

Fall 2010



# Teaching and Learning Fall 2010 Newsletter

## Lessons Learned About Online Teaching and Learning

By Shannan McNair, Ed.D., Associate Professor, Human Development and Child Studies,  
Recipient of a 2009-2010 Teaching Excellence Award

I teach in Early Childhood education—only graduate-level programs with class meetings in the evening or weekends as most of the students are employed as fulltime teachers or practitioners. I am fortunate to have class sizes ranging from 5 to 35, making small group and whole class interactive experiences easy to facilitate each session, whether on campus or online.

A three-hour and twenty-minute class at the end of a workday should be lively, engaging and thought provoking. Online learning needs to be similarly engaging but balanced with regard to technological challenge and compelling content. The process of developing a hybrid or completely online course initially involves thinking through what would ordinarily be done in class to accomplish course objectives and modifying that with online learning strategies. In addition, current online resources are explored to update and enhance the content and mode of delivery.

Similar to face-to-face classes, each online session includes an exercise asking students to recall prior knowledge of particular content or skills. Next they gain new knowledge by way of course readings, websites, or experiences. Following that students are asked to engage in exploration and inquiry through an application of the learning. This may be an online simulation, a classroom observation and documentation, an interview or an assessment task. Next, students are asked to do critical thinking—perhaps a written analysis of the previous experience, critical discussion with others in an online forum in Moodle, or “teaching” others an aspect of what they learned. Finally, a self-reflection on learning is required. Use of this format each session aids the flow and clarity of an online agenda and mirrors the format of face-to-face agendas for hybrid courses.

I continually learn from students and other instructors as I develop and implement online and hybrid courses. The following are some highlights of lessons I’ve learned along the way.

**Students like to see the instructor and their classmates.** Brief video clips of the instructor presenting information, explaining an assignment,

or providing a course overview are helpful to the learning process and easy to develop and post. My students report that interacting with an instructor and classmates online is more satisfying when they are able to picture what the person looks like. This is easy to accomplish when completion of the Moodle “profile” is an assigned task the first class of the semester. I ask students to post a photo and if they are unsure of how to do so, they email me the photo and I post it for them. I record a short video of myself, explaining how the course works and what to expect for the semester. In the future I hope to include more video and audio “mini-lectures” to take the place of reading the information. My digital camera has still and video capabilities that are suitable, and I also use a Flip © video camera.

**Students often assume that the workload will be lighter than in a face-to-face course.** I simply remind student in the “How to Begin” section of the course that the workload is based upon the same formula as a face-to-face course, and that it may be time-consuming depending on their strengths and skills. I stress the importance of allowing adequate time each week for coursework and tie the timely completion of assignments to course grades. When I offer tips to students for success in the course, I cite examples from student feedback in previous semesters. This also lets students know that you take their feedback seriously and use it to make modification and suggestions to student in subsequent semesters.

**Instructors sometimes think that the workload will be lighter.** Time can be saved depending on the way the course is developed, but it is easy to get caught up in responding to discussion and feedback and integration of new resources. This can seem efficient at first due the flexible nature of Moodle, but can snowball into spending hours and hours more each week. For me, responding to student work and reviewing possible teaching resources online is best done daily.

*Continued on page 3*

### The Early Alert Program Helps Struggling Students

By Joel Lane,  
Early Alert Retention Coordinator,  
Academic Skills Center

The Early Alert program identifies students who are experiencing academic difficulties or who are in need of help in identifying resources on campus. This program is sponsored by Oakland’s Division of Academic Affairs and administered through the Academic Skills Center. The Early Alert Program is a proactive way to assist students early in the semester, while there is ample time to resolve issues and overcome challenges.

One of Early Alert’s goals is to increase retention by intervening early and providing the student with resources to help them be successful. Some students do not realize the wealth of campus resources available to them such as the Academic Skills Center, Writing Center, Advising Resource Center, Disability Support Services and Center for Multicultural Initiatives.

Faculty members can submit a referral form online ([www.oakland.edu/earlyalert](http://www.oakland.edu/earlyalert)), which initiates the Early Alert process. The Early Alert Retention Coordinator (Joel Lane) can respond in collaboration with other departments to address student challenges, which may include poor class attendance, incomplete or missing assignments, poor quiz and test scores, lack of course materials, performance below course level, or inappropriate classroom behavior.

