

CTE NOTEBOOK

Volume 11
Issue 1
Fall 2008

**"Ideas for Starting
the New Academic
Year"**

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Reinert CTE Mission Statement

The mission of the Paul C. Reinert, S.J. Center for Teaching Excellence is to support Saint Louis University faculty and graduate students so that they can better serve the intellectual, spiritual, and social needs of all learners.

The Reinert Center for Teaching Excellence

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This issue of the CTE Notebook focuses on strategies for beginning the new academic year. We asked faculty from various departments around campus to share ideas and tips about how they either personally prepare for the new semester or how they create a learning environment in the classroom for their students.

I love the preparations for a new semester, although I do often claim that I am "losing my mind" at certain points! One thing that I enjoy is starting a new course, or revamping an old one. I like to take a piece of poster board and mark off squares, one for each class session. I block off holidays and other "rocks in the stream". Then I use differently colored post-it notes and write a class activity, topic for lecture, assignment, exam, etc. on each of them. I stick the post-its on the board, and just keep re-arranging them until a nicely sequenced and balanced pattern/flow emerges. I find that this method inspires me creatively, helps me to see the "big picture" of the course, and makes it easier to type up my syllabus. I have shown many of my colleagues this technique, and they now use it, too.

- *Deborah Davidson, Occupational Therapy*

Before class starts: I send a group e-mail to the entire class a few days before the first day of class. In it, I introduce myself, give them information about where the class will meet and when, tell them whether books are in the bookstore, and generally let them know that I'm looking forward to meeting them and getting to know them during the coming semester. Students have told me how much they've liked this e-mail and how it helps build a feeling of community even before we meet in person.

On the first day of class: In my undergraduate classes, I tell students that I will want to meet with them for about 1/2 hour in my office. We might use this time to get to know each other better, to ask and answer questions, or simply to chat. Most students are surprised by my request but later, indicate that the meeting was one of the best parts of the class.

On the first day of class: I ask students to introduce each other but to link the introduction to the topic of the class. For example, in a lifespan development class, I might ask them to show us an item in their backpacks or purses that reflects their developmental status (e.g., a student's first credit card).

- *Mary Chittooran, Educational Studies*

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From the Director

The beginning of an academic year is an exciting time; a time of fresh beginnings. In *Teaching within the Rhythms of the Semester* (Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1995), authors Duffy and Jones refer to the beginning of a semester as the “honeymoon period when energies are high and students are open to new approaches”, as well as the “period when classroom community must be built.” From years of teaching, I know that colleagues are a great resource when it comes to getting new and interesting ideas for approaching the semester. With that in mind, we invited several faculty members to share a practical idea or strategy that they use to get the semester off to a good start. This first issue of the CTE Notebook for the academic year 2008-2009 highlights responses that we received to this invitation. In it you will find not only teaching tips but some ideas for managing time and obligations. We are indebted to the faculty members who generously contributed teaching tips.

This issue of the Notebook also spotlights events planned to celebrate the Center’s new location on the second floor of Pius XII Memorial Library. The week of September 8th will feature many informal opportunities to learn about the services that the Center offers to faculty and graduate teaching assistants. The complete schedule of events can be found in this newsletter. In particular, we invite you to join us for an open house on September 8th beginning at 3:00 for a blessing of our new space by John Kavanaugh, S.J.. We also encourage you to join us on September 10th for a workshop on “Bringing Lectures to Life Through Stories and Anecdotes,” a conversational, interactive approach to teaching content by author, speaker, Lynn Rubright, professor emeritus, Webster University, School of Education.

The Center is open from 8:00 – 5:00, Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, and from 8:00 – 6:00 on Tuesdays. We invite you to stop in at your leisure to meet our staff, tour our new facilities and learn about our programs and services.

On behalf of the entire CTE staff, I wish you a productive, successful academic year.

We’ve Moved!
Please Come visit us at our new location!



Bringing Lectures to Life Through Stories and Anecdotes: A Conversational, Interactive Approach to Teaching Content

Presented by:
Lynn Rubright
Professor Emeritus
Webster University, School of Education
Wednesday, September 10, 2008
1:00-3:00pm
DuBourg Hall 409
Registration Required!
(register online at http://cte.slu.edu/launch_week.html)

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For me, the start of the semester requires that the items that have migrated throughout the year return to their proper home. As I do this, I recall the excitement we felt as I pulled out the book or article that perfectly fit their project. As I move into the classroom, I try to capture that sense of doing things together. I sincerely believe that it is unstated expectations that contribute to most of the tension and disruptions in class. ("You expected me to answer your email in 2 hours?") On the first day I tell them that the syllabus is my expectations for them but, just like any communication event, we all contribute. I ask them to share their expectations for me and we discuss if and how we can all meet each others expectations. We also discuss what should be done when we cannot....if I cannot return a paper in 4 days or if they cannot turn a paper in on time. By taking those few minutes during the first class we create an environment where the discussion and clarification of expectations, as well as the sharing of knowledge, is appropriate communication for a professor and student.

