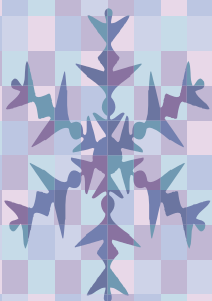


Winter
2011



Teaching and Learning Winter 2011 Newsletter

Teaching in the Time of Texting

Author: Dikka Berven, Ph.D., Special Lecturer of French, Dept. of Modern Languages & Literatures
Recipient of the 2009-2010 Excellence in Teaching Award

One subject on the minds of many on campus is the report from the Office of Institutional Research concerning the plummeting retention and graduation rates at Oakland University. 25 out of 100 students are calling it quits after the first year. Student engagement is another area needing improvement linked to these disconcerting statistics. It is a national problem.

A recent article in the *Oakland Post* (January 26, 2011, p. 13) reported that the other kind of retention—the ability to retain information—has plunged nationally as well. According to data compiled by Collegiate Learning Assessment, 45% of students examined did not demonstrate a significant improvement in complex reading and writing skills in their first years of college. This sorry development is blamed on a homework deficit.

Students entering the university today are ‘Generation Z’ (born between 1990 and 2000), dubbed the “Internet Generation”—the first to have been in a room with a computer since birth, the first without memory of life before social technologies. Interpersonal relationships are now “social networking.” Communication is done through Facebook, texting and tweeting. Texted thoughts are expressed formulaically: “?4U” = “I have a question for you.” But Baby Boomers, Generations X and Y are just as reliant on computers, gadgets, iPhones, iPads, and YouTube as their younger counterparts. Our phones are smarter than we are, and life has become easier. GPS systems get people to their destinations. Food is zapped. E-mail is about to put the U.S. Postal Service out of business. Online options are available for every ordinary task—banking, shopping, taxes, travel arrangements. Technology plays a major role in education today as well. Universities do most business online, and offer online courses to appeal to the “internet generation.”

But we are learning to take the bad along with the good. Communication via social media connects people in a way unprecedented in history, but now there are isolation and privacy issues that never existed before. People falsely portray themselves online. Identity theft is not uncommon. Hackers can get into private or government business; personal and public havoc can be wreaked. Parents complain that children prefer sitting in their rooms with their ear buds in their ears, texting friends, to interacting with family members. Everyone stares at screens hours every day—whether television, computer, cell phone, movie screens—at home, at school, and at work. As amazing as technologies are, they can have amazingly bad effects. London taxi drivers who switched to GPS systems have shrunken hippocampuses in their brains (worse memories) than those still navigating using their minds and maps (Newsweek, January 3, 2011)—they got dumber! Some people are even technology addicts. Several universities recently organized one day when all students had to turn off all technologies. Some students actually went into withdrawal, while others discovered a world of human beings they had not noticed before, and had conversations the old-fashioned way. It was a revelation to all involved.

Textbook companies have created a splendid array of ancillary digital materials—especially useful in developing online courses. When students sign up for an online course, they know what to expect: online work, online tests, with a meeting between professor and students occasionally during the semester. The computer is their point of contact.

But the in class setting should be a completely different story and experience. We should be very reluctant to believe that in offline courses online materials are superior to traditional reading, writing and discussing, when it comes to the development of complex skills—as is evident in the statistics above, related to retention. Nor can online options possibly be as engaging as communication between humans. Our greatest opportunity to engage our students in a revolutionary way that is completely different from the normal technology-oriented focus that governs the rest of their lives is to relate *without* the computer as our intermediary, whenever possible. We are not just another screen to click.

