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SUCCESS AND MOTIVATION IN GRADUATE SCHOOL
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TEACHING STYLES TO PROMOTE ACTIVE LEARNING
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I'm excited about this issue of lessons. I'm proud of our student writers and their ability to articulate what they've found most motivating in their classes. I especially love the way the students have chosen to showcase what their favorite teachers have done to motivate them in the classroom.

You'll find that the biggest theme in this issue is active learning. Through service learning, technology, or more specific activities, our student writers have explained the great advantages of active learning. Being a big fan of active learning myself, I think it's fantastic that these students have resoundingly decided that active learning is such a great motivator for their learning. I, too, decided to write on it.

Other articles in this issue help us, as instructors, to better cope with some of the difficulties that come our way, from tired graduate students, to multi-leveled classrooms, to just pure self-motivation; I hope that this issue will offer you exactly what you need to support you in your role as a teacher.

Kim Welch
Assistant Director, CTLE
SUCCESS AND MOTIVATION IN GRADUATE SCHOOL

BY MARIA MURGUIA

Graduate school can be one of the most rewarding experiences of a student's academic and personal life, but it also can be the most physically and mentally challenging. Associate Professor of Psychology Paul White put it best: "graduate school was both some of the hardest of times and some of the most enjoyable of times."

It is these challenges, the hard work, and the dedication that make the experience worthwhile. Still, the demands of graduate life require staying focused and being self-disciplined and motivated. Working toward a specific goal can keep some students motivated. But, if the passion and dedication aren't there, a student is likely to go astray. Having the support of others can be another source of motivation. Sources for motivation are not always easy to come by, leaving many graduate students to look within themselves for their motivators.

Born Scholars

For some, graduate school has always been a goal; it was just a matter of how and when. Since he was 11 years old, Professor of Chemistry Jack Simons knew he had to acquire specific credentials to become a scientist. "I just knew that the only way to do research in science was to become a Ph.D.,” he said. “It’s probably unusual.”

At the age of 3, Associate Professor of Psychology Paul White knew he would go to graduate school. This came naturally to him. He lived in an academic household; his father was a college professor. Still, White didn’t consider psychology until high school, when he said he got the research bug. Research has always been White’s priority and rationale for continuing his education in a doctoral program. “My goals were not, and are still not, on being a professor,” White said.

Simons and White both had the goal of making empirical research their life’s work and knew they had to go beyond the undergraduate level to achieve it. This self-awareness of knowing what to accomplish through graduate programs is a quality that many professors want to see in the students who approach them for advice. These professors want to see clear goals and self-determination.

Isabel Dulfano, assistant professor of Spanish in the Department of Languages and Literature, likes to emphasize the significance of having a goal when considering graduate programs. Dulfano said, “I don’t encourage people to go to graduate school unless they know who they are. I encourage people who have the right qualities.”

One of those qualities is patience, especially when it comes to the educational system itself. “[Students need to] have tremendous patience. [It is] a system with many hurdles that [students] need to learn to manipulate,” Dulfano said. “If the students have a specific goal in mind, those hurdles become easier to clear,” she added.

Professor Robert Avery in the Department of Communication agrees with Dulfano’s philosophy. “I get them to articulate why they want to go to graduate school. Then, I can guide them and recommend an approach,” Avery said. Avery had already received his Master’s and was working in broadcasting when he realized he wanted to teach and work toward a Ph.D. “It gave me the opportunity to constantly work with students,” he said.

Avery sees something special about being a professor and a scholar. It is being part of a community of scholars, and it’s a shared community, he said.

Simons does not necessarily believe that his undergraduate students need to articulate their goals with him. “Most have already decided [that they want to pursue graduate studies],” he said. Simons said that the majority of his students ask questions regarding what they should look for
in a graduate program and more career-specific questions.

For some it is not a matter of careers but knowledge. Third-year psychology doctoral student Alyson Froehlich said she had no real goal in mind when she began to apply to graduate school; she simply wanted to continue studying her interest area within psychology. "I wanted to keep learning: it was not about a degree," she said. Froehlich said she will likely continue in academia. Matthew Saker, a doctoral student in the Department of Communication, said, "I'd like to be a professor ... I want to be very engaged in my research and in motivating my own students."

All of these individuals saw something within themselves that motivated them in their academic careers. And that is exactly what White suggests students do. "If you're going to graduate school to get a degree for others, or because of others, that gets hard to do, because when it gets tough, you start to question and doubt your abilities, and [it's hard] to get to the point where there is something driving you," White said.

Helping and Motivating Each Other

Although some may believe that competition motivates graduate students to succeed, in many cases it is just not true. Many graduate students are encouraged to form cohorts and help each other with the intense workload and stress, and they also help each other emotionally. They motivate each other.

For example, Baker said it's not about the individual. "We're all a team. It's not a matter of doing better than somebody else; it's a matter of doing well."

It helps to have someone who will listen and can relate to certain situations. In these cohorts, the students feed off each other with information. Froehlich said that it is not a competition but a way of comparing. "Making that comparison is useful to monitor you progress," she said. It helps to know who is doing what, what classes to take, and when to fill out what forms, and it helps to approach others for ideas on research projects, she added.

"We share our experience ... It's nice to know other students have your back when things get tough," Froehlich said. Just as Froehlich has been helped by her peers, she said she helps new graduate students in teaching and in taking certain steps within the program.