- Paaige Turner, Communication

Some thoughts on starting a new semester

Over plan. I know in detail what I intend to do at each course meeting before the semester starts (readings, exercises, quizzes, assignments), so both the big picture and the way I plan to fill it in are in place. Of course I am ready to change things if a topic requires more elaboration, or student questions or class discussion take us to unexpected places. I expect students to be organized and ready each day, so I want to model that approach myself.

Start the course content in some way the first day. Though syllabus information and course expectations are important to discuss, I also want students to engage the course content with their first impression of the course. Theology means wrestling with the big questions. In every theology course, I start with the story of Jacob wrestling with a shadowy opponent in Genesis 32:22-32.

-Daniel Finucane, Theological Studies

To prepare for the fall semester, I look back on students' comments from assessment surveys and course evaluations from the preceding spring semester. I read the comments early in the summer, take several weeks to let them sink in, and then carefully consider them again when I can be objective about the feedback. Each semester, I try things a little bit differently—I modify learning objectives, focus on different aspects of my teaching, or expose students to different learning vehicles. Thus, the students' opinions are essential in helping me tweak my approaches so that the next semester can be successful for everyone.

- Jonathan Fisher, Biology

Whenever possible, I try to build an entire course around a content-appropriate theme. I prepare as many materials and activities as possible around the theme. On the first day of class I like to begin the session with a creative, interactive activity (such as a game, song, story or poem) to grab the students' attention. Course syllabus information is covered at the end of the first session. This approach is not only fun for the students but it keeps me interested and engaged as well!

- Elizabeth Zeibeg, Clinical Laboratory Sciences

I teach primarily freshmen and sophomores. With the freshmen, I take extra time to review the syllabus since they are new at reading a syllabus. I explain certain things that they should look for when reviewing the syllabus of any class. With sophomore students, I make sure that I hit the highlights of the syllabus and spend more time on my expectations of them in terms of the quality of the assignments. With all students, I put forth the expectation that the classroom will be a place of respect for everyone.

-Ginge Kettenbach, Physical Therapy

The Reinert Center for Teaching Excellence
presents

CTE's Week of Events

Join us in a special week of events to launch our new location on the 2nd floor of Pius XII Memorial Library

Monday, September 8

3:00 – 5:00p.m. : Blessing of Center by Fr. John Kavanaugh, S. J.
Open House and reception to follow
Pius Memorial Library, 2nd Floor, AB Wing

Tuesday, September 9

12:00 – 1:00p.m. : Brown Bag Conversation: Teaching and Technology
Sandy Gambill, BSC 254

12:00 – 1:00p.m. : Brown Bag Conversation: Service Learning
Mark Pousson, Allied Health 2030

Wednesday, September 10

10:00 - 11:00a.m. : Conversation on Teaching Enhancement Programs
Beth Hill, Allied Health 2024

1:00 - 3:00p.m. : "Bringing Lectures to Life Through Stories & Anecdotes"
Lynn Rubright, DuBourg 409 (please register)

Thursday, September 11

12:30 - 2:00p.m. : Integrating Learning Across the Curriculum
Beth Hill & Liz Fathman, Knight's Room, Pius Library

Friday, September 12

10:00 - 11:00a.m. : Conversation on Teaching Enhancement Programs
Beth Hill, DB 406

12:00 - 1:00p.m. : Brown Bag Conversation: Teaching and Technology
Sandy Gambill, Allied Health 1036

12:00 - 1:00p.m. : Brown Bag Conversation: Service Learning
Mark Pousson, VH 219

http://cte.slu.edu/launch_week.html

How to Transition Into the Semester

Shawn Nordell, Biology

We all know that the fall semester is almost upon us and this causes many of us to start hyperventilating at the thoughts of all that is left to be done and all that we somehow did not manage to get done over the summer. The summer can be a terrific time of research and writing productivity as the demands from committees and teaching can be somewhat attenuated. So how do we prepare for the upcoming fall semester and increased demands of teaching, research and service?

1) Write out your long term goals and schedule them

For many academics, publications are the key to success. Therefore, writing is critical to your success. Although most academics find time to do research, teach and committee work they often do not schedule time for writing.

2) Schedule your writing.

Research on successful academics indicates that most write in short, focused time periods each and every day and that they schedule this time first (for more information see Richard Boice's Advice for New Faculty Members). Schedule a 20-30 minute (or longer) writing session for the beginning of your day before you get caught up in other commitments. It's easy to get sidetracked as you start responding to requests so do your writing early before these can happen. If you can only fit in 10 minutes a day this will still help you maintain a continuous concentration on your writing which can be very beneficial and productive. It may also be useful to form an on campus writing group or join an online writing clubs (for more information check out the Academic Writing Club) where you can share your writing experiences and progress.