And I believe our students know this. Last semester one of our French language textbooks made available an online version of the hard copy workbook accompanying the main textbook. It promised to be essentially the same as the hard copy, with technological features “superior to the hard copy format,” designed to appeal to students (cheaper, up-to-date, interactive, auto-graded for immediate feedback) and faculty alike (“powerful Maestro classroom management and grade book tools that allow in-depth tracking of student scores and progress”). But wait a minute—interactive with whom? It “tracks” scoring? The hard copy workbook, as time-consuming as it inevitably is for teacher and student alike, is fundamentally important work. While reading students’ writing, I track their progress, from shorter to longer responses. My students are aware that the reader of their workbook will be me, and they display their personalities in many ways. I could not believe the online workbook is a preferable mode in an offline class. I decided to ask my students—this internet Generation Z group—their opinion. I passed out a simple questionnaire. Should we switch to the online version? The response was a thunderous, unanimous “NO!” Fifty questionnaires covered front and back with passionate reasons, such as “Students feel a stronger connection to the words, language and teacher with the hard copy, by writing. I use the computer for social purposes, but writing is creation, your window to the professor through which they see your progress, tribulations and successes.” Not a window on a screen, but a window to the professor.

Online materials are necessary for online courses, but they can be a barrier to student/professor engagement in a traditional classroom setting, and an unworthy substitute for traditional reading and writing assignments. A college education is not just a few clicks away—it takes years, like it always has. We must provide a challenging experience that is rewarding but different from the distracting, fragmented instantaneous virtual reality that dominates the rest of our students’ world. Maybe then, more than 50 out of 100 will stick around long enough to graduate.

2011 Educational Development Grants: Call for Proposals

The Senate charge to the Teaching and Learning Committee is “to promote the teaching and the learning process.” In accordance with this charge, the Committee invites the Oakland University faculty and staff to apply for grants in educational development. Funding may be requested for projects whose primary purpose involves one or more of the following:

- Development and/or use of new teaching techniques.
- Development of a new instructional approach.
- Faculty development related to curricular responsibilities.
- Investigation of a teaching/learning problem.
- Evaluation of a method of teaching.

Individual awards will not normally exceed \$750. Student labor in conjunction with preparation of teaching materials may be funded. The Committee will not fund preparation for accreditation or program reviews nor will it fund faculty salaries or travel costs. The cost of food, food services and photocopies will not be funded. The grant is not intended to support the purchase of software or hardware unless it is incidental to the development of the educational process.

The deadline for applications is 5:00 P.M. on Friday, March 18, 2011.

Completed applications should be emailed to Fred Hoffman (hoffman@oakland.edu). The form should be downloaded from the Teaching & Learning Committee website, filled out electronically and sent as an attachment.

Additionally, the electronic version must be followed by an identical, signed hard copy sent via campus mail to Fred Hoffman, School of Business Administration, 404 Elliott Hall. This hard copy of the application requires the signature of the department or unit head. The due date for the signed, hard copy is also 5:00 PM, Friday, March 18, 2011.

Each award recipient must file a final report at the conclusion of the project describing its purpose, activities and outcomes. The reports are due by March 1, 2012. Questions and comments may be directed to Fred Hoffman at x4978 or via email (hoffman@oakland.edu).

<http://www2.oakland.edu/tlcommittee/educationaldevelopmentgrant.cfm>



Upcoming Events

March

14th — Best Practices in Service Learning, led by Rich Perry from Marsh Risk Consulting, The Learning Studio, 200A Elliott Hall (use the entrance to Elliott closest to Pioneer Drive), 11:30-1. Limited seating for faculty. RSVP to cetl@oakland.edu. For more information contact Suzanne Flattery at x2466.

17th — Teaching Excellence Awards Nominee Luncheon, Oakland Room, Oakland Center, 11:30-1:00. *For more information contact Fred Hoffman at x4978 or hoffman@oakland.edu.*

27th-29th — Equity Within the Classroom Conference, Michigan Technological University, Houghton, MI. <http://www.oakland.edu/equityconference>. Travel funding will be provided to the first four faculty to register. *For more information contact Scott Crabill at x3229 or slcrabil@oakland.edu.*

31st — Students Across the Spectrum: Dealing with students with disabilities, a lunch and learn workshop, The Learning Studio, 200A Elliott Hall (use the entrance to Elliott closest to Pioneer Drive), 11:30-1:00. We'll provide the food and drinks. Bring your questions and experiences and learn about the support services provided by DSS and how best to deal with those students who may enter your classroom with Autism, Asperger's syndrome, or other disabilities. *For more information contact Fred Hoffman at x4978 or hoffman@oakland.edu.*

May

19th-20th — Fifth Annual Conference on Teaching & Learning: Beyond the Traditional Classroom, University of Windsor. <http://cleo.uwindsor.ca/oakland/>. *For more information contact Scott Crabill at x3229 or slcrabil@oakland.edu.*



An Interview with Cynthia Sifonis, Associate Professor of Psychology and Director of the Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Studies Program

Author: Fritz J. McDonald, Ph.D., College of Arts and Sciences, Assistant Professor of Philosophy

TLC: What is the Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Studies (BALS) program?

