishments and goals.

The electronic portfolio is a means of compiling self-selected items that provide evidence of expertise and development. The purpose of the portfolio determines the type of items to be included. Potentially, any combination of materials that can be digitized can be included as documentation of work that the person has created. A purposeful compilation of materials by electronic means provides a more powerful statement than the traditional hardcopy format.

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Virtual Community, Real Discussion: An Intranet Forum in the University’s Science-Core Course
Sangtian Liu, (St. John’s College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, lius@stjohns.edu)

My CTL Fellows project was an investigation of the role of the intranet forum in the University’s science-core course (Scientific Inquiry) based on a two-year classroom study of St. John’s Central and WebCT message/discussion boards. The internet provides new communication channels in the rapidly changing information age. The intranet forum is a fast-growing online community that offers new ways of teaching and learning science for students with a wide range of science backgrounds and professional goals. However, a virtual community is just as real as the people behind it. Many non-computational issues need to be addressed so that we can enjoy the benefits of an intranet forum without losing our educational goals. My presentation focuses on the issues of virtual community, information distribution and gathering, information structure in discussion boards, student assignments and evaluation, as well as the archiving of messages.

Electronic Documentation of Requests in an Institutionally Based Drug Information Service
Nicole Maisch, (College of Pharmacy and Allied Health Professions, maischn@stjohns.edu)

The St. John’s University Drug Information Service at Long Island Jewish Medical Center, located in New Hyde Park, New York, serves as an experiential rotation site for fifth and sixth year pharmacy students. The Center is directed by two clinical faculty members from the College of Pharmacy and Allied Health Professions. As one of these faculty, I focused my project on increasing the efficiency of retrieving drug information requests through the development of a database. This database would help document requests, allowing for quicker retrieval and enhancing the service’s quality assurance initiatives. I also wanted to link the database with a website that requestors could easily access. Both the database and the website would help to improve the written communication skills of pharmacy students.

International Communication
Basilio Monteiro, (College of Professional Studies, monteirb@stjohns.edu)

I attempted different technology interventions to suit the learning styles of my students. My project is primarily focused on using the internet as an integral learning tool along with text books and other traditional classroom activities. The internet potentially can bring the world to the students; the challenge has been to incorporate the internet as a sound and helpful pedagogical tool for learning about global communication, world cultures, and the phenomenon of globalization.

The Juxtaposition of the Visual with the Verbal in WebCT Distance Learning Classes: Purpose, Project, Process, Presentation
Claire O'Donoghue, (College of Professional Studies, odonogc@stjohns.edu)

The purpose of my Fellows project was to learn how to integrate and juxtapose selected artworks with literary texts assigned in my distance learning classes on the WebCT platform. To do this, I began by exploring the possibilities of the “Image Data Base” feature on WebCT. Finding this feature limiting, I consulted St. John’s e-Studio personnel about available imaging software that would help me to achieve my project’s purpose of creating a gallery of visual and verbal intertextualities. The e-studio introduced me to Dreamweaver software but its application was complicated and working with it became daunting. Frustrated, I explained the difficulties I was experiencing at a Fellows’ meeting and was directed to KEEPtoolkit, a free program developed by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching http://kml.carnegiefoundation.org/news/projectKit.html. KEEPtoolkit’s features and applications were less complex than Dreamweaver’s applications and better served my purpose of juxtaposing a work of art with a literary text.
Perceptions of Graduating Students at St. John’s University

Results from the 2005 College Student Survey (CSS)
Prepared by: Office of Institutional Research

Introduction

College Student Survey (CSS) is a national senior survey developed by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at UCLA. Results can be used to assess a wide variety of institutional practices. In Spring 2005, graduating students received an invitation to complete the survey. Three hundred and six students (9.3%) responded. Because of the small response rates, results should be used with caution. This report, prepared by the Office of Institutional Research, summarizes the results of St. John’s students as compared to private institutions, identified as peers.

Highlights of the Survey Results

Overall satisfaction with St. John’s is fairly lower than private institutions: college experience (73% vs. 86%); quality of instruction (71% vs. 86%); and sense of community among students (56% vs. 73%). When asked whether they would still choose the same college if they could make their college choice over, 77% of St. John’s and 84% of peers indicated they would.

