



Center for Teaching and Learning Newsletter

January 31, 2017

Message from the Director



This month marks a milestone for CTL: we have been serving UT Dallas for one year. We are grateful to the Provost's Office and the university community for your continued support.

Approximately 20 years ago, I asked the students in my class how often they used email. I was surprised that over 80% indicated that they did not have an email account, even though I knew that the university at which I was teaching at the time provided every student with an account free of charge. Things have certainly changed in the past decades, and students (and faculty) now interact extensively, and in some cases primarily, through social media. Handouts and announcements in class, as well as face-to-face office hours, have not gone away and indeed can still play important roles in conveying important information and assisting students. Nevertheless, instructors increasingly rely on other ways to reach students. Email is now widely accepted, and using the tools in UTD's Coursebook (which has both student personal and official UTD email addresses) and in eLearning sites are ways to reach all students easily. Yet we know that students don't necessarily check their email accounts regularly (or at least as frequently as instructors would desire). The Millennial generation pays attention to text messages and check Facebook more often, although this can vary substantially. These forms are also much more difficult to contact all students in a class and carry with them some serious problems associated with mistakes and poorly composed messages. There are no easy solutions and some redundancy of communication is in order, even at the risk of being accused of spamming.

Upcoming Events

Faculty and Graduate TA Workshops

Dr. Stephen L. Chew is Professor and Chair of Psychology at Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama. He is a cognitive psychologist, and was selected as a Carnegie Scholar in 1998 to serve in the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (CASTL). His research examines the cognitive basis of effective teaching, the use of examples in teaching, the impact of cognitive load on learning, and the effects of students' misconceptions and the ways those misconceptions can be addressed and overcome. Please join us for either or both of the teaching-intensive workshops planned for this week:

On **February 2**, Dr. Chew will present an afternoon workshop on **"What we can do outside the classroom to help students inside the classroom."** Lunch will begin at **noon**, and the workshop will finish by 4pm. This workshop is expected to be of particular interest to Graduate Teaching Assistants, but is sure to benefit anyone interested in helping students learn more effectively.

On **February 3**, Dr. Chew will present a workshop for faculty and staff on **"Improving student performance by addressing student and teacher misconceptions about learning."** The workshop will

begin at **9am** with a light breakfast and will end by noon. Both workshops will be in the Faculty/Staff Dining Room, **SU 2.905**.

Teaching Tip

Getting students to use study strategies more effectively is more complicated than simply telling them about those strategies. Here are some factors that make a difference in whether or not students use effective study strategies:

1. Teach appropriate study strategies—such as those described by Dr. Chew—as part of your course. Students are more likely to use study strategies that they learn within the context of a course or content area. Do you expect them to memorize, summarize, apply formulas, or solve new problems? Whatever you want them to be able to do, give them opportunities to practice doing it.
2. Guide students in developing proficiency in these sophisticated ways of thinking. Many effective study strategies involve elaborating, summarizing, monitoring comprehension, and so forth. Model effective strategies and tell students *how* specific strategies should be used.
3. Teach students a wide variety of strategies, and help them understand *why* those strategies are effective.
4. Help students understand *when* specific strategies are likely to be effective. When should they summarize, elaborate, or use mnemonic devices? This will depend on the learning outcomes you want your students to achieve. Give students plenty of opportunities to practice these strategies over a long period of time and across a wide variety of tasks.
5. Students will only use the strategies we teach them if they believe it will be worth their time and effort to do so. Help students see how using the strategies helps them learn.

For more on this, see: Hattie, J., Biggs, J., & Purdie, N. (1996). Effects of learning skills interventions on student learning: A meta-analysis. *Review of Educational Research*, 66, 99-136.

What the Students Say

Students don't always listen to what we say, read what we give them, or respond to messages when we send them. Nevertheless, there are some things that instructors can do to increase the likelihood that the information that we convey to students is read and interpreted correctly. In communicating with students through email, announcements in eLearning, or in designated discussion spaces, students have a number of complaints and suggestions for improvement as reported in the book *For My Professor* (2016). "I really get annoyed when a professor doesn't answer email for 5 days" and "Professor sends an email saying class is cancelled 15 minutes before class - #annoyed" are just two examples of student reactions. Instructors can enhance impact and minimize negative student reactions by (1) using *good subject lines* that are simple and direct and thereby encourage students to read the message, (2) using *appropriate punctuation*, specifically avoiding exclamation and capital letters or using them sparingly, (3) *refraining from humor*, which is hard to convey in text and can be misinterpreted, and (4) *proofreading* for mistakes and otherwise watching for autocorrections to prevent incorrect or embarrassing messages.

CTL Staff

Dr. Paul F. Diehl, Director
Dr. Karen Huxtable, Associate Director
Beverly Reed, Administrative Assistant II

Teaching Leaders

Prof. Shelby Hibbs A&H
Dr. Kristin Drogos ATEC

Dr. Shayla Holub	BBS
Dr. Paul Battaglio	EPPS
Dr. Randy Lehmann	ECS
Dr. Rebekah Nix	IS
Dr. McClain Watson	JSOM
Dr. John Sibert	NSM

The University of Texas at Dallas

Center for Teaching and Learning
800 W. Campbell Road, Richardson, Texas 75080-3021
CTL@utdallas.edu