Cynthia Sifonis: The Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Studies program is an innovative and rigorous approach to interdisciplinary education within the College of Arts and Sciences. The program has been designed for motivated, creative students who are interested in exploring the intersections between disciplines for which Oakland University currently has no concentrations or majors.

The students for whom this program is designed will typically fall into one of two groups. The first group of students will be those who have two or more areas of study that they find equally interesting. These students typically find it difficult to choose a particular major at the expense of another because they would like to focus equally on both areas of study during their undergraduate education. The other group of students are those who are interested in an area of study that is interdisciplinary in nature (e.g., forensic science) but which is currently unaddressed at OU by the individual disciplines making up the field or is currently only offered at OU as a concentration.

The Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Studies program allows these students to pursue their particular interests while teaching them how to integrate diverse fields of knowledge and activity and how to generate new knowledge from the intersections between disciplines.

TLC: What courses will students take to finish the program?

Cynthia Sifonis: Students begin the program with two courses that introduce them to Liberal Studies and interdisciplinary approaches to generating knowledge.

LBS 100 (Exploration of the Arts and Sciences) provides an overview of the major discipline groups that traditionally comprise the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS). Readings and discussion during the semester will center on a particular interdisciplinary theme (e.g., Creativity) to demonstrate how diverse disciplines (e.g., Biology, Psychology, Language, Journalism) can relate to an overarching interdisciplinary topic.

LBS 200 (Interdisciplinary Approaches to Liberal Studies) will introduce students to interdisciplinary topics and methods. In this writing intensive course, students will apply interdisciplinary approaches to the

topics through analytical papers and oral presentations.

The core of the program will consist of either an interdisciplinary concentration or a combination of two approved minors offered in the CAS. The core program will include a relevant disciplinary methods course for all BALS students.

The program culminates in a two semester thesis experience: LBS 495 (Senior Thesis I) and LBS 496 (Senior Thesis II) during which students will work closely with faculty advisors in their areas of study and their instructor to develop and complete the research and writing of their liberal studies thesis papers and presentations.

TLC: How does BALS relate to existing programs?

Cynthia Sifonis: The BALS program is designed to work with existing programs and departments by utilizing existing department minors and interdisciplinary concentrations within the College of Arts and Sciences. By consulting with individual departments and program directors, BALS advisors can help design programs of study for BALS students that best prepare them for interdisciplinary study in their areas of interest. As a result, the program can also help nourish and grow existing minors and concentrations within the departments and increase the fit and quality of the students taking classes within the disciplines.

TLC: How is the BALS program different from other programs at the university?

Cynthia Sifonis: The BALS program differs from other Liberal Studies programs at the university in several ways. For one, it is focused on incoming freshman and transfer students who want to begin their undergraduate education with interdisciplinary training. Consequently, BALS students begin their education with courses designed to teach them about the various disciplines making up the CAS and how knowledge is generated within those disciplines.

Another difference is that the core of the BALS program is made up of existing concentrations or minor-minor combinations within the College of Arts and Sciences.

Finally, it is an interdisciplinary program specifically designed to develop enhanced abilities in critical and analytical thinking and writing in addition to creative and collaborative abilities.

TLC: What careers might BALS students pursue?

Cynthia Sifonis: BALS students that choose a line of study that corresponds with existing careers (e.g., forensics, neuropsychology, art restoration) will have the skill sets needed to obtain careers and succeed in those fields.

However, the training that students receive in this program should make them marketable for a wide range of existing careers and even careers that do not yet exist. This is because of an increasing recognition within particular disciplines of the contributions that knowledge from other disciplines can make to a particular field. Consequently, there is a need for people with the skills to bridge disciplines – to make connections not visible to those specializing in a particular area, to act on and develop those connections and to communicate those connections and the products that result to a diverse audience. The BALS program will produce students with these skills.

