

# Teaching and Learning Newsletter

## How to Teach Keeps Changing:

### Views on Teaching by the 2006 Teaching Excellence Award Winner Dagmar Cronn

It was suggested that I start this article where I started in my personal statement that accompanied the nomination materials for the Teaching Excellence Award last year. So, I love to teach.

But none of what I wrote about last year is on my mind now (I still love to teach, though). Always there are new issues to ponder when you want to do what you can to help students learn. My students differ from those of even a year or a few years ago. I do not yet have answers about what I need to do in light of these changes. It is why I have agreed to co-chair the OU Student Readiness subcommittee of the First Year Council.

Greater numbers of my students enter my science classes with the inbred belief that they cannot master the course material. Anxiety levels are higher and more students "know" they are "no good" at science.

Fear of anything that requires numeracy skills has become almost ubiquitous.

Students seem to me to have fewer coping skills. More often, I see students become so frustrated when faced with a task they cannot accomplish easily at the first try that they quit.

More of my students do not learn course content from textbooks as well as previously. Before, students who lacked reading skills appeared to be the less well accomplished students. Now some of my brightest students lack the ability to read for content.

Larger fractions of the students in my classes do not write well. I teach one writing intensive course and have writing as-

signments in all my courses. Part of the grading depends on the quality of the writing. An increasing percentage of my students do not use proper attributions, know the mechanics or display good writing styles.

Recently, I read that cursive writing is no longer being taught in schools. Perhaps that is ok because people mostly type on keyboards rather than writing. But, students can take fewer notes in class if they print instead. And few of my students bring a laptop to class to type notes. (Most of us type slower than we write anyway.) What really concerns me about this issue is that if you are not taught cursive writing, you also will not be able to read someone else's cursive writing. So, I have asked my students if they can read cursive writing (I have to define what that means). About 15% raise their hands to say they cannot. So, I either continue to write cursive on the board, disenfranchising some of my students, begin printing (and I print poorly and very slowly) or use PowerPoint prepared material exclusively, which robs any spontaneity from the classroom setting. This problem will solve itself with time when the generations of people who can write and read cursive text are gone, but we need to deal with the transition period.

The reason for the changes in my students at Oakland University is not because admission standards have changed. These observations are statewide and nationwide. I like to think the observations are not because I have become an old grouchy curmudgeon either. There are data that support my observations.

Winter Issue

March 15, 2007

***"Since teaching must start from where a student starts, we must change the way we teach to make it possible for the majority (I strive for all) of our students to learn what we intend to teach."***

#### A Publication of the Senate Teaching and Learning Committee

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## Teaching and Changing in Teaching... Learning Newsletter



Since teaching must start from where a student starts, we must change the way we teach to make it possible for the majority (I strive for *all*) of our students to learn what we intend to teach.

I recently noted a textbook that advertised as part of the student supplemental materials an oral version of the text. That might seem like a solution for someone who does not learn by reading. But it takes too long to listen to a text rather than read it (compare your own time to read a book compared to listening to it on tape). So, urging the textbook publishers to tape all textbooks does not strike me as a solution.

Will commercial and industrial companies change their expectations of their employees so that they no longer hire based on writing skills, reading skills, numeracy skills, group interaction skills, etc.? I suspect they cannot

and remain competitive in the global marketplace.

So, what am I to do, what are we faculty to do, and what is the University to do? We first need to know what learning skills each student has and does not have. Then we need to provide mechanisms for students to improve the skills they lack. We need to redefine our expectations of students to the reality of their collective learning skills. And, finally, we need to change the way we teach to take the knowledge into account.

All the above is part of why I love to teach. There is a constant but changing set of challenges. It is why I find this work so stimulating.

**The author, Dagmar Cronn, is Professor of Chemistry and Teaching Excellence Award Winner for 2006**

## The Doctor of Nursing Practice Degree Program (DNP) —

by Frances Jackson



**The author, Frances Jackson, is Associate Professor of Nursing**

This fall, Oakland University School of Nursing admitted its first class to the Doctor of Nursing Practice degree program (DNP). This degree is awarded by Oakland University, but is given in collaboration with Northern Michigan University in Marquette, Michigan.