Esther Israel, a clinical psychology master's student, said she thinks with such diverse interests there is hardly any room for competition. "We all have different career objectives, not to mention that the field of clinical psychology has become so specific," she said. "I think that contributes to reducing rivalry among peers, because it almost seems like
we are not in competition with each other.”

Cara Wieser, a second-year master’s student in communication, acknowledges that there can be some competition, but not always. Wieser said it depends on the specific program and discipline. She does not believe communication is one of those disciplines. “Everyone in the department is willing to help,” she said. “To remain a good and strong department, everyone needs to succeed.”

**Internally Driven**

Obtaining help from others is one way of keeping motivated, but self-motivation may be the most crucial key to success in graduate programs. In order to be successful, the student has to be able to focus and have real determination. Each student must find something that will help motivate him or her. Baker said that his inner drive is his own fear. “Fear of failure motivates me,” he said. In comparison, Israel said, “I am internally driven to reach the goals that I set for myself.”

Froehlich said she likes to work independently and pursue her own research projects. Froehlich mentions a characteristic that is highly crucial: independence. For her, a certain degree of independence is not only necessary but required. And professors can’t emphasize that enough. “[Have] independence, [and be willing to] learn on your own,” Simons said.

Additionally, Avery believes that academic independence is something that every graduate student should strive to obtain. Getting to this level of academic independence starts with providing support and guidance. “You’re helping to develop a young scholar,” he said.

Eventually the student gains the freedom to “embark on a life of scholarly pursuit. You become your own mentor and your own disciplinarian. There is this sense of cutting the umbilical cord,” he added.

But it’s more than simply becoming independent. Professor White said it’s also about developing a unique voice and way of thinking and being able to develop in a broad way.

Froehlich agrees. She said that having the support is good and necessary, but the supporter also has to let the students develop their own ideas. “You’re not always going to have someone to say what you need to do … You have to be self-motivated and be interested in what you do. The more interested you are, the easier it is to get through to graduate school,” Froehlich said.

Still, getting through is more than just getting through. Most professors agree that a graduate program is not about how smart a person is, but about the amount of effort the student is willing to put in. Dulfano has seen this with her students. “The ones who are successful are not necessarily the smart ones but the ones who get things done,” she said. “What good is it to you if you don’t finish?”

“With Ph.D.s, 50 percent are A.B.D. [all but the dissertation]. They never finish their dissertations,” Dulfano said. Avery knows this as well, which is why he said it is at that point where graduate students need to be free to pursue writing their dissertations and truly become experts in their field.

“Nothing is more satisfying than the pursuit of knowledge,” he said. “I’m reading works from former students. The roles are now reversed; they are now teaching me.”

**Important Relationships**

To become experts, graduate students learn from the experts. Working closely and creating a relationship with professors is essential for students’ graduate school career. A professor potentially becomes an academic advisor who will assist throughout the course program. Choosing the right advisor is crucial in order to progress efficiently. When choosing an advisor, Dulfano recommends, “Find someone who is an expert in your field and you are able to work with and will give you feedback.”

Each student seeks something from the relationship. For example, Wieser said that advisors must be available, have office hours, and must be willing to put in the time. But for Froehlich, it is important to have a mentor as an advisor who will not necessarily tell her what to do but guide her when she goes astray. “Some [professors] are good at being...
mentors. But some don’t help, and the students need to seek the help on their own,” Froehlich said.

In the professors’ defense, Avery said that, “the faculty is a mentor, a support, and critic.” Yet, in order for the relationship to be effective, the student must make a commitment to speak and ask questions. Professors are not going to hunt down students. “If they choose to hide, they can hide,” Avery said.

Additionally, a mere willingness to help is not enough. “It’s important to have an advisor who recognizes your strengths and weakness and who knows what works best for you,” Froehlich said. Similarly, a good advisor should not only know the student personally but also know what challenges the students academically. “My advisor has high expectations, but he is willing to help me meet those expectations,” Baker said.

Professors meet many students throughout their careers and may enjoy working with certain types of students. “I like to work with gifted minorities and show them there are available opportunities. Some of these minorities are very intelligent and deserving students, but their parents don’t know about the opportunities and of the system and cannot be supportive,” Dulfano said. To compensate, Dulfano said that she tries to provide as much information as she can. Similarly, Simons said that in the recent years he has worked with more females and enjoys helping these women be respected in science. Simons is so willing to help his students succeed that he used part of his Rosenblatt Prize award of $40,000 to create a research fund for his doctoral students.

The student-advisor relationship requires effort that builds gradually, but once established, it is constantly growing. It is through the growth of a professional, and yet personal, relationship with advisors and professors, that the student can find words of wisdom that make daily life as a graduate student a little more manageable and help graduate students be continually motivated.

**Surviving Day by Day**

Students have intensely busy schedules: courses, teaching, research projects, studying, and some have families. After weeks, months, and years, it can be physically exhausting.

This is a typical day for Wieser: “I get up at 6 a.m. Then, I study for a couple of hours, go to my classes, teach classes, and finally go home for the day.”

Keeping a balance becomes hard. The cliché “work hard, play hard” becomes important in maintaining motivation and reducing burnout. “I think I went to a movie and concerts once or twice a month,” White said. “It is important to take a day off and do something unrelated to school,” Wieser said.

When students take that time for themselves they can refocus on their studies, and it relieves some of the stress. Living healthily also helps. Sleeping and eating well are important, Wieser said.