The program focuses on students in 100- and 200-level classes, yet also welcomes referrals from upper-level classes. The program’s core mission is to help students stay in class, avoid academic probation, and focus on the finish line of graduation.

For more information, visit [www.oakland.edu/earlyalert](http://www.oakland.edu/earlyalert), call Joel Lane at (248) 370-2529, or email [ouea@oakland.edu](mailto:ouea@oakland.edu).



# 2011 Teaching Excellence Awards—Call for Nominations

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## CALL FOR NOMINATIONS!

The Senate Teaching and Learning Committee is pleased to announce a call for nominations for the 2011 Teaching Excellence Awards. Two awards will be made for 2011: one to a tenured or tenure-track member of the faculty; another to a non-tenure-track faculty at Oakland University. Each award includes a cash stipend and will be presented at the 16th Annual Faculty Recognition Luncheon, tentatively scheduled for mid-April, 2011.

Nominations may be made by any member of the Oakland University community, including students, faculty, alumni, administrators, and staff. *Faculty may not self-nominate for the Award.*

The letter of nomination should address the nominee's accomplishments based on the following criteria:

- Superior Teaching
- Innovative Instructional Practice
- High Educational Standards
- Productive Learning Environment
- Demonstrated Ability to Inspire and Motivate Students

Student nominations are a highly valued component of this process. Faculty are encouraged to announce this nomination process in all classes.

Nominations will be accepted through **November 30, 2010**. Nomination forms should be completed on-line using the online nomination form.

The Committee will contact the nominees and chairs of their departments to request additional information. Previous Teaching Excellence Award winners and current members of the Teaching and Learning Committee are not eligible for nomination. A plaque with the names of previous Teaching Excellence Award winners is on display in the lobby of Kresge Library.



[http://www2.oakland.edu/misc/teaching\\_award.cfm](http://www2.oakland.edu/misc/teaching_award.cfm)

## Fall 2010 Faculty Workshop

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**Join us for soup and a discussion of how you and your colleagues encourage student involvement in the classroom.**

We'll provide Zoup soup, bread, and drinks. You provide a three to five minute explanation or sample of your favorite technique for getting students involved in your classroom.

**WHEN: Thursday, November 18, 2010, 11:20-1:00pm**

**WHERE: Oakland Center, Lake Michigan Room**

*For questions and RSVPs, please contact Fred Hoffman at [hoffman@oakland.edu](mailto:hoffman@oakland.edu) or x4978.*



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## Working with Students with Asperger's and Autism on Campus: Webinar

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**Speaker/Host:** Dr. Theirfield Brown, Direction of Student Services at the University of Connecticut

**Date:** Tuesday, November 16

**Time:** 1:00 - 2:00pm

**Location:** 225B Kresge Library

### Topics Include:

- Introduction to Asperger's and Autism.
- How to deal with students on the spectrum in regards to social issues, group dynamics, and campus life.
- How accommodating should campuses and residence halls be?

### Who Should Attend?

Residence Hall Staff, Student Life Staff, Disability Services Professionals, Student Services Administrators, Senior Student Affairs Officers, and Faculty

**RSVP:** Disability Support Services, x3266, or [dss@oakland.edu](mailto:dss@oakland.edu)

Students become accustomed to expedient feedback, so I remind them that any wait for feedback that is less than a week is a “gift” rather than an obligation on my part. Despite this, I typically provide feedback right away. In addition, I let students know at the beginning of the semester that my participation in discussion forums will be limited, because the intent is for students to be very interactive and to share ideas. The instructor as “expert” runs the risk of squashing the flow of ideas.

**Students need direction and support unique to e-Learning, and develop different skills.** It is interesting to note the change each year in the skills and interests students have in online teaching and learning. Albeit in early childhood education our graduate students may be less technology savvy than some fields, the typical level of skill and confidence is on the upswing. In addition, the equipment they have access to is also better each year.