As compared to private institutions, St. John’s and their peers are most satisfied with the following areas:
- Courses in their major field (83% vs. 86%)
- Class size (80% vs. 87%)
- Interaction with other students (79% vs. 86%)
- Availability of Internet access (74% vs. 84%)
- Amount of contact with faculty (71% vs. 79%).

The least satisfied areas for both St. John’s and private institutions are:
- Campus health services (31% vs. 52%)
- Job placement services (37% vs. 48%)
- Financial aid services (43% vs. 50%).

As compared to private institutions, a higher percentage of St. John’s seniors noted that the faculty frequently provide them with the following:
- Encouragement to pursue graduate/professional study (49% vs. 34%)
- Advice and guidance about their educational program (37% vs. 24%)
- A letter of recommendation (36% vs. 28%).

A lower percentage of St. John’s students noted that the faculty frequently provide them with the following:
- Intellectual challenge and stimulation (32% vs. 46%)
- An opportunity to discuss coursework outside class (33% vs. 40%).

During a typical week, St. John’s students spend one hour more than their peers attending classes/labs (an average of 13.1 hours for St. John’s and 12.1 for private), but three hours less studying/doing homework (6.7 vs. 9.9). Almost one-third of St. John’s students indicated that they work full-time while attending school (31% vs. 10%). Similarly, St. John’s students spend three times as much as their peers working-off campus (13.4 hours vs. 4.5) and commuting (5.5 vs. 1.7), and less time working on campus, socializing with friends, partying or exercising.

St. John’s students participate less often than their peers, in the following:
- A study-abroad program (5% vs. 30%)
- Receiving course assignments through the Internet (45% vs. 58%)
- Using the library for research or homework - frequently only (38% vs. 43%).
St. John’s students rated themselves slightly lower than the peer group in: academic ability (79% vs. 83%); writing ability (59% vs. 64%); public speaking ability (45% vs. 51%); computer skills (43% vs. 49%); and mathematical ability (41% vs. 47%).

Students of St. John’s and private institutions have similar top five personal goals but differ in terms of ranking and percentages:
- Raising a family (86% vs. 81%)
- Being very well off financially (81% vs. 60%)
- Helping others who are in difficulty (78% vs. 75%)
- Becoming an authority in my field (73% vs. 63%)
- Obtaining recognition from colleagues for contributions to my field (63% vs. 54%).

When asked how they describe themselves now as compared to when they started college, the top three areas that St. John’s students rated as stronger or much stronger are: knowledge of a particular field or discipline (52%); general knowledge (40%); and public speaking ability (37%).

When asked what they plan to be doing after graduation, St. John’s students and the peer group have the same top two plans: work full-time (67% vs. 62%); and attend graduate/professional school (57% vs. 31%).

Results from the 2005 College Student Survey are consistent with the 2005 Your First College Year (YFCY) survey in the following areas:
- During a typical week, St. John’s students spend less time than their peers studying/doing homework
- St. John’s students and their peers have the same top five personal goals
- St. John’s students are less satisfied than their peers with the overall college experience, quality of instruction, and sense of community among students.

As part of the ongoing collaboration between the Office of Institutional Research (IR) (www.stjohns.edu/about/ir) and the CTL, we are featuring highlights of studies on various aspects of University life prepared by IR for institutional assessment and improvement.

What Our Students Learn from Us: Beyond the Course Material Revisited
Peter P. Cardalena, Jr. (College of Professional Studies, cardalep@stjohns.edu)

In two prior essays, “Beyond the Course Material” (CTL Newsletter November 2004) and “What I Learn from Our Students” (CTL Newsletter December 2005), I attempted to demonstrate the value of education from varied viewpoints. As an addendum to these pieces, I now offer what I consider the natural follow-up, “What Our Students Learn from Us.” This is information that clearly goes beyond the course materials.