For Baker, it is about what he will achieve after making such sacrifices. He said that not being able to see an end can cause him to lose some motivation. But then, he reminds himself, “one day it will be over. I’ve been in school a long time ... I look forward to it, and if I can’t see that, it gets frustrating.”

**A Tedious Process**

It is difficult enough to keep a certain standard of motivation once in a graduate program but the lack of motivation can start with the application process.

Justin Myers, a graduating senior, is currently applying to architecture school and is excited about all aspects of making the transition into graduate level studies, all but the application process itself. “The process, even to apply, becomes so difficult, and you become less excited,” he said.

“It does not have to be difficult,” said Courtney Reeser, Graduate Executive Secretary for the Department of Languages and Literature. The process can be simplified if applicants contact the right people. “The graduate secretary should be the first contact when putting an application,” Reeser said. When specific questions arise, the graduate secretary can refer students to the graduate adviser. “Students make it more involved than it has to be and ignore the staff interaction,” she added. Myers is an example of that.

Once students are admitted, the graduate secretary continues to provide information. “I make sure they are [placed] with the appropriate faculty to assist them ... act as intermediates between the students and faculty regarding concerns and complications,” Reeser said.

Dulfano thinks that is just as it is important to contact the graduate secretary, it also is important to look at the program’s environment. “You want an environment that is conducive to you feeling comfortable,” she said.

Myers already knows what environment he wants. He wants an environment that will teach him a profession. “[In architecture programs], the focus is on preparation for the profession and marketable skills, instead of ideas,” he said. “I would like it [graduate work] to be less different than undergraduate work with less emphasis on grades and more on improving your skills and preparation for the real world.”

**All Worth It?**

Graduate school is mentally and physically challenging, and there are going to be good and bad days. The few bad days will go away, but hopefully, it is the many good days that will be kept in the students’ memories.

As Baker said, “The things you work hard for are always more rewarding.”

Maintaining motivation through interaction with faculty and other students along with a strong sense of personal identity and purpose may define success or failure in an academic career.
“Everyone in the department is willing to help. To remain a good and strong department, everyone needs to succeed.”

Cara Wieser
Communication Ph.D. Student

“I know many colleagues who would never think of telling students about their personal histories. I have a pretty unique history, as a Mexican American woman from a family of 12 who lived in poverty. I find that this story is useful in opening up students’ minds to issues of race, class, gender, etc., and also helps them feel comfortable sharing stories from their lives. Students learn so much from each other in this way.”

Theresa Martinez
Associate Dean, Sociology

“My professors don’t really care about me or my education. My incentive to pass comes from the desire to never have to sit through their lectures again. I want to succeed because of myself not because anyone has encouraged me to be better.”

Susan Jones
Sophomore, Undeclared Major

“Graduate school was both some of the hardest of times and some of the most enjoyable of times.”

Paul White
Associate Professor of Psychology

“I know that I am a better teacher because my experience has helped me to learn more and more about what effective teaching involves. I enjoy hearing about what other professors do within their classes, and I hope they also learn from my experience. Such sharing helps to make all of us better teachers.”

Nancy Jensen
Writing Professor

“I’ve read a lot of teaching evaluations of other faculty to try to learn from them, and I’ve netted that undergraduates pick up on it pretty quickly if the professor does not respect them and their contributions. The vast majority of the professors at the U know their topic inside and out; many of them are nationally recognized experts in their fields. But all that great information is not going to get through if the student is feeling belittled, intimidated, or even as if the professor simply doesn’t care what they think.”

Liz Borgwardt
Assistant Professor, History

“The traditional way is students in seats, teacher in front of the class. But, research shows that multiple modes help. Students can be active -- working with others, talking about it. When people are teaching, they are learning things better.”

Carol Sansone
Professor, Psychology

About a service learning class: “It didn’t feel like a class, it felt like something I would do all day. I loved learning and gardening. The amount of time spent outside of class was never a sacrifice ... The learning came intrinsically. I didn’t feel pressured to learn things, but felt free. I was interested in learning. In other classes, there is that obligation to do certain things, that dryness. It’s not as personal or intimate.”

Artem Kopelev
Junior, Biology, Math, International Studies
LEARNING HOW TO SERVE: INSPIRING MOTIVATION

BY STEVEN WATKINS
PHOTOGRAPHS BY KENDRA HORN

Before the Citifront Apartment complex was built, there was an abandoned bowling alley at 631 W. North Temple. Behind the apartments is a ruined factory building, the remains of a 2004 fire. Farther west the former Frontier Pies restaurant has been repainted and turned into a Leatherby's ice-cream parlor. At the heart of these new developments Maged Senbel’s graduate workshop in the urban planning department has found a niche where the students work with the Neighborhood Housing Association on future developments. Suite 50 of Citifront Apartments has become a design war-room for the West side.

The 14 students of Senbel’s workshop showed off their initial research for critics from the Neighborhood Housing Association, architects and planners in the community. This stage involved community mapmaking, much more than just laying out streets. The maps, with the help of photos, statistics and quotes from residents—all imposed on the map itself—document topics such as crime rates, government boundaries, transportation, land use and incomes. Later, development solutions will be suggested for the community. The School of Business sent a student to the class to help with financial feasibility issues and learn more about real-estate aspects.

Senbel’s class is one of 130 service-learning courses on campus. The program began in 1992 to get students involved in the community through projects and partnerships. In service-learning, students apply concepts in real-life situations. The Bennion Center’s service-learning faculty primer credits the work of psychologists such as Jean Piaget for setting the foundation in active learning methodology.