**Synchronous classes can support more learning but take additional teaching and learning time and additional student resources.** I attended a conference session where research findings on online teaching and learning highlighted the importance of including at least one or two synchronous sessions. It may be that these sessions include a level of interaction and accountability that boost the level of learning, increasing positive learning outcomes. Planning synchronous session requires preplanning and a certain level of student comfort with Elluminate. To work up to more regular integration of the synchronous with the asynchronous, I offer “virtual” office hours and voluntary synchronous course meetings for interested students. Sessions held so far have revealed varied levels of participation, due to some extent to differences in equip-

ment. When polled, most of my students report not having headsets or webcams. However, they feel their participation in Elluminate using the audio and chat functions is meaningful. I am finding that conducting meetings with Elluminate works well and also allows us to practice our skills with that particular teaching tool.

**Online learning can get students excited about Internet resources useful to learning and application in their work.** I really enjoy the preplanning and advance organizing that online learning promotes. Once loaded, all course resources reside online and minimize having to physically carry teaching materials and student assignments from place to place. For students there is no need to look for misplaced materials, ask for a replacement syllabus or assignment guide, or ask for an “interpretation” of my handwritten feedback when it is barely legible. My overflowing office is not further compromised with student assignments and stacks of current articles, as they are all online. Feedback is provided using “track changes” and is efficiently done, stored, and more likely viewed by students than when I did the same by hand.

**Convenience is high for students with computers and Internet access at home, and may be a “greener” option.** Many of our students drive long distances to class and engage babysitters for their children, adding to the cost and time investment of their graduate experience. When we convene from the convenience of our homes, no gasoline is required, no photocopying of resources takes place, and engaging a babysitter is not necessary. Vacation, illness, and extra work responsibilities no longer mean excuses and absence as the work can be completed almost anywhere and not bound to the day and time designated for the class.

**Teaching and learning can be highly inter-**

**active and engaging.** The current nature of online information, the varied formats (video, audio, discussion) and the ability to bring professionals to the class from all over the world makes for thought-provoking and relevant experiences. In turn, students see ways in which they can use similar strategies to bring high interest content to their own students.

**I find I know the students better as individuals when they do all or some of their work online.** One reason online supports knowing students better is that I hear every “voice” rather than just the students who are outspoken and/or do their thinking while talking through an idea. I remind them that the “talkers” in class often see a keyboard as a barrier, at least in the beginning. The quality of discussion and written assignments tends to be higher, possibly due to their more visible nature – most are visible to everyone in the class. In addition, students find it easier to learn from one another as they share strategies and teaching ideas online.

**Online learning keeps instructors and students interested and learning new skills.** Meaningful integration of technology in teaching and learning can provide endless interest and challenge as it changes so quickly. My curiosity, enthusiasm and willingness to fumble through a new challenge appears contagious to students, creating a dynamic cycle. The office of E-Learning and Instructional Support is encouraging and provides ongoing learning and support, including getting faculty together to share ideas and strategies. Taking advantage of these opportunities has resulted in more effective course development and implementation and great ongoing dialogue and professional friendships.

I encourage each of you to give online learning a try. I see it as just one of the many “languages” we have as teachers.

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## **Fifth Annual International Conference on Teaching and Learning**

*by Scott L. Crabill, Ph.D., Director of Integrative Studies*

The Oakland University and the University of Windsor Fifth Annual Conference on Teaching and Learning will be May 19 – 20, 2011 on the University of Windsor's campus. The conference is a mixture of

interactive workshops, presentations by our featured speaker, keynote addresses, and concurrent sessions offered by faculty from Oakland University and the University of Windsor. The Fifth Annual Conference on

Teaching and Learning is truly international in spirit. Intended for faculty, administrators and full-time graduate students, it explores current issues and challenges in teaching and learning in higher education.

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## **THE SENATE TEACHING AND LEARNING COMMITTEE**

**Fred Hoffman**, (Chair) School of Business Administration  
**Susan Awbrey**, Senior Associate Provost  
**Addington Coppin**, School of Business Administration  
**Melissa Hoag**, CAS, Music, Theatre and Dance  
**Lisa Levinson**, CAS, Linguistics

**Krista Malley**, Academic Skills Center  
**Shaun Moore**, E-Learning and Instructional Support  
**Fritz McDonald**, CAS, Philosophy  
**Robert Sidelinger**, CAS, Communication and Journalism  
**Support Staff:** Scott Crabill, Integrative Studies



# Putting It All Together: Best Teaching Practices 2009 Workshop

Summarized by Jennifer Law-Sullivan, Ph.D., CAS, Modern Languages and Literature

On Tuesday, November 17, 2009, approximately 20 faculty members shared lunch and a discussion of "Best Teaching Practices." Fred Hoffman from the Teaching & Learning Committee moderated the discussion, suggesting topics to direct conversation. Following is a list of helpful suggestions from your colleagues who were able to attend the workshop.