It is my belief that I am the only professor in the College of Professional Studies who was in the charter class of the College, when it was founded in 1962. At that time it was called the St. John’s Junior College, and it was under the direction of Dean C. Carl Robusto. It evolved through several name changes to its current status, yet its direction and mission have never changed. I believe this philosophy is engrained in it, and I teach with that as a backdrop. I knew then, what I have known through all these years, that this College is indeed special, and experience revealed that I and thousand of other students benefited from the following:

SECOND CHANCE: I still remember being seated in Dean Robusto’s office, when application for admission required an interview. The college mission was presented: the College and its faculty would take the extra steps to insure each student’s growth and fulfillment of potential. Today, that interview reminds me of a scene from a movie called “The Chosen.” At one point a man approaches his Rabbi and tells the
Rabbi that the man’s son has gone astray. It appears that no matter what the father does, it is not making an impact on his son. The father is now ready to surrender. He literally wants to give up on his son. The Rabbi replied. “No matter how far away your son goes, you must go the distance to meet him.” Does this mean if the son only goes one percent, is it my responsibility to go the other ninety-nine percent, and of course the answer is yes. That is the sum and substance of what this College is all about. It is a nurturing college. That thought struck me then with its understanding and empathy; my education began with the sure knowledge that all who enter these halls are entitled to a second chance. That interview is entrenched in my memory forever. My teaching lives that thought.

VALUE OF A COLLEGE EDUCATION: When I continued my educational process at St. Vincent’s College, the third name change for the College of Professional Studies, I was a New York City Police Officer with five children. Coupling that career with the street knowledge that I encountered during my upbringing on the streets of East New York, Brooklyn, I believed that I knew all there was to know. My cronies from that childhood were either dead, in prison or civil servant colleagues of mine. What could one possibly learn from individuals who were born and raised in academia? In a short time I was pleasantly surprised. I immediately became a better husband, parent and police officer. My heart and soul were opened to characteristics I did not know existed. I learned from professors who gave of themselves – gave empathy, sympathy, self-reliance and a host of virtues that exceeded the course outlines in every subject. A few years ago I heard Ed Lowe a noted newspaper columnist speak, he said that in life “Every Thing You Do, Matters.” It reminded me of what this College gives each student and what they learn from every single thing. I know that all 126 credits of a college degree assist every endeavor that our students will undertake in their lifetime.

ALL ARE NOT CREATED EQUAL: I do not believe that a professor exists who has not heard a student complain about another professor. While I listen carefully to their complaints, I avoid any commentary about my colleagues. Instead I point out to them a benefit of their education: in life our students will meet every personality type. Their college experience is giving them a preliminary view of what can be expected. While all are created equal, each is unique. Our students are better prepared to understand that in life, some individuals will establish parameters that must be met, while others will lighten their load. Understanding these variables will allow a journey through life that our students will be well-prepared for.

GLOBAL MULTI CULTURAL WORLD: The location of the University and its mission allow our students a head start in the world they will shortly enter and inherit. They learn immediately that our student body represents a myriad of cultures. Fortunately, there is an interchange of attitudes, thoughts, religions and cultures. From the depths of these viewpoints a tolerance and understanding of our global neighbors becomes a part and parcel of their daily existence. Our students have learned firsthand the ingredients for a world at peace.

FINALLY, THE PROFESSORS BELIEVE IN THE STUDENTS: The professors in this College have a tremendous belief in the students’ capability and it does not end on graduation. Years ago I knew a learned law professor, who although an extremely difficult grader, had filled classes. He guided students both in and out of the classroom. When two of his students became lawyers, one immediately became the professor’s personal lawyer, and the second student became his co-author on several books and writing projects. What better way to support students, and what overwhelming belief in the students we teach?

Finally, as I am writing this, I just received a handwritten note from my former English Professor. I will not mention his name, as I know his own sense of modesty. Most of you know him anyway as he is truly a role model for many of us. When I have the privilege of watching him, whether he is advising students, teaching or in attendance at a meeting, he is the essence of what this College gives its students. The consummate professor, his abilities never ends. His note compliments me on my last essay. As a retired police lieutenant, attorney and professor (in that order), I have received countless forms of recognition and awards. None will be as valued as this note that supports my position that our students learn much more than a syllabus.
Informality in the Classroom
Jordan Schneider, (St. John’s College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, schneij1@stjohns.edu)

Editor’s Note: This essay is in response to Richard Scorce’s article, “A Case for Formality in the Classroom,” which appeared in the February 2006 issue of the CTL Newsletter.

I don’t like formality. To me, it is a set of rules and structures set up when deep human-to-human contact is uncomfortable or impossible. While that might be appropriate in some settings, the classroom is definitely not one of them. I do not consider myself to be an English teacher in front of students, but rather a person teaching English to other people learning English, and that human contact seems quite at odds with formality.