The psychology department uses service-learning as one of six modes of learning. The other modes include research, technology, everyday psychology, collaborative learning, and writing/communication. The modes of learning program lets the psychology department practice what theorists have preached.

“The traditional way is students in seats, teacher in front of the class. But, research shows that multiple modes help. Students can be active—working with others, talking about it. When people are teaching, they are learning things better,” said Dr. Carol Sansone, professor of psychology.

Joani Shaver, Manager of Service-Learning at the Bennion Center, agrees that the program is unique.

“It’s a different type of learning—active versus sitting—spitting the information out for a test. Students can get involved in the learning process.”

During the summer of 2004, Artem Kopelev, a junior who is triple majoring in biology, math and international studies, enrolled in an organic biology course listed with the service-learning attribute. The class taught principles of gardening, agriculture and sustainability. Along with regular course work, the students grew their own gardens. Some students would attend to their plants every other day, watering, trimming and just seeing how much they had grown.

Kopelev and his partner grew four tomato and eight sweet pepper plants, and when they were ripe, the vegetables were
donated to a food pantry. Other students grew corn, pumpkins, squash and flowers. “It didn’t feel like a class, it felt like something I would do all day. I loved learning about gardening. The amount of time spent outside of class was never a sacrifice,” said Kopelev.

Kopelev contrasted this course with other courses he has had. “The learning came intrinsically. I didn’t feel pressured to learn things, but felt free. I was interested in learning. In other classes there is that obligation to do certain things, that dryness. It’s not as personal or intimate.”

Students learn differently in courses that get them to apply concepts outside of the classroom. Professors have to teach differently, too.

“A class is a single unit, so it can be controlled. In service-learning students can be doing different things, so I am overseeing multiple dimensions. It’s impossible to control. To make it work I told the students that they have to take ownership on their projects,” said Luke Garrott, assistant professor of political science.

Garrott teaches a class on neighborhood democracy. His 15 students are divided into five teams. Some analyze community council meetings, some are organizing a community festival in the Rose Park area, others interview government leaders, and there is also a questionnaire for residents of Glendale and Rose Park.

Sansone finds herself playing with the activities and styles she uses to find out what will work. “It takes a lot of thought to try and find the best way. I always change things as I wonder ‘what could make things better?’”

Service-learning classes often involve forming a partnership with a community organization, such as a food pantry or community councils, so teachers do more than work with a syllabus and what texts they will use that semester. Students and teachers have to commit to projects and make them work. Shaver knows there are a lot of risks involved.

“Partners facilitate their learning. If the partner works well, they will learn well. The partner takes a risk on the students not showing up and not doing the work,” said Shaver.

Shaver said it is important for everyone to communicate as they navigate this three-legged stool between students, teachers and partners. Shaver noted that sometimes business partners do not realize the students are being graded on their projects and treat them as regular volunteers.

Martha Bradley, associate professor of architecture, teaches an introductory class where service-learning is a concurrent enrollment option. Bradley said typically 30 students out of 300 participate, and she usually tries to have 13 projects for them to select from.

“(I) don’t always have enough students for the projects,” Bradley said. “This is where communication with business partners is important, so needs can be met, even when numbers are short.”

The modes of learning program is concurrent enrollment, so not everyone in a class is as motivated to participate, even though two credit hours are required for the major. Sansone said typically half of the class is enrolled, and that the students who have completed the requirements do not care as much.

“The negative thing about modes of learning is that
often a divide occurs between modes and regular students. Those students are losing that opportunity to learn in a different way," Sansone said.

Bradley echoes Sansone and Garrott that setting up projects and partners on top of traditional class methods is demanding.

"It requires more energy from the teacher. There is a lot of set-up in finding a project, establishing relationships with a partner, making students understand the process. There are a lot of extra moves," Bradley said.

Despite these demands, instructors know the method benefits students.

"It is an advantage because students can pour their energy into something that makes a difference. It enhances the meaning as an application and benefit. It has the best effect on students' lives," said Bradley.

"It gets them out in the community. The classroom can't touch that experience. You can talk about examples, but until you see it and get that real-life experience it isn't the same. They are making sense of the abstract, creating their own knowledge," said Garrott.

Bradley is involved because as an activist, she finds teaching service-learning a reflection of her personality. Garrott has also always been inclined to link theory and practice, and this program is allowing him to have that opportunity.

Sansone enjoys reaching the point where students are working with the concepts and making them personal. When students in her classes debate the theorists, they are internalizing the information and becoming passionate about the information. The style makes it more fun for her and her students.

Shaver believes that service-learning could extend its influence, and become more of a required, rather than an optional, program citing departments that already require it to be in a lab all day, and that this program does not fit them. Their philosophy of learning is reflected because they don’t have service-learning.

Shaver at least hopes to educate the student population about this opportunity, since she recognizes the program is not really well known. A 1996-1999 Bennion Center study found that more seniors than any other class participated.

Shaver said that it might take a few years on campus before students even find out about service-learning. Right now, Shaver said most people hear about the program through friends who talk about some of the popular service-learning courses.

The Bennion Center has put together a DVD about the program for faculty to have as a resource. Shaver hopes they will use it as they introduce the opportunity in the first week of the semester, so students can see what they could be doing as active learners.

Bradley said service-learning works fine as an option for students, noting that when it is not fully integrated, they do have to pay more tuition. Bradley enjoys being able to pitch the opportunity in her class and getting the interested students involved.