3) Practice saying "No"

Unfortunately this was not a class in graduate school and many faculty have little experience in this practice. However, before you agree to take on a new project or responsibility make sure that this is something you actually have time to complete. You can acknowledge the request and reply that you really need to determine if you have the time available to apply to this important project. Write out a schedule of all of your commitments for each and every day for the next week or two.

Be sure to include teaching preparation time, research time, writing time, email time, student meetings, lunch, and other committee requirements, etc. You may want to time yourself as you do some of these activities to see if your perception of the time they require is the same as the actual amount of time you spend on that activity (we often underestimate the time we spend on email).

Once you have done this you can determine if you have time to add another project to this schedule. If not, you can reply that although you believe that this is an important project you do not have the time resources to complete this work (for more information see Time Management from the Inside Out by Julie Morgenstern). One colleague I know then suggests to the requester that if they could remove one of their prior commitments they would be happy to use that time to work on this new project.

4) Limit the time you spend on class preparation and grading

This may seem like true heresy but many faculty spend more time than needed to prepare for their classes. Is a single class time that took you five hours to prepare for really an improvement of your teaching over a class time that took you two hours to prepare? Probably not. Many faculty report that they realized after the fact that they spent more time than was needed preparing for classes and that this additional time did not improve their quality of their classes. It may help to write an outline of exactly what you need to prepare and how much time you will spend before you start preparing so that you stay focused and on schedule. Some faculty use the time before class (e.g. two hours) to prepare which limits their time and allows them to better focus on the upcoming class.

5) Don't forget about you

It's easy to get lost in the sea of requests from students and administrators but scheduling time for you is what will help you better accommodate those requests. Don't forget to schedule lunch and/or a short break during the day where you get up and walk outside and smell the humidity! A short break can allow you time to reconnect with your goals and thoughts and become more focused and refreshed.

More Teaching Tips

These teaching tips along with other teaching topics can be found at: www.wku.edu/teaching/timesages/

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Making Wise Use of Class Time

David M. Behrman, Somerset Community College

In my several years of teaching in college classrooms, I have become aware of the high value of time in class. Because class time is precious, I endeavor to make the best use of it that I can. I can suggest the following simple tips.

1. **Arrive a few minutes early.** I have noticed that many instructors tend to arrive right at the designated start time or even a few minutes late. Arriving late robs precious time from your class. I use the time *before* class to take care of essential preliminaries such as unpacking and organizing my materials and setting up the overhead projector. I also use this time to write reminders to the students on the board and pass back papers.
2. **Be organized.** When I was a student, there was nothing so maddening to me as sitting in the classroom of a professor who came unprepared. You may think you know the material so well that you can lecture without notes or without a plan. You may think the students won't know any better. Believe me, the students can tell the difference between an instructor who is prepared and one who isn't.
3. **Stay on task.** We as instructors sometimes experience frustration when our students converse, focus on their cell phones, or otherwise fail to pay attention to our scintillating lectures. For students, it can be just as frustrating when the instructor makes a habit of taking class time to engage in activities unrelated to the course. Some instructors have the notion that telling stories about their hobbies or about their families is a good way to connect with the students. I think small doses of this may be beneficial. But to take a substantial portion of the class for topics unrelated to the course sets a bad example and is a waste of the students' time. Good students will not appreciate it.
4. **Vary your presentation.** Most instructors are familiar with the glazed look in students' eyes, indicating a lack of comprehension.

When you see this, it is essential to move quickly to some other mode to re-engage your audience. No matter how well organized and fascinating your lecture, the glazed look is a sure sign that your message is not getting through. What purpose is served in continuing to lecture when your message is not being heard? In teaching developmental mathematics, I have found that lecturing more than ten or fifteen minutes is counterproductive. At this point, an activity that engages the students is a much better use of class time.

Starting the Academic Year off Right: Learn Every Student's Name Quickly!

Tim Miller, Morehead State University

In so many instances the first impressions are often the most lasting ones. We all were college students once; and either consciously, or subconsciously, we learned that the instructors who were slow at learning names were often the least affective at inspiring us with a willingness to learn. We do not want to start off on the wrong foot with our students; so what can we do?

The following are strategies to help in learning names and faces quickly. With these strategies, and a little bit of personal care, you could learn the majority of your student's names, and faces, by the second class meeting.

Strategy 1

Well in advance of the beginning of the school term print the rosters for your courses. If your institutions software permits print the picture that accompanies the name. Preview these rosters several times and pay attention to any unusual names and/or general characteristics. By doing this beforehand we create, in our mind, a cognitive imprint of student faces and names. At this juncture when you study the roster pay attention to the general attributes of your students; it is not necessary to focus on their first or last names at this time.

