

Director's Column

Mary Stephen, Ph.D.
Director, Reinert CTE

The first issue of *The Notebook* for this academic year focused on Ignatian pedagogy. Reflection is a corner stone of Ignatian pedagogy. For this reason, contributors to this second issue were invited to write about their strategies for reflecting on teaching and learning by writing about either approaches they use to encourage student reflection or ways they reflect on their teaching.

I am going to bend the theme of reflecting on teaching and learning for this column. I will be retiring from the Center for Teaching Excellence and from SLU in early January. Since I became an employee of Saint Louis University in 2000, I have often reflected on the path and individuals who led me from a tenured faculty position at another institution to a position in SLU's Center for Teaching Excellence (later renamed Paul C. Reinert, S.J. Center for Teaching Excellence). One of the first things I learned about the Center was the unique role that faculty played in the establishment of the Center. Faculty continue to play an important role in the Center's growth today. I quickly became acquainted with SLU's very dedicated, creative faculty who truly care about their students and about their teaching. I have been humbled by the generosity of so many faculty members who have so freely given of their time to present workshops and seminars and serve on committees and as mentors. I am also grateful for the unwavering support each administration has given to the Center.

The last major project that I have been working on as director is ironically similar to the very first project that I worked on in 2000. Three months after I began working in the Center, the Teaching and Learning Lab opened in Verhaegen 212. This state of the art classroom was designed as a space for faculty to learn how to use and incorporate new learning technologies into teaching. My charge was to help make that happen. Today, I am facilitating the design of a state of the art learning studio in Des Peres Hall. This space which has been designed primarily by a team of faculty and students is part of the Herman Miller Learning Studio Research Project. Faculty teaching in the learning studio will be able to combine flexible furniture and space with a variety of new technologies to develop and explore innovative ways of fostering student learning. Additional information on the learning studio, and on programs and fellowship opportunities to support faculty in this endeavor, will be announced shortly.

Over the years I have been gifted with an advisory board that has believed strongly in the work of the Center. I thank them immensely for their dedication to the Center and for helping those of us on the staff of the Center remain focused on our mission. The growth of the Center over these ten years is a direct result of this dedication. I leave knowing that my successor will be served by an excellent staff of individuals, each of whom is committed to the work and mission of the Center today and as it moves into the future.

So many individuals across campus have shown me every day what it means to live the University's mission and to be 'men and women for others.' I am truly blessed to have been part of the Saint Louis University community.

REGULAR COLUMNISTS

“Strategies for Reflecting on Teaching and for Reflecting on Learning”

Dr. Daniel Chornet-Roses
Assistant Professor, Department of Communication, Madrid

Enhance your Teaching through Exam Grading

One tenet of my teaching philosophy is that students always *wear their thinking caps* in order to develop and improve a variety of learning outcomes. I expect that they connect bodies of knowledge, and be able to apply them to their everyday lives. Accordingly, I regularly challenge students to evaluate ideas, and to provide examples from their own experiences that illustrate concepts or that hint at alternative ways to explain them. Fostering these skills requires a well-structured lesson plan and a great deal of improvisation. In midterm and final exams, I assess students' skills via questions and scenarios that connect the exam-taking moment with classroom experiences, in order to trigger the same kind of cognitive processes. Students' exams provide two types of feedback: First, there are indicators of how students think and how effectively or not they have mastered a skill. Second, there are indicators of how effectively or not I have managed to teach a skill. While grading, I jot down ideas, and I use them to modify how I approach a lesson plan. My objective is to adapt to students' needs, and their ways of thinking and making sense out of class materials.

“Don't you recognize yourself?": Analysis of a Videotaped Presentation to Enhance Metacognition

Delivering a public presentation effectively requires a great deal of control over one's body. Frequently, students are too focused on marshaling materials, and they neglect to rehearse their body language. One strategy for students to become aware of distracting verbal and nonverbal behaviors is to perform a close analysis of their videotaped presentations. In my experience, I have learned that students who have the greatest control over their bodies are the ones able to relive the presentation while watching it. On the other hand, students with the least control over their bodies are the ones who cannot relive that moment and cannot recognize themselves in the presentation. This activity becomes an experience that they remember during subsequent presentations, and that grants them an awareness of their performances to gradually improve their skills.

“This is paper, okay?”