"The kids who do it are typically service-oriented — not that other people aren’t good. They just haven’t started thinking that way yet," Bradley said.

Bradley also believes that the community-based style works better in different types of classes. She has found that service-learning’s projects better fit the content of upper division and architectural theory classes.

Despite these demands, Bradley said, "It’s enormously gratifying work — knowing my students are satisfying a great need in the community. It is a feel-good thing."

Bradley’s experience with service-learning started out in Architecture 1615 and in a Service-Learning Scholar Seminar she taught a few years ago.

She was a speaker at the 2005 Scholar Banquet for students who graduated with the Service-Learning Scholar distinction.

Bradley remembers working with the Center for Documentary Arts on a project about the West- and Eastside gap. After studying different city blocks, the students made a computer animation showing what buildings had been built and torn down over time. Called "Crossing the Tracks," the project is part of a display for the Leonardo Complex by the Salt Lake City Library.

The University of Utah prides itself as a research institution.

Service-learning complements that research mission, as it seeks to strengthen ties with the community and give students field experience. Students face decisions about the future every semester, some seemingly as small as whether they should take a service-learning class to enrich their learning experience.

As professors strive to help a future generation, they could read a Chinese proverb from the Bennion Center’s web site for inspiration: "Tell me and I will forget. Show me and I will remember. Involve me and I will understand."
TEACHING STYLES
TO PROMOTE ACTIVE LEARNING

BY COLLEEN CORKERY

Bueller ... Bueller ... anyone? Bueller? The bland, monotone, mind-numbing, lecture-droning professor in the movie "Ferris Bueller's Day Off" is a perfect example of the teaching style that is not working in today's classrooms.

Professors, like students, learn and teach in different ways, however, some are more effective than others. Matching teaching style with learning style might improve a student's overall college experience and a professor's contentment, or if all else fails, their evaluation scores.

The University of Utah prides itself on its bright, intellectually challenging faculty. A student may only voice his or her opinion about a professor in their final evaluation. By this time, it is generally too late to change or improve a student's learning experience.

Another problem is that serious thought may be put into an evaluation sheet just for it to be seen only by the shredding machine, and the learning process for both that professor and his or her student and future students ends there.

In a recent poll, some students were given the chance to determine who their favorite professors were thus far in their college careers. Based on the classroom experiences, they found the most conducive to learning and the teaching styles they enjoyed from that particular professor. These likeable professors shared their teaching styles, inside knowledge of how to keep students interested, and thoughts of where future teaching styles are heading.

The majority of these top professors all agree that active learning is a vital component of getting through to students.

"A child is a candle to light, not a cup to fill. Childhood is a journey, not a race. Tell me and I'll forget, show me and I may not remember, involve me and I'll understand. All children are gifted; some just open their packages sooner than others."

Heidi Baker is an early childhood educator and instructor for the Department of Family and Consumer Studies. Her primary motivation for her interactive, hands-on, community-involved lecture style is to "provide students with appropriate practices and strategies that facilitate the physical, social, emotional, and mental development of young children. Children's experiences during early childhood not only influence their later functioning in the school setting, but can have effects throughout life. Therefore, those college students who choose to teach have the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of children."

Baker incorporates role playing, hypothetical scenarios and resolution activities into the classroom. A 'tentative' agenda is also posted during class for organizational purposes. Baker also uses a quote in her classroom to express her philosophy about how people and children learn. "A child is a candle to light, not a cup to fill. Childhood is a journey, not a race. Tell me and I'll forget, show me and I may not remember, involve me and I'll understand. All children are gifted; some just open their packages sooner than others."

Theresa Martinez, associate dean and associate professor in the sociology department incorporates discussions, invited panels, videos/DVDs and music clips into her lectures, but she especially gears her teaching style toward story telling.

Martinez said, "I know many colleagues who would never think of telling students about their personal histories. I have a pretty unique history, as a Mexican American woman from a family of 12 who lived in poverty. I find that this story is useful in opening up students' minds to issues of race, class, gender, etc., and also helps them feel comfort-
able sharing stories from their lives. Students learn so much from each other in this way."

Martinez has also been known to bring panelists from the metro gang task force as well as former prostitutes. She believes "these panels have a profound impact on students and teach valid lessons that cannot be learned from a lecture or a text."

According to Jim Fisher, assistant professor of communication and recipient of the Student's Choice Professor of the Year Award, his discussion-oriented teaching style demands a lot from himself and his students. "It assumes a mutual curiosity and delight in the subjects at hand. It also relies on mutual respect for everyone's humanity and ability to choose consequences," he said.

Fisher said, "I don't think much can be taught in lecture-only style. Never did. The fact is, that doesn't get even the most interested student as far as discussion and challenge does. But it's ridiculously easy to prep and perform. You control. You PowerPoint the world. You're done when the screen goes black. Questions? Arguments? Not now. What that teaches leads to disinterest. But it will stay as long as there are teachers poorly equipped to walk in well-prepared to lead an active discussion wherever it goes, without confinements."

Fisher also allows his students to discuss what they choose, to work in small groups, and even to write their own exams.

As an associate instructor for the English department, Disa Gambera also uses small group discussions as a way to "move my students from passive listening to more active participation in class. WebCT discussions have also turned out to be very useful in this respect." Gambera says that she also incorporates a mix of enthusiasm, humor, and improvisation in her teaching style. "I love to teach literature, and my enthusiasm tends to be contagious. I'm also very interested in my students' ideas. My best classes are the ones where I do less talking."