Formal relationships can only reach so far. Our students are very much used to being treated as something partially, yet not completely, human. For twelve years, all of their classes have required their presence, their attention, their ability to retain and recite information, and precious little else. Their passions, their fears, and their challenges have long since been left at the classroom door. They have learned very well to hold back.

By limiting what we can do and say in the classroom, we limit our students as well. I teach mostly Freshman Composition courses, and in those courses, self-expression develops into critical thinking. I have to provoke, challenge, and even occasionally offend my students to get them to open up, in part I think, because of the formality imposed on them in their previous classrooms. In high school, their personal opinions about their subjects and their schooling have given them more trouble than value, and they have learned that it is better to remain silently anonymous than to form and to fight for their own burgeoning values. College should be a place where students can challenge authority rather than automatically bow to it.

Formality should not be the standard of our classroom behavior. Rather than deciding if a technique, speech, or assignment is formal enough, we should be asking ourselves if it is educational enough. If a method or style makes students learn what they need to know, it is successful, as sloppy or lowbrow as it might appear. Students are often shocked to hear me use pop culture references, from cartoons to movies to music, and that bothers me. Because their entertainment is widely considered “informal,” its educational and literary value is overlooked, even and especially by the students themselves. Artificial standards of behavior lead to artificial standards of value, talent, and worth.

I do absolutely agree that a class needs direction, focus, and structure, but these should come from leadership and enthusiasm, not from a set of traditional rules. When we show our love and passion for our subjects, our students are infected by it. When they see that we give them work not from discipline but from necessity, our students become willing to try. When they see that our criticisms come from honesty and experience rather than spite and arrogance, our students tend to actually listen to our comments.

We should not abandon our role as teachers. We should transcend it, to bring to it all we can of ourselves that is useful, including the sticky, icky, and awkward. By showing our weaknesses as well as our strengths, we give our students the chance to see us as people, people who care, rather than employees or taskmasters. We need to make it very obvious to them why we have chosen this career. While idolization works for some, it also creates a chasm between teacher and student. Yes, we want our students to look up to us, to follow us, but we must ask who or what they are following. To paraphrase an old Taoist proverb, “If the glory is in the man, of what value is the position? And, if the glory is in the position, of what value is the man?”

If we teach to a mind, only the mind will learn. If we teach to the whole person, the whole person will learn. If we want our lessons to stick, we must teach to the whole person, and that requires us to step around and above formality and strictly defined roles. We all take our different paths in the classroom, but they should all lead to teaching the entire student, not just a subject.
St. John’s University Connects with a Rural Community in Nicaragua
Peggy Jacobson (St. John’s College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, jacobsop@stjohns.edu)

St. John’s University is a community active in its commitment to service as evidenced by the infusion of service learning into the academic curriculum. Currently, several students, faculty and staff are extending their service beyond the academic arena to the villages of Amatitan and Chacraseca in Nicaragua.

It began a few years ago at a meeting of the Vincentian Chair’s Conference on Social Justice. This conference brings together people from within and outside of the university to inspire one another in fostering our commitment to serving the poor. When Joe Martin, a member of Project Nicaragua a small group of parishioners from Our Lady Queen of Martyrs Church on Long Island (www.projectnica.org) spoke with Bob Mangione and Joanne Carroll about efforts to improve living conditions in the towns of Chacraseca and Amatitan, they immediately expressed a desire to get their college and students involved.

Around the same time a volunteer nurse in Nicaragua was training community health care workers in basic first aid practices and was desperately in need of supplies for first aid kits. The pharmacy students (in particular, Craig Schmidt and Christi Churmusi) responded with generosity and enthusiasm. Donations of over-the-counter medications from St. John’s Hospital were obtained and sent to Nicaragua.

Students learned of my own involvement in Project Nicaragua when Janet Mangione, Associate Director of the Service Learning Center, mentioned my trips while speaking in one of my classes. Shortly afterwards, several students approached me and wanted to participate. On the next trip, three graduate students helped to provide speech-language and hearing screenings. Members of the Speech Department who have traveled to Nicaragua include faculty Nancy Colodny and Peggy Jacobson, graduate students Jesenia Gonzales and Michelle Sanchez, and alumni Maritza Cajigas and Yesenia Phillips.

