



Center for Teaching and Learning Newsletter

30 August 2016

Message from the Director



As we begin another academic year, there are not just many new faces on campus, but many more of them. UTD has experienced a tremendous upsurge in enrollment over the last decade and the large number of new students on campus this fall is no different. It is easy to complain about space constraints in scheduling classes and the extra papers and exams that need to be graded. Yet there is another way to look at this situation. At a philosophical level, more students mean greater opportunities to influence student learning and to put the UTD imprint on future generations. The challenges of increased enrollment are also opportunities to reevaluate teaching strategies and materials, things that tend to get stale when we face the same instructional contexts year after year. With some innovative approaches and emerging technologies, instructing more students can actually be more enjoyable and students might learn more than ever before.

Upcoming Events

Invited Speakers

- Sept 8, 12-1:30** Dr. Christine Stanley, Vice President and Associate Provost for Diversity, Texas A&M University: *Improving Student Learning in a Diverse Environment*
JSOM 1.118
- Oct 27, 12-1:30** Dr. George Siemens, Director, Learning Innovation and Networked Knowledge Research Lab, UT Arlington: *The Future of Technology in Higher Education*
JSOM 1.118

Faculty and Graduate TA Workshops (12-1pm, RSVP required, lunch provided)

- Sept 19, MC 2.410 Effective Teaching with Teams and Groups
Sept 22 Character Day (multiple locations and times, presented in cooperation with School of Interdisciplinary Studies, Student Wellness Center, Office of Information Technology, Student Counseling Center)
- Oct 5, MC 2.410 TA Workshop: Developing Professionalism & Your Teaching Persona
Oct 11, JSOM 1.516 Faculty Workshop: Rubrics for the PhD Oral Defense
Nov 2, MC 2.410 Diversity in the Classroom
Nov 7, JSOM 1.516 Motivation is not Enough: Supporting Students in Developing the Skills for Success
Nov 14, MC 2.410 They Get Younger Every Year! The Challenges of Teaching and Reaching Millennials

Teaching Tip

Consider creating an attention-grabber for each new topic in your course. No matter what you teach, the first step is to get your students' attention. You can do this by introducing new ideas in a way that

connects them to what students already know, and by getting students to start thinking about what more they want to know. A good strategy is to induce a sense of puzzlement or wonder. At the beginning of class, perhaps even before the class time officially starts, put on the overhead projector some picture, figure, graph, news report, or video that relates to your topic in some way. Ask students what they notice about it or what it makes them wonder, or even how it makes them feel. You might have students write down their ideas about how your item relates to the assigned reading, and ask them to share what they wrote in pairs or small groups. Follow this with a brief whole-class discussion to connect the new topic to students' prior knowledge or understanding.

Research into Practice

There are no such things as "learning styles." To put it in more scientific phrasing, the claim that *each student has a particular way of learning, and if teaching methods are matched to the student's preferred learning mode, learning will improve* has no support in research on how people learn. This is something that cognitive psychologists have known for quite a long time, but the myth of learning styles persists in many fields outside of psychology. One reason for this persistence is the reality that people do learn in different ways, and often people prefer some ways over others. Nevertheless, that is irrelevant for teaching. What people prefer is not necessarily better for them. Also, much of the learning we care about concerns conceptual understanding, and the style or method by which the meaning of a concept is presented doesn't matter. A person who prefers an auditory modality may well have better recall for the sound of the professor's voice, but will not necessarily have better recall or comprehension of the meaning of what the professor said. Good teaching involves being able to present and explain ideas in more than one way for all learners, and to pay attention to what works and adapt accordingly. For more on this, see:

Pashler, H., McDaniel, M., Rohrer, D., & Bjork, R. (2008). Learning styles: Concepts and evidence. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 9(3), 105-119.

Riener, C., & Willingham, D. (2010). The myth of learning styles. *Change*, 42(5), 32-35.

Training for Online Teaching

Training in best practices for teaching online and hybrid courses is offered by the eLearning support team. For more information or to sign up, email elearning@utdallas.edu. The eLearning Team offers three levels of Online Teaching Certification. Each level will require 13 hours of instruction and will use the blended model, allowing instructors to experience the online tools and educational environment *as students* prior to teaching. The certificates will focus on pedagogy, University policies and processes, learning management system functionality, multimedia production, and online tools (web conferencing, audience response systems, surveys, etc.).

What the Students Say

Every instructor wants to have motivated students, those who are engaged in the subject matter and eager to learn more. In the 2015 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), UT Dallas students mirrored those from around the country in making comments about the need for courses to show relevance or applications to everyday life. Helping students see the connections between course matter and their own experiences increases student motivation and ultimately the depth and breadth of their

learning. This is not a matter of teaching only “contemporary events” or compromising learning objectives. Rather, it means using relevant examples (e.g., how the laws of physics are involved in keeping planes from crashing or why accounting rules were created to prevent fraud) to illustrate key concepts or theories. It means designing assignments that require students to take what they learned and apply that to aspects of their own life (e.g., music theory to rap videos or psychological concepts to political poll responses). Making these connections leads not only to better understandings, but these applications make it more likely that students will remember what they learned long after the course is over.

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