Lisa Diamond, assistant professor in the psychology department prefers engaging in active discussions for her smaller classes, however for larger classes, she finds it "simply impossible," so in those cases, "I rely on a lot of energy, enthusiasm, and humor in order to make lectures interesting, and I try and highlight ways in which the course material is relevant to individuals' own lives."

According to Diamond, analyzing one's own learning or teaching style is a lifelong process in which she still periodically sits down evaluate her own teaching. "Just as every student is different, so is every professor. The best advice
is constantly to evaluate what is working (or not working) about your own teaching, to seek advice when needed and to try to recapture (even for material you have taught 100 times) what you originally found exciting or intriguing about the material, so you can communicate that to their students."

Amanda Smith, associate instructor for health promotion and education, promotes "out of the box" thinking and will sometimes give credit for a wrong answer on a test if the students can justify their reasoning.

Smith also feels that on a university level, where the pressure to research and publish is huge, professors should "never lose sight of what is really important—our students. One can be an expert in any given field but that doesn’t necessarily make them a good teacher. A good teacher makes it look easy but it never is. Good teaching requires hard work, a passion for the material shared, a desire to constantly upgrade teaching skills, and a love for the students. As technology constantly advances we have opportunities to teach in new ways but a love for teaching and the students can never be replaced, regardless of what the future offers. May we ever be life-long learners and may we always value and respect the wonderful students that cross our paths."

Liz Borgwardt, recipient of a 2005 Student’s Choice Professor of the Year Award and assistant professor in the history department, says that her teaching style “is defined by respect for the participants in my courses. I developed this approach to teaching in my early twenties, when I was working as an instructor in Harvard Law School’s summer sessions for mid-career executives. I was still a law student myself and was serving as ‘teacher’ to participants who were often 20 and 30 years older than I was. It was imperative that I show respect for their experience while still communicating that I had information to share.”

Borgwardt also finds that informal interactions can be just as vital to the learning process as inside the classroom. “I always try to have at least one event per course where I invite students for a meal in my home. My sense is these informal events serve a legitimate and overlooked intellectual purpose. We have something of a commuter campus here at the U, and one of the aspects of a university education on which our undergraduates sometimes miss out
is the opportunity for informal intellectual exchange with faculty."

Borgwardt also uses teaching evaluations of other faculty as a learning tool for herself. "I've read a lot of teaching evaluations of other faculty to try to learn from them, and I've noted that undergraduates pick up on it pretty quickly if the professor does not respect them and their contributions. The vast majority of the professors at the U know their topic inside and out; many of them are nationally-recognized experts in their fields. But all that great information is not going to get through if the student is feeling belittled, intimidated, or even as if the professor simply doesn't care what they think."

As a writing professor, Nancy Jensen knows that students won't learn about writing by listening to lectures, thus she has them actively involved in analyzing, critiquing and discussing issues related to writing.

"Students will improve their writing skills through being actively involved in writing, learning about the writing process and writers. Such improvement typically comes as students are actively involved in class discussions and activities, as they analyze writing samples and develop their critical thinking skills. Students who learn to analyze and critique will often become the better writers."

Jensen feels that teaching styles are always changing and evolving. However, those who remain static are no longer effective and that professors sharing information is also a great tool to use.

"I know that I am a better teacher because my experience has helped me to learn more and more about what effective teaching involves. I enjoy hearing about what other professors do and within their classes, and I hope they also learn from my experience. Such sharing helps to make all of us better teachers."

For Marci Butterfield, assistant professor for the accounting department, organization, relaxing atmospheres, games and food is the key to a student's mind.

"I bake cookies when I introduce process costing in my managerial classes, and we turn the classroom into a factory when we talk about manufacturing. Students are not just a number to me; each of them adds something unique to my course and another facet to my life. They are free to call me at home, come visit me at my office whenever is convenient for them, and if need be, study sessions with pizza have been known to occur before finals."

Butterfield finds that as a national gymnastics judge as well as a professor, she clarifies the correlation for her students about being team players.

"I want my students to learn about networking by interacting with one another. I also post a perfect 10 list after every quiz and tell them I can't give perfect 10s in collegiate gymnastics very often so I like giving them in my classes."

Butterfield also finds that when a certain class happens to be a complete disaster, those are the times to try something different. "We can't be content with mediocrity!"

Everyone of these professors agrees that participation and attendance in the classroom is a must as well as really taking into consideration student evaluations. The teaching styles of these well-liked professors focus on interaction and active learning. They are phasing out the lecture-only style of teaching and are creating a desirable learning classroom atmosphere that can engage even a Ferris Bueller-type of student.
In this issue, we have been pleased to offer you a wide variety of topics relating to motivation ranging from what motivates students, teaching styles that can help motivate, and factors that can reduce motivation. With this article, I want to try to do something that may be received with mixed review: I will attempt to motivate you, the reader.

There is so much good done at this university that goes without praise or even acknowledgement. Recently, I was in a graduate computer lab working away at about 10 p.m., not an infrequent occurrence for any involved in academia. I noticed a fellow graduate student slumped at a computer next to me. At a moment between printing and the next project, I asked this student how they were doing, a question asked countless times in any given day. "Fine..." was the trailing response, followed by a brief description of the current past-due work for their committee. Discouragement was written clearly on this student - dark circles under their eyes, disheveled clothes and hair. For a moment, I tried to stammer some encouragement, the typical "keep at it." But I saw immediately that this was not beneficial to this student, about whom I had heard rumors that they sometimes slept in the cubicle down the hall to avoid the down time of driving back and forth between all-nighters.

