



Center for Teaching and Learning Newsletter

27 January 2016

Message from the Director



I am pleased to announce that UTD has created the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL). The mission of CTL is multifaceted:

- Provide campus-wide leadership and coordination of activities aimed at supporting excellence in teaching.
- Create a campus culture in which excellent teaching is recognized, respected, and rewarded.
- Enhance student learning through effective pedagogical approaches, assessments, and technologies.
- Support innovation in instructional practices and the scholarship of teaching and learning.
- Encourage and disseminate best practices in teaching that are evidence-based.
- Introduce effective teaching practices to instructors with limited experience.
- Encourage self-reflection, assessment, and improvement by instructors.

CTL aims to hit the ground running in the Spring 2016 semester with the creation of graduate teaching certificate programs and an instructional improvement grant opportunity. In addition, it will sponsor a series of workshops and events (see the schedule below). These will be supplemented by programs within each of UTD's eight schools. "Teaching Leaders" for each school are in place and are responsible for developing such programs and working with CTL.

Upcoming Events

Speakers

On January 28 and 29, **Dr. George Gopen**, Professor Emeritus of Duke University will speak on "The Reader Expectation Approach," a groundbreaking method for writers of law, science, technology, and any other professional prose. His classic article, "The Science of Scientific Writing," first appeared in *American Scientist* in 1990, and may be seen [here](#). On Thursday, Dr. Gopen's morning lecture will be targeted to doctoral students. In the afternoon workshop, he will give live demonstrations of how to work with students' or colleagues' writing to make it better. On Friday, his morning lecture will be targeted to faculty, and in the afternoon workshop he will address issues of teaching writing. The full text of his article on this topic may be seen [here](#).

On April 7, **Dr. Mary-Ann Winkelmes** of UNLV will join us to speak on Transparency in Teaching and Learning and the Higher Education Project. Details will be available soon.

Graduate TA Workshops on Crafting a Teaching Philosophy and Developing a Teaching Portfolio will be held on February 17 and March 8, respectively, in the Faculty/Staff Dining Room (SU 2.905).

Faculty Workshop on Mentoring Undergraduate Research, chaired by Dean Andrew Blanchard, will be held on February 23. Additional workshops for faculty on Crafting a Teaching Philosophy and Developing a Teaching Portfolio will be held on March 23 and April 14, respectively.

Teaching Tip

Consider gathering mid-semester feedback from your students. Distribute questions such as these for students to complete anonymously:

1. What should I **START** doing, or do more?
2. What should I **STOP** doing, or do less?
3. What should I **CONTINUE** doing the same?

Then condense the feedback and go over it in class. You may find areas where you can improve or make changes. There also are likely to be comments about some things that you simply cannot or will not change (e.g., “too much reading!”), but knowing that students are having difficulty in a particular area can lead you to assisting them with these difficulties. When you go over the feedback with the class, even when your response is that some things can’t be changed, students are still able to see that you have listened to and responded to their concerns. At the end of the semester, you may find that students completing their official course evaluations take into account that you care about their learning and your own self-improvement.

Research into Practice

James M. Lang, author of *On Course*, has a new book that will be available in March 2016: *Small Teaching: Everyday lessons from the science of learning*. For a preview, see his 3 simple ways to use the minutes before class to create an atmosphere for learning. Read more here: <https://shar.es/1hWii0>.

What the Students Say—Part I

If the main purpose of teaching is to promote learning, it is often useful to listen to what those learners have to say about their experiences and what would help them learn. This is the first of a series of reports based on focus group conversations by CTL with honors students and student government leaders.

Practice might not make perfect, but students lament the lack of opportunity to practice skills, except perhaps in language classes. They note that the first time they might be asked to perform a task, apply a formula, or analyze a situation is on a midterm or final exam. Students would prefer to have those skills tested in advance with ungraded or low-risk assignments in order to master what is necessary for later assignments. Feedback is an important component of practice and students value the feedback they receive when mistakes are made. Pedagogical research supports the use of practice and repeated assignments for enhancing student learning. Faculty members should not expect students to be able to swim if they have never before been to the pool.

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