The DNP is the terminal degree for nurses who want to be practicing clinicians. Eventually, it will replace the master's degree in nursing. Our current program is a post-master's degree program and consists of courses in leadership, health policy, health informatics, statistics, advanced research methods, and advanced

health care and nursing theories. There is also a final project required for graduation.

Oakland University is the first institution in the State of Michigan to offer this degree and the demand for admission has been quite gratifying. Grants were awarded from both the State of Michigan and the Kellogg Foundation to provide support for this degree. As a result of these grants, students receive free tuition, a monthly stipend and a free laptop. Twenty-two students were admitted in this first cohort. We are currently accepting applications for our second class, which will be admitted for Fall, 2007.

***Next in Teaching & Learning:***

***Opportunities to Participate in  
Faculty Learning Communities -  
Announcement Coming Soon!***



# Information Ethics in the Information Age: Plagiarism at OU ... by Shawn V. Lombardo & Tricia Juettemeyer

Winter Issue

To initiate a campus-wide discussion on academic integrity and accountability, the Teaching and Learning Committee asked us to present a plagiarism workshop on November 14th. Our goals for the workshop were to provide practical suggestions on detecting and preventing plagiarism; introduce the tools available to OU faculty to help identify plagiarism when it occurs; and discuss how the library is working to address this problem. Rachel Smydra, Department of English faculty and member of the Academic Conduct Committee, began the workshop by providing data on how academic conduct cases at Oakland have increased steadily since 1997, mirroring national trends.

Most faculty are aware of the signs of plagiarism, including uneven writing style, papers that fail to address the requirements of an assignment, or reference lists that include outdated sources or sources not owned by Kresge Library. Faculty can use a search engine such as Google to investigate suspicious phrases, or submit suspect papers to Turnitin.com ([www.turnitin.com](http://www.turnitin.com)), a plagiarism detection service that simultaneously searches online sources and a database of student papers. Instructions for using Turnitin can be found on the e-Learning and Instructional Support website at <http://www2.oakland.edu/elis/turnitin.cfm>. We also shared tips on creating "plagiarism-proof" assignments; these include:

- Assigning multiple deadlines for the-

sis statements, annotated bibliographies, and multiple drafts.

- Requiring specific recent articles, items from classroom discussion, or interviews.
- Requiring students to submit copies of all sources.

To address plagiarism at Oakland, the library is developing support materials for faculty to use in their classrooms, including MLA and APA citation guides, a student handout on avoiding plagiarism, and an interactive online tutorial that will address proper paraphrasing, quotation and documentation techniques.

For more information, check out our faculty plagiarism resources page which links to other resources at: <http://library2.oakland.edu/tutorials/plagForFaculty.htm>. We'd appreciate any feedback!

*"To address plagiarism at Oakland, the library is developing support materials for faculty to use in their classrooms."*



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## THE SENATE TEACHING AND LEARNING COMMITTEE

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# What is it like to be a freshman... *really?* -

Teaching and Learning Committee  
**Freshman “impersonator” Cathy Small (or is it Rebekah Nathan?) visits OU. By Chris Clason**

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***“She asked herself the question: ‘How can I find out why undergraduates are so different from what I expect?’ and embarked on a research project of a most unusual nature.”***

Cathy Small is a cultural anthropologist at Northern Arizona University, who until several years ago had become disillusioned with teaching undergraduates: freshmen and gen-ed students seemed disinterested in what she understood as education. As faculty in many institutions sometimes do, she sought refuge in teaching only graduate courses. Sensing that there is something more to a career as a professor, and asking herself the question, “how can I find out why undergraduates are so different from what I expect?” she embarked on a research project of a most unusual nature: she “disguised” herself as an incoming student, entered the university as a freshman, enrolled in courses under an assumed name (Rebekah Nathan), lived in a freshman dorm, and in all ways entered into the world of the students she had begun to disdain. The amazing results of her odyssey through the daily existence of a beginning college student became her book, *My Freshman Year: What a Professor Learned by Becoming a Student*.

The Department of Rhetoric, Communication and Journalism and New Student Programs invited Professor Small to campus on January 30. A description of her presentation, as well as details about her project and book, can be found on the Oakland “News at OU” Web Page.

The issues concerning the freshman year experience are being addressed comprehensively through the campus-wide program, The Foundations of Excellence. For more information, please contact [clason@oakland.edu](mailto:clason@oakland.edu).



Linda L Hildebrand  
Library