Our involvement began three years ago when Liz Salmon, a Maryknoll sister working in Chacraseca, asked for speech-language screenings for a few individuals suspected of having communication disorders. Performing the actual screenings was relatively easy as it was obvious that all were experiencing significant communication problems ranging from deafness and cerebral palsy to mental retardation. The challenge, however, lay in finding assistance for these individuals in an area where little existed in the way of rehabilitation services. Consequently, our efforts have focused on identifying and finding services for those with special needs.

Numerous obstacles make it difficult to obtain services. To begin with, there is limited access to basic healthcare including pre- and post-natal care, and childhood immunizations. Hearing, vision, and developmental screenings are not routinely provided. Furthermore, there is a lack of awareness regarding therapeutic services that might be beneficial and an absence of networking support for family members of individuals with special needs. Moreover, many parents are fearful that their children will be taken away from them and sent to boarding schools if they are identified as having problems. Children with obvious disabilities typically do not attend school, yet many children with other learning problems can be found within the regular education program. When Jesenia Gonzales, a graduate student, conducted an informal needs assessment to explore the types of problems encountered by teachers, she found that problems related to literacy, speech-language, and hearing were widespread.

Our colleagues in the Speech Department - not actually traveling to Nicaragua - have been extremely generous in supporting our efforts. When we hosted a small fund raising dinner to cover the cost of renting a four-wheel drive truck for travel, the response was overwhelming. Not only did we collect enough to rent the truck, but we were also able to purchase additional therapy materials to bring down. Another kindness came from Northeastern Technologies, a private business involved with the University. This company has generously loaned us equipment, in addition to donating an audiometer to be used in Nicaragua. A few days before my trip in January, I decided to stop at the St. John’s Bookstore to inquire if they had any items to donate. I was delighted to receive hundreds of St. John’s caps and baby blankets for Nicaragua from the bookstore manager, Denise Servidio. One observer commented “Wow, you sure made a lot of people happy with those caps.”
Small acts of service can make a tremendous difference to others while enriching our lives. We are fortunate to be part of a community that provides an atmosphere supporting this type of service experience. By disseminating information about the needs in Nicaragua, we hope that others will want to become involved. Future missions will target education, networking, and empowerment of these communities so that they may develop improved standards of healthcare and education.

WebCT Sessions
As you may know, the University has switched to an updated version of WebCT. If you would like to also update your knowledge of WebCT, Edith Chasen (Assistant Professor, Physics Department, St. John's College), who is involved in the University's Online Learning program, has created a set of tutorials that are helpful, easy to understand, and extremely useful. They are available at: http://facpub.stjohns.edu/~chasene/DL2/Refresher/Refresher.htm. Even those who have little or no experience with WebCT can learn a great deal from this resource.

The Online Learning Program is also offering a series of hands-on workshops on various aspects of using WebCT, from the beginning steps to more advanced applications. Edith Chasen will be conducting these sessions from 12:10 to 2:10 p.m. in the Library room 411 on:

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May 11</td>
<td>Introduction to WebCT</td>
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<td>May 18</td>
<td>Managing Course Content</td>
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<td>June 1</td>
<td>Managing Communications</td>
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<td>June 8</td>
<td>Grading and Communicating Grades</td>
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<td>June 15</td>
<td>Quizzes and Surveys</td>
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<td>June 22</td>
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<td>June 29</td>
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To register: Call the CTL at ext. 1859 or email us at CTL@stjohns.edu.

Useful Resources

Academic Information Resources Newsletter
The University has launched a new Newsletter that is particularly useful for faculty. It deals with Academic Information Resources including those of the University Libraries, Online Learning, and Information Technology. This is a wonderful way to keep up with all the latest initiatives that are germane both to our teaching and research. The Newsletter is available at on the University’s internet website at http://new.stjohns.edu/media/3/e14a96e0d37a499689b6d2e721cfc899.pdf.

Web of Knowledge
Until May 31, 2006, the University Libraries have a trial subscription to the Web of Knowledge, a collection of databases. One of its best features is the ability to search for article citations. This is a particularly valuable research tool because you can start from a single article on a subject of interest and then build a bibliography from the articles and books that it references. You can also discover where your articles have been cited by other authors.

This trial subscription provides a great opportunity to try a new resource and then let the library know if you like it. This will increase the chances that it will be selected as a regular database for the University Libraries website. You can access the Web of Knowledge by clicking on “Trial Subscriptions” on the Libraries main webpage.