TLC: What new methods of teaching will be used in BALS?

Cynthia Sifonis: The program itself is a new approach to a Liberal Studies education. Typical Liberal Studies programs are designed to train generalists – people with a broad understanding of the natural sciences, social sciences, arts, and humanities. In contrast, the BALS program trains people to bridge disciplines by providing them with an education specific enough that they have a firm grasp of issues and approaches within specific fields but general enough that they can draw connections between those fields and communicate those connections to others.

Because developing student creativity is a valued component of this program, creative approaches to teaching course content is encouraged in the instructors who will be teaching the courses in the program. Possible creative teaching methods include podcasting course content or having students create their own podcasts for distribution, field trips, guest lectures, incorporating social media into the course, and the use of virtual worlds such as Second Life.



Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning

Author: David Lau, Ph. D., Interim Director of the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL)

Big news! Oakland University now has a new Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL). Improving teaching at Oakland University is the center's mission.

SERVING: The center is open to all full-time and part-time faculty and graduate assistants who teach at Oakland University.

WHAT: Working with teachers at Oakland University to develop pedagogy that culminates in student learning is the goal of the center.

The Learning Studio is a 21st century classroom environment containing the resources needed to support the teaching pedagogy of a broad based faculty and curriculum in ways that engage and enhance student learning. The Learning Studio provides the flexible resources to support a wide range of teaching styles, from traditional lecture-based pedagogy to collaborative, student-based learning. Some of these resources include: modular furniture, room-front location, multiple writing surfaces, fixed projection surfaces, mobile computer display technologies, video conferencing, lecture capture technology, wireless and wired network access, and technology control systems.

Workshops will be provided on various themes related to instructional development. The first sponsored workshop is "Best Practices in Service Learning" led by Rich Perry from Marsh Risk Consulting on Monday, March 14 from 11:30 – 1:30 in the Learning Studio. Other workshops will soon follow.

Research on teaching and learning provides the conceptual grounding for the work at the center. The Professional and Organization Development Network in Higher Education (POD) and the Carnegie Foundation (CF) both highlight significant research on teaching in higher education. The center incorporates this research and works to make it available to faculty. The Lilly North Conference on teaching in higher education, which is an extension of the work of the Carnegie Foundation, provides an additional venue for professional development. Particular attention at the center is given to the research on higher education at Oakland University.

Faculty Fellows will be made available beginning Fall 2011 for mentoring and work with other faculty members. A call for faculty fellow proposals will go out in this Spring.

WHERE: The CETL (Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning) is located in the 200 wing of Elliot near the connector hallway to Varner. The learning studio is in 200A. Faculty and staff offices are in 200D – 200G, and 200J. Look for news about CETL events and resources on the web at:

<http://www.oakland.edu/CETL>

IDEAS: Have an idea for a workshop or other program to develop the quality of teaching? We want to hear about it. If it engages faculty in productive thinking about and action in their teaching, we want to find a way to make it happen. Let us know.

There are a few assumptions that underlie the work of the center:

- ◆ There are no teachers without students. Moreover, it is only as students learn that truly, teachers can be said to teach.
- ◆ Teachers learn how to teach. Though being able to teach well is a gift, it is also a learned gift. Becoming a student of pedagogy improves teaching.
- ◆ The potential impact of a teacher on a student is immense. It extends well beyond the bounds of the classroom. Sometimes teachers inspire and are remembered a lifetime.
- ◆ Teaching is a challenge. Our students often do not find it as meaningful as we might hope. It is as much a dance as it is a wrestling match. Sometimes we move well together, sometime not and there is conflict. How we handle the conflict influences the student experience of learning.

WHO:

David Lau, Interim Director
Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning
248-370-2455
lau@oakland.edu

Suzanne Flattery, Administrative Secretary
Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning
248-370-2466
flattery@oakland.edu



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, OUWB School of Medicine
Shaun Moore, E-Learning and Instructional Support
Fritz McDonald, CAS, Philosophy
Robert Sidelinger, CAS, Communication and Journalism
Support Staff: Scott Crabill, Integrative Studies