"You know, you do good work," I said. Finally, a smile. "Thanks," they said with near tear-filled eyes.

No one hears it enough, and so, I say it to you:

YOU DO GOOD WORK

So often in our line of work, and in general, all we hear is criticism. Although most frequently well-intentioned, constructive criticism, it still tears down. It tears down what we’re building, what we’re dreaming, and what we’re hoping. As academics, we’re trained to deconstruct. As teachers, we’re asked to evaluate and are evaluated. As Americans, we consume everything and everyone, and so we critique it all (Ritzer, *The Globalization of Nothing*).

But let me share a quote my dad gave me at a critical moment of particularly low motivation. I have it framed in my office and apartment.

It is not the critic who counts: not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly, who errs and comes up short again and again, because there is no effort without error or shortcoming, but who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, who spends himself for a worthy cause; who, at the best, knows, in the end, the triumph of high achievement, and who, at the worst, if he fails, at least he fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who knew neither victory nor defeat. (Theodore Roosevelt, "Citizenship in a Republic," April 23, 1910)
So how do we face the criticism and keep going? How do we keep striving when we’d rather give up? How do we continue to spend our lives in what we hope are noble pursuits when more often than not the positive results are not immediately seen?

I think the first thing that we have to realize is that we’re not alone. In the article about the motivation of graduate students, the author points out that one of the most significant things motivating graduate students is the camaraderie of other students and faculty. Although ideally this camaraderie would exist implicitly in departments, I would guess that it must often be sought out. Don’t suffer in silence; if you’ve taught it’s guaranteed that you’ve had similar experiences as instructors.

While working on this issue, I happened to overhear a conversation between Stephanie Richardson, the CTLE Director, and another staff member. They were discussing the dreaded course evaluation and how to handle them. Richardson mentioned that she had read that John Lennon, legendary singer and songwriter for The Beatles, never read any reviews in the newspaper, good or bad, when the song came out. He felt that the initial reaction to songs were not always an accurate reflection on them and often hindered his creative ability with his current projects. Richardson continued that she wished sometimes that she was brave enough to not read her student evaluations as soon as they arrived. She was empathetic with the other staff member and provided comfort by forming this common bond.

Now, I’m not telling you that you shouldn’t read your student evaluations. Richardson went on to tell this staff member that she usually waited until she was ready to handle the criticism before she read her evaluations. I share this story to illustrate the common feelings shared by these two faculty members. It is also comforting to realize even the best instructors, such as Richardson who is well-known for her teaching ability, don’t always receive glowing reviews from every student.

I find that the greatest barrier to my motivation as an instructor is my personal insecurities and self-critiquing. A friend of mine who is the math specialist for Jordan School District, Camille Baker, told me that this was a serious problem for her also. She taught middle-school math for several years. She said after each class, she found herself reviewing everything she said and did wrong or could have done better. She found that it was crippling for her teaching. It became a destructive cycle that limited her ability to improve because she felt so negatively about herself. She convinced herself that she wasn’t a good teacher. Her solution was to limit this reflection only to what was actionable — how she could improve the student experience in the future. She said she had to learn how to excuse her own mistakes, particularly those which she had no ability to change.

In conclusion, I find the best motivation is the inherent value of teaching. Teaching itself can be so rewarding — seeing understanding on another’s face and helping them to succeed. However, I only feel that motivation when focused on the student, not on critiquing myself or them.
Do you ever get frustrated when your students ask you a question that would have been answered had they been listening to you just two sentences previous? Or, have you ever been astonished when students claim that you didn’t teach them something that was on the test—knowing full well that you could pull out the exact PowerPoint slide where the information was explicitly spelled out? How does it feel when your students tell you that you’re not teaching them what they need to know when you’ve scrupulously gone through every detail?

Now, don’t think I’m taking sides here, but there might be more to your students’ claims than we fully realize. Let me explain. In ancient times, aspiring sages sat at the feet of the masters to bask in their superior knowledge and intellect. Soon, buildings were constructed and stadium seating was added in order to accommodate large masses of people who could then feel this enriching transfer of information. How practical! How exciting that so many would soon come to the same level of knowledge as the masters!

This tradition was then passed along from generation to generation and, during the Middle Ages, institutions of higher learning took this format and started the makings of what our colleges and universities are today. What a magnificent link to our historical roots to know that we benefit from the same format of instruction that Copernicus experienced during his time! However, as your students might suggest, the magnificence stops there. We’re now finding that whoever thought that this was the best way to learn didn’t have the advantages of brain science and the research of cognitive studies to guide them. Now that we have these resources, it’s high time we make a change.

Activity Idea

A simple, time-friendly collaborative activity for use in large or small settings:

1. Pose a thought-provoking question
2. Give sufficient time for individuals to think (a time limit would be good)
3. Pair the students so that individuals feel more comfortable sharing in front of the entire class (again, a time limit would be helpful)
4. Ask a student to share either his/her own ideas or the ideas of his/her neighbor.

Cognitive and Brain-based Research on Learning

In the early to mid-1900s, psychologists started to recognize that real learning was much more than just listening to a dissertation or lecture. Kurt Lewin and John Dewey began to see patterns for learning that required experience, reflection, and, quite often, collaboration with other individuals (see www.infed.org/thinkers for more information on Lewin and Dewey). Later, David Kolb created an entire cyclical process for learning which included experience, reflection, active hypothesizing, and active testing.