**Eliciting Student Participation:** *How can we better encourage students to participate in class?*

- Write questions on Moodle instead of delivering them orally. This will give students the opportunity to prepare their thoughts at home before the class discussion begins.
- Accept silence. When you ask a question, freeze. The silence may be uncomfortable at first, but it gives students the opportunity to process the question, formulate a response, and then share.
- Ask leading questions.
- Let students know it is okay to give an incorrect answer. Use the incorrect answer to find the right answer.
- Discuss a question first in pairs and then before the entire class.

**Classroom Management:** *How can we structure our class meetings to facilitate better participation?*

- Have a participation grade built into the course, as much as 25%.
- Give students advance preparation time before class discussions.
- On the first day of class, have an informal "meet the class" exercise. This activity will give the students the opportunity to meet each other, find common interests, and establish a sense of comfort and ease.
- Give students a participation grade every class.
- Use the "i-clickers" keep students engaged and hold them responsible. These devices allow the instructor to track participation and give students anonymity.
- Distribute numbered pieces of paper to students that they can hold up in response to questions.
- Use humor to set students at ease.
- Bring in coffee. The caffeine will help keep students awake and gathering around the pot before class promotes a feeling of community.

**Social Networking Sites:** *How can these sites be used to benefit a university course?*

- Create a class blog to create a repository bank of common questions.
- Facebook is questionable. While you could post information on professional

development and relevant articles, there may be an uncomfortable melding of professional and personal worlds.

- YouTube allows mounting of 10-minute segments for student projects.
- Twitter, with a limit of 140 characters, is suitable for back and forth discussions outside of class.
- Wikipedia has been used as a class project.

**Writing:** *What sorts of writing assignments do you use in your courses?*

- Debate topics. First write an essay on the topic to be debated, and then have the class debate.
- Reflective writing encourages both writing practice and critical thinking.
- Weekly journaling encourages the habit of writing and allows students to process material acquired throughout the week.
- Require students to participate in a trip to the writing center.

These were some of the suggestions shared among faculty at the 2009 luncheon. Hopefully the prove useful in your classrooms and if you have any creative ideas that encourage student involvement, please join us at the 2010 luncheon on November 18.

## Spotlight on Classroom Research: Teacher Self-Disclosure Motivates Students to Communicate

by Robert Sidelinger, Ed.D., CAS, Communication and Journalism

Do your students text on their cell phones or stare aimlessly out the windows? Student passivity is a common problem for faculty. Fortunately, research indicates instructors' effective behaviors in the classroom positively impact their students. One useful technique is self-disclosure. Appropriate teacher self-disclosure in the classroom offers instructors the opportunity to stimulate and maintain students' attention and interest. Jacob Cayanus (Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication and Journalism) examined the association between instructors' self-disclosures in the classroom and students' communication.

Teacher self-disclosure is when instructors reveal information about themselves that students would not otherwise know. Instructors' self-disclosures help to clarify course content. These disclosures reflect educational experiences, and information pertain-

ing to family and friends, beliefs and opinions, and personal problems. Most disclosures are considered appropriate by students, with the exception of personal problems, drinking behaviors, and personal opinions.

Appropriate disclosures elicit a host of positive classroom outcomes: perceived similarity between teachers and student, increased classroom participation, enhanced approachability of the instructor, a positive classroom environment, higher motivation, increased affective learning, and more positive instructor evaluations.

Cayanus' research found that relevant teacher self-disclosure may promote students' communication. Relevant disclosures include personal examples that relate to course topics. When instructors include these disclosures in the classroom students

are more motivated to communicate to learn more about the course and to demonstrate they know the course material. However, when instructors use negative self-disclosures, students may communicate for excuse-making reasons and sycophancy.

Relevant disclosure may be included in instructors' arsenal of prosocial classroom behaviors. As instructors share appropriate information about themselves students may develop a positive affect for them and the course. For more information about this topic:

Cayanus, J. L., Martin, M. M., & Goodboy, A. K. (2009). The relation between teacher self-disclosure and student motives to communication. *Communication Research Reports*, 26, 105-113.