Ben DeFoy, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor, Department of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences

This is paper, okay? And it will make you stupid. People will write down their knowledge into books, and they will no longer need to know it, and their memory will wither. At least, Plato thought so¹.

Fast forward 2,000 years and you find Richard Feynman turning the harmful product to his advantage. Here is James Gleick's account:² Charles Weiner, encountering with a historian's glee a batch of Feynman's original notes and sketches, remarked that the materials represented 'a record of Feynman's day-to-day work.'

Feynman reacted with unexpected sharpness:

'I actually did the work on the paper,' he said.

'Well,' Weiner said, 'the work was done in your head, but the record of it is still here.'

'No, it's not a record, not really. It's working. You have to work on paper and this is the paper. Okay?'

Next time you assign a small group discussion, make sure to go around the room looking at the notes taken during the class. More importantly, pose a problem and check to see how many write something down in order to solve it. Chances are you will see students attempting to solve the problem in their head so that they can then record the solution on paper. So when your students want to reach for the stars, get them to grab a pad of paper and to start thinking on it.

¹ "Orality and Literacy," Walter J. Ong, Psychology Press, 2002 (see pg 78)

² "Genius: The Life And Science of Richard Feynman", James Gleick, Pantheon Books, 1992 (see pg 409)

"Midterm evaluation: A reflective tool for decision making"

Kimberly Levenhagen, PT, DPT, WCC

Assistant Professor, Department of Physical Therapy & Athletic Training

Midterm course evaluations can be a powerful tool to improve our understanding of the classroom learning environment before we are left scratching our head and wondering what went wrong during the semester. As a novice teacher, I was aware of the need to request student feedback regarding course objectives, course material, and instruction of the content at the conclusion of the semester. After reflecting on students' comments, I was disheartened to discover the classroom did not create an excellent learning environment and my assignments and objectives were not always clear. I quickly realized that many of the comments could be corrected if had been identified earlier. I determined that I wanted to make changes to assist students currently enrolled in the course. Therefore, I implemented midterm evaluations in my

courses with two goals in mind: 1) to allow me to improve the learning experience while the course was still in session and 2) to demonstrate the process of reflective thinking.

In addition to providing the teacher with feedback, midterm evaluations allow the student to understand the process of gathering, analyzing, and then synthesizing the information. Many students do not realize how they can use reflection as a learning tool. Students must be taught that reflective thinking is part of the critical thinking process, referring specifically to the processes of analyzing, evaluating and making judgments about a decision. While not all comments warrant a change in the course, explanations of the choices made about the course help the students learn why you, as an instructor, have selected a certain teaching style and format. Changes can demonstrate your willingness to listen to the needs of your students which can help the student learn to appreciate the requests of their future clients or patients. Chew and McInnis-Bowers wrote, "Enhancing decision making requires that we learn from our successes and failures and catalogue mentally for future retrieval what has occurred and why." Each classroom experience has successes and failures, midterm evaluations allow us to turn them into teaching moments.

FEATURED ARTICLES

"Shining Light on Student Evaluations"

Faye Abram, Ph.D.
Associate Professor, School of Social Work

I've always been a little afraid of the dark, not being able to see what's ahead. And there's something about student evaluations of my teaching that for, me, is like walking around in the dark. I know some professors simply don't go there. One professor unabashedly admits, "I don't read that hate mail," and others discount student evaluations altogether. None of these is an option for me because I love teaching; and without feedback, my teaching lacks meaning and value. So I solicit mid-course evaluations, meditate over students' comments, and often wish I had a flashlight to make the dark less scary.

The Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE) has become a lantern for me that illuminates dark and uncertain paths toward understanding how to process student evaluations. My bright discovery is that by inviting someone from the CTE into my classes to observe my teaching and facilitate a Small Group Instructional Feedback (SGIF) session for students at midterm, I have gained a colleague who walks with me through the process. My doubts and fears have been calmed with encouraging words, wise lessons, firm nudges, gentle truths, and useful suggestions that enable me to improve my teaching. Now, because I am not alone and have the benefit of light from another's insights, I find even dark venomous student evaluations can inform my teaching without diminishing my love for teaching.

