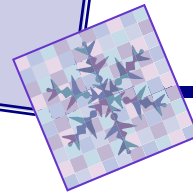


# Senate Teaching and Learning Committee

Winter  
2008



## Wake-Up Call, By Peter J. Bertocci, Professor of Anthropology

If there is any extra-curricular reading that should soon be on every Oakland University faculty member's agenda, it is the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment's "What Students Are Telling Us About Their OU Experience: Results from the NSSE Survey." First unveiled just before the holiday break by OIRA Director Laura Schartman to an increasingly somber audience of faculty and administrators, and now on-line at the OIRA home page, the NSSE Survey raises serious questions as to whether Oakland offers the "instructional programs of high quality" that it claims as part of its mission to provide. It also makes one ask whether the university will meet 2010 goal of delivering "high quality and challenging undergraduate education" by an "inspired faculty" that is "driven by ... dedication ... to the teaching-learning process." And it suggests that we've all got some serious work to do if the similarly lofty instructional goals of 2020 are to be met.

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) grew out of a 1998 initiative by the Pew Charitable Trusts aimed at studying "the investments that institutions make to foster proven instructional practices and the kinds of activities, experiences and outcomes that their students receive as a result" (see the NSSE home page <[nsse.iub.edu](http://nsse.iub.edu)> on the origins of the study).

One central conclusion of the NSSE over the years is that "the degree to which students are engaged in their studies impacts directly on the quality of student learning and their overall educational experience." Thus, "characteristics of student involvement can serve as a proxy for quality" (NSSE home page). Put differently, the NSSE is a "college student survey that assesses the extent to which students engage in educational practices associated with high levels of learning and development" (quotes from the on-line study narrative). It focuses on "the ways that [institutions] can shape their academic, interpersonal and extracurricular offerings to encourage *student engagement*" (emphasis in original), by which is meant the "time and energy" [students devote] to educationally purposeful activities" and the kinds of "effective institutional practices" that institutions use "to induce students to do the right things."

Just over a third of the 4,800 Oakland students invited to participate in NSSE's 2007 survey responded, a re-

sponse rate roughly matching that of the overall national survey. The study focuses comparatively on first year students and seniors only. The OIRA report includes longitudinal NSSE data from 2002, 2003, 2005 and 2007, and in it OU student responses are variously compared with those of "selected peer," Carnegie, NSSE and the "top 50" national institutions. The OIRA's overall conclusions are summarized in a series of graphic presentations, but pages of data tables are provided for anyone wishing to explore the study in great depth.

The NSSE identifies, and reports student responses to questions measuring institutional performance on, five key indicators of "effective educational practice:" the level of "academic challenge" (LAC) students experience, the degree to which they are involved in "active and collaborative learning" (ACL), the extent of "student-faculty interaction" (SFI), how much in the way of "enriching educational experiences" (EEE) institutions provide, and how "supportive" students feel their "campus environment" (SCE) to be. The OIRA study presents graphic data generated from the NSSE to compare summarily Oakland's performance on these five indicators with selected peer, Carnegie, overall NSSE and "Top 50%" institutions. It first presents overall benchmark comparisons for each of the five variables, then following up with graphic data from several illustrative questionnaire items.

From an Oakland faculty member's perspective, the overall benchmark data are startling; they show Oakland typically trails the other institutions by 2-3 points on most measures. The benchmark data tend, perhaps, to exaggerate the differences when one looks at the actual NSSE 2007 mean comparison tables that are also provided. Nonetheless, *the ineluctable conclusion one draws from the study is that Oakland is at mean or often below the mean in performance on most indicators in comparison with the other institutions in all categories.* Thus, for example, Oakland's LAC scores "are close to the means for many items, but ... low on objective measures of student effort, e.g. number of papers written, reading assignments and hour spent studying." "There are no 'high performance areas'" in the AIC area, reports the study, and the data for the "student-faculty interaction" area are especially disturbing. *Continued on back...*

# 2008 Educational Development Grant 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 travel costs or full-time faculty salaries. Joint proposals should identify a single lead applicant. The committee will not normally fund multiple proposals from a lead applicant. 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 17, 2008**

Completed applications should be emailed to Austin Murphy ([ajmurph@oakland.edu](mailto:ajmurph@oakland.edu)) 5:00 P.M., Friday, March 17, 2008. The form should be downloaded, 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 Austin Murphy, School of Business Administration, 408 Elliot 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 17, 2008.

**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, 2009.**

Questions and comments may be directed to Anne Mitchell at (248) 370-4098 or via email ([mitchell@oakland.edu](mailto:mitchell@oakland.edu)).

## Upcoming Events

### MARCH

4th—Teaching and Learning Coffee Hour, Gold Rooms A & B, Oakland Center, 11:30-1:30  
13th—E-Portfolio Workshop,

27th—Teaching Excellence Awards Nominee Luncheon, Oakland Room Oakland Center, 11:30-1:00



### APRIL

16th—Faculty Recognition Luncheon

### MAY

12th-13th—Second Annual International Conference on Teaching and Learning: Creative and Critical Thinking,

### **The Senate Teaching and Learning Committee**

#### *Chair:*

Anne Mitchell, Nursing

#### *Members:*

Susan Awbrey, Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education

Henry Aigbedo, School of Business

Melodie Kondratek, School of Health Sciences,

Austin Murphy, Accounting & Finance

Charles Edward Clark Jr., Academic Skills Center

Lori Winslow, Nursing/MATEE Student

# Accommodating Students with Disabilities in Higher Education is a Shared Responsibility

By Linda Sisson, Director, Disabilities Support Services

Faculty, students, and the Office of Disability Support Services staff must work together to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities who request support. All involved in the process have rights as well as responsibilities.