Strategy 2

In the first class meeting begin by introducing yourself with information on your background, and your experiences with the subject you are teaching. Give a brief statement on your academic expectations. Have each student write their name on a folded tag board 8' x 10' piece of paper.

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Have them hold the name tag so others can see it. Ask each student to briefly tell one thing about themselves. Encourage them to include what they want to share. They do not need to share anything they do not want others to know. Have students attach the name tag to their desk. The introduction may vary according to the size of the class.

Control the sharing and conclude with a brief “Student Survey” for the students to fill out. The survey will include demographic information as well as an open-end essay about their backgrounds and expectations for the course. Give students enough time to complete the survey.

While students are taking the survey walk around the room and observe the class. Notice what they are wearing and their physical characteristics. Additionally, this time spent observing will give you an opportunity to check attendance and get a feel for the academic tenor of the class. As stated above, this will give you an additional cognitive imprint of your student’s physical characteristics that can help you quickly learn names and faces.

Check to see when students are done. Give them enough time, but not too much time, to do this task. The time may vary from class to class.

Strategy 3

Besides developing a cognitive imprint of the visual characteristics of your students; arrange the room so you can form a “pneumonic placement frame” to help you remember students. This may be considered a coding device for locating students. Organize your room in advance. For the first few classes assign students to a particular place to sit. Keep a seating chart close at hand. When students are in designated rows, seats or tables it is easier to remember students. This coding technique is one of the central features of these all of these strategies. It relies on student’s natural homing tendencies. Invariably students will return to the same seat, or close to the same seat, each time they return to class. Most of the time, this homing tendency continues beyond the first two, or three, class periods.

Strategy 4

As you begin collecting surveys ask students to say a

word or two about their academic expectations of the course. This is in addition to what they have already contributed. Have them continue to bring the sign with their name on it to each class meeting. When collecting the Student Survey use the coding sequence in which you have organized your class. For example, if your class is arranged in tables collect Table 1, Seat 1, etc. Collect the surveys in this order. As students talk, write anecdotal notes and put them with the survey. Continue going down the listing, collecting surveys, and writing notes, until all have been collected. When finished you should have student surveys in the order of where students were sitting in your classroom. This method of collecting student surveys will add an additional imprint for your task of remembering student’s faces and names.

Strategy 5

When the class is over immediately begin reading the Student Surveys. Read the surveys in the order they were collected. Cover up the names and try to remember the faces and names of the students based on your anecdotal notes and recollection of what the students said in class. Refer to the “Student Survey”, the seating code and your memory to recreate what the students have said about themselves. This will give your short-term memory an additional practice with the names and faces.

Before the next class period, hopefully only minutes before, review the roster, surveys and anecdotal notes. Try to recollect the names and faces of each student; as well as where they are seated in the class.

After this last review of the course roster you should have almost committed to memory the names, seating and ancillary information about each of the students in your class. When you arrive in class begin talking to students and calling them by name. If you cannot remember all the names you can refer to your seating chart for help. It will look like you know more students than you actually do. With the right amount of care and concern your students will feel that you really are concerned about them as individuals, because you have learned their name. This should communicate that you are as concerned about them as you are about your subject and will open avenues of opportunity for you to make your subject come alive for you students.

Effective Teaching Seminar Schedule Fall 2008

September 2 @ 1:30p.m. September 5 @ 1:30p.m. Knight's Room, Pius Library	Preparing Your Syllabus Shawn Nordell, Biology Tom Valone, Biology <i>Orientation for new certificate participants immediately preceding both sessions, 1:00 - 1:30</i>
September 30 @ 1:30 p.m. October 3 @ 1:30 p.m. Knight's Room, Pius Library	Interactive Lecturing Paaige Turner, Communications
October 7 @ 1:30 p.m. October 10 @ 1:30 p.m. Knight's Room, Pius Library	Promoting Discussion in the Classroom Dan Finucane, Theological Studies <i>Teaching Portfolio Open Lab Session (immediately preceding both sessions, 12:00—1:30 pm)</i>
October 28 @ 1:30 p.m. Verhaegen 219	Active Learning Strategies Russell Blyth, Mathematics and Computer Science
November 4 @ 1:30 p.m. & November 7 @ 1:30 p.m. Knight's Room, Pius Library	The Art of Teaching Brian Till, CSB– Marketing
November 7	Deadline for completion of Portfolios for the December Certificate
November 18 @ 1:30 p.m. November 21 @ 1:30 p.m. Vehaegen 219	Classroom Assessment Ann Rule, Educational Studies Julie Weissman, Assoc. Provost
December 5 @ 3:30-5:00 p.m.	Certificate Ceremony

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