“Journaling with SLU Global”

Jeanne Eichler, MOT, OTR/L, MT, CP-BC
Instructor, Occupational Science & Occupational Therapy

Students are always asked to reflect on what they have learned, challenging them to see how new knowledge and understanding fits into their lives so that they may apply it. In a world of technology, where facebook, twitter, and texting are a part of everyday life, SLU Global seemed the logical place to go to encourage effective and frequent journaling for my Occupational Science (OS) students. Journaling electronically creates a personal pathway between the professor and the student, allowing a personal dialogue that makes even the largest class experience seem more individualized.

Students write on a page that nobody else in the class is able to see, and the professor is able to evaluate what is written from anywhere... no papers, clutter, or ways for private thoughts to get lost. Frequent journaling for the OS students allows them to explore the idea that self-evaluation can be a growth experience instead of a punitive and discouraging one. Every student takes a unique path toward understanding this concept, among others. The journaling experience allows students to explore self-evaluation for themselves, as I facilitate the process, allowing both of us to work together for good outcomes and understanding of material.

In a world where privacy seems to go by the wayside, communication becomes more impersonal, and relationships between professors and students may become less individualized by larger and larger classes, the online journal tool in SLU Global is the answer for me.

“Reflecting on How Small Group Instructional Feedback (SGIF) has Enhanced my Teaching”

Michael Lewis, Ph.D.
Associate Professor, Department of Chemistry

It never ceases to surprise me how different the SGIF responses for the same course are, from one group of students to the next. I have taught Principles of Organic Chemistry most of my years at SLU, and I always begin teaching the class the way I left off teaching the previous year's class. My initial thought process, upon becoming a faculty member, was that SGIFs would eventually allow me to figure out what works best for SLU students in regards to learning organic chemistry. At some point, I thought, I could discontinue doing SGIFs, or perhaps I would only need to do them every few times I taught the class, for the purposes of fine tuning. I couldn't have possibly been more wrong. Each class is very unique. A teaching approach or tool that one class of students thought was integral to their learning process could very well be viewed as needless, or even annoying, to the class of students in the same course the following year. A teaching approach I am asked to discontinue in the SGIF responses by one year's class is oftentimes requested in the SGIF of the following year's class. Ultimately, the diversity of

requested teaching approaches within the same course keeps me alert, and the changing of the course delivery every year prevents me from getting in a rut. I truly didn't think SGIFs would always be a part of my teaching, but they are, and they will continue to be so. How else am I to know if I am optimally meeting the students' learning needs?

“Can do!”

Anne McCabe, Ph.D.
Chair, Languages and Literature Division, Madrid

One goal I strive towards is getting my students to accept student learning outcomes for a course as theirs (and not as mine). For example, in the first-year writing courses, we go through several cycles of explanation of outcomes, perusal of assignment rubrics, application of rubrics to sample assignments, peer review of students' drafts, rewriting, my application of rubrics to their drafts with grades and comments, and more rewriting if they wish. Then, I ask students to put together all of their drafts into a portfolio, and I turn the course outcomes that we have covered up to that point into 'can do' statements (such as “I can rework papers for greater rhetorical effect”), which students respond to by indicating the degree to which they can do so (e.g. 'very well', 'so-so' or 'not yet'); they must provide clear evidence from their own papers to back up their statements. This activity allows them to internalize the learning outcomes, shows them where they need to focus their learning, and helps me to see where I can focus instruction. These kinds of 'can do' self-assessment activities can be carried out with presentations, reading, and exams – even multiple-choice – where students can rate how confident they are about their answers as they fill them in.

“Reflective Engagement through Weekly Video Responses”

Jonathan Smith, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor, Department of American Studies

This semester I have aimed to find the pedagogical opportunities available through social networking by requiring my students to submit weekly videos. Previously, I required electronic written responses to weekly reading assignments, but I had never entertained the idea of utilizing videos. In making the decision, I believed most of my students would be sufficiently familiar with some form of video uploading to make the assignment doable. But I also knew that I risked both technological obstacles and the relaxed familiarity often associated with electronic communication. Yet I hoped that, by requiring a different kind of attention to the technology, I might elicit more thoughtful responses. I also committed to responding through individual facebook messages. All my hopes and none of my fears have been realized. The quality of responses is much higher than I anticipated and has also helped foster more individualized relationships with students. My video responses are even more nuanced and detailed than my written comments have been on written assignments. The weekly video forces students to

display their engagement with the material and seems to raise the personal stakes for them without increasing the pressure of "writing" a response.