Qualified **students** with disabilities at Oakland University have the right to:

- Access courses, programs, services, activities and facilities offered through the university.
- Work, learn and receive reasonable accommodations and/or auxiliary aids and services that do not impose an undue hardship or fundamentally alter course requirements.
- Confidentiality of all information about their disability except as disclosures are required or permitted by law.
- Have disability related records maintained separately from academic records.

Qualified **students** with disabilities at Oakland University have the responsibility to:

- Meet qualifications and maintain the essential university standards for courses, programs, services and activities.
- Self-identify as an individual with a disability and seek information, advising, and assistance when necessary.
- Document (from an appropriate licensed professional) the disability and how it limits participation in courses, programs, services or activities.
- Follow procedures for obtaining reasonable accommodations or auxiliary aids.

**Faculty** and staff have the right to:

- Receive verification of a documented disability from DSS in the form of a faculty notification letter delivered by the student.
- Contact the DSS office to discuss the appropriateness of the accommodations requested and to discuss strategies that assist the learning process.
- Establish course/program standards and essential requirements.
- Refuse unreasonable accommodations, academic adjustments or auxiliary aids that impose a fundamental alteration to a program.

**Faculty** and staff have the responsibility to:

- Maintain appropriate confidentiality of student disability related information except where permitted or required by law.
- Maintain the same standards for students with disabilities as are applied to all other students
- Evaluate students on the basis of their abilities and not their disabilities.
- Provide and arrange any reasonable classroom accommodations deemed reasonable and appropriate by DSS.

Here are some general suggestions for modifying the learning environment to make your class more accessible:

- Add a statement to your syllabus inviting students who have disabilities to discuss their needs and accommodation strategies with you. An example of such a statement is, "If you have a documented disability and wish to discuss academic accommodations, please contact me as soon as possible."
- Select course materials early so that they can be procured in appropriate formats in a timely manner.
- Ask students about successful accommodations they have used in the past. Ask the student to explain the functional limitations of their disability and how they impact the learning process.
- Use materials that are available in an electronic format.
- Find alternative methods of administering tests and testing comprehension of a subject.

Use DSS as a resource for questions, concerns, suggestions etc. Phone: #3266, 121 NFH.

## ***Second Annual International Conference on Teaching and Learning: Creative and Critical Thinking***

Oakland University is proud to host this year's conference on teaching and learning, in conjunction with the University of Windsor, May 12 and 13, 2008 in the Oakland Center. The theme of the event is critical and creative thinking. Experts in each area will provide the latest research and techniques to enable faculty to better prepare their students through alternative teaching techniques and improved assessment methods.

The conference will begin with a workshop conducted by Ellen Weber, Director of MITA Center for Brain Based Education Renewal, and will provide tools to address the student issues pertaining to the NSSE survey which were presented during the Fall Teaching and Learning luncheon.

We invite you to join us to learn more about the latest brain research findings and teaching instruction that has proven to be effective in student's ability to learn and retain knowledge.

For more information about attending the conference, visit the conference website: [www2.oakland.edu/itlconference/index.cfm](http://www2.oakland.edu/itlconference/index.cfm)



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Our first year students especially, report lower levels of faculty feedback, for example, and we score below the mean on most indicators of working with students outside of class on research or other projects. Asked to rate their faculty on a scale from “unavailable, unhelpful” to “available, helpful”, both first year students and seniors gave our faculty lower scores than students at the comparison institutions did.

Oakland compares more favorably with its selected peer institutions in providing “enriching educational experiences,” but other than in its offerings in foreign language coursework, it does not score highly on the performance items measured in this area and visibly lags behind in some of them. Measures of the supportiveness of our overall campus environment came in lower as well; low scores on items related to relationships with faculty and staff are especially worthy of note. The last two questions in the survey instrument asked students, on a scale of 1 low to 4 high, to “evaluate your entire educational experience at this institution,” and whether, if they had it to do over, they would “go to the same institution you are now attending.” OU student responses to both questions however a tad lower below the mean score of 3 (“good”), that students elsewhere tended to give their schools.

One should stress that Oakland's scores on most items are at or just slightly close to the mean, and in most cases the differences are not statistically significant. It is not, therefore, that we are performing at seriously lower level than our peer and other institutions nationally. But these results are clearly not consistent with the claims we make and the aspirations we have to provide a superior, high quality and distinctive educational experience. Moreover, the wide-ranging NSSE study touches on many student behaviors that are not easily amenable to change by institutional practices and faculty instructional efforts. The OIRA study makes a point of showing the astoundingly greater amount of time that OU students, both first year and senior, spend working off campus for pay than do students at our peer institutions. That fact presents Oakland faculty with a particularly unusual challenge in improving student engagement in the learning process. But it is clear that we as a faculty can do more to move our overall instructional performance to a level closer the ideals we profess and to which we aspire. I would recommend that all units place collective deliberation on the OIRA report and NSSE data on their agenda some time soon. And perhaps the Teaching and Learning Committee can exercise some leadership as well in helping us assess the meaning of these results and what steps we can take to ameliorate them.