In the last 15 to 20 years, brain scientists have added to Lewin, Dewey, and Kolb’s theories by honing in on the scientific nature of the learning process within the brain [see Zull, J. E. (2002). The art of changing the brain: Enriching the practice of teaching by exploring the biology of learning. Stylus: Sterling, VA]. Brain scientists have backed these learning theories by noting the following pattern within these functions of the brain:
1. Sensory perception: An individual experiences some sort of sensory input such as sight, hearing, touch, taste, smell, etc.

3. Reflection: In the back cortex, usually associated with our long-term memory, we store a great deal of our data, pictures and information. We make connections between what we already know and what we experience.

4. Active or abstract hypothesizing: In the front cortex, usually associated with our short-term memory, we come up with ideas, plans and hypotheses about the newly combined data.

5. Movement or action: In order to try out our new ideas plans and hypotheses, we do something. This can mean speaking, writing, making a motion with our hands ... any type of movement.

6. And then, based on the input we receive from our actions, we start the cycle all over again.

Repeating this cycle over and over again creates new neuronal pathways—connections in our brain that map out our perceptions of the world, our knowledge and our “reality”. If these new pathways are reinforced through repetition and testing, they grow strong and lead to that progress we call comprehension. If the cycle is not completed, or if it is not reinforced through repetition, then these pathways fade away (quite literally and physically, as brain scientists have found). Interestingly enough, the more that an instructor can connect the new information to things that are important to the students, the more likely the information is to be strengthened by their motivation to learn and by the mere fact that they already have a solid basis of neuronal networks in those areas, upon which they can start forming new pathways.

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Example of Learning Process


Suppose my task is to learn a new word from another person who knows its definition. Let’s say the word is “flabmonk.” When I see or hear “flabmonk,” I have concrete experience. This is a visual and/or auditory sensory event for my brain. When I reflect on the word “flabmonk,” I remember other words and images that seem related or similar. I may recall that flab suggests fat, monk could be a religious person, or it could be an animal. This is the reflective brain at work; it primarily involves memory. As various possibilities come to me, I begin to develop an abstract idea for the meaning of “flabmonk.” I may think, for example, that a “flabmonk” is a new species of animal, or it may be a fat religious person, or a pompous fundamentalist. This is my abstracting brain at work. It is converting past images, and then into new words—new symbols for the real thing. Finally, I test my hypothesis. To do this I must act; I must speak or write. So I ask, “A pompous fundamentalist?” This requires activity by my motor brain. Instantly, my teacher responds, “Yes!” she says and laughs out loud! I have tested my idea.

Or he says, “Sorry, good guess! Try again.” I have tested and failed, but now my sensory brain has new input and the cycle can start again.

Here is a summary of this example:
1. Hear words or see words = concrete experience
2. Remember related words, images, or ideas = reflection
3. Generate new words or ideas = abstraction
4. Speak or write new words or ideas = active testing
5. Hear or see new words and teacher’s response = new concrete experience
Active Learning

Active learning is an answer to these theories and research. It has been created to promote this type of learning cycle and give the students more control and responsibility of their learning by giving them time to reflect, solve problems and test hypotheses during class time. Active learning allows us the chance to put the students’ brains to work.

Active Learning Models

The following models give you an indication of the methods and techniques that individuals have created in order to better implement active learning in the classroom.

Collaborative and Cooperative Learning

Going back to Lewin’s information about the importance of group work, we find a basis for this model. Collaborative and cooperative learning are, basically, well-structured group activities and projects that lead people to learn from each other, as well as on an individual basis. The key to success with collaborative and cooperative learning is that the structure be “just right.” What I mean by this is that there has to be enough structure so that everyone knows:

1. What they are expected to do,
2. Why they’re doing it, and
3. For how long they have to do it.

Another important feature of successful collaborative and cooperative learning is that the individual student has to feel a sense of responsibility within the activity or project. If you’ve ever tried a group activity before, you might have heard your students groaning about it. Often times, students have had bad experiences with group learning where one person has had to take the reins and carry the rest of the students. This idea can become even more burdensome if the students will be graded for the project. For this reason, it is important for the students to understand how they need to be involved individually and the method by which you will know who has contributed what. Some instructors do this by assigning roles (note-taker, team leader, devil’s advocate, data gatherer, etc.); others do this by having each group member turn in a personal reflection on the project along with their own viewpoint on the material. And some instructors, using a more controversial tactic, will have group members grade each other and then use this to determine part of the individual’s final grade.

Team-based Learning

Taking collaborative and cooperative learning to an entirely new level, Dr. Larry K. Michaelson has created an instructional model called team-based learning. Realizing that group members often give an unequal amount of effort to most activities, and wanting to get his students more motivated and involved than the typical collaborative grouping, Dr. Michaelson, along with Dr. Dee Fink and Dr. Arletta Knight, devised a method in which the students would feel an innate sense of responsibility and a higher level of critical thinking. They argue that the best activity is one where the groups have a high level of discussion, students are held accountable on an individual basis, groups receive immediate feedback and groups performing at high levels receive explicit rewards.

Case-based Learning

Case-based learning is a model of active learning that focuses on using problem-solving skills to better understand practical application of theories and strategies. For example, the following might be used to teach a business student how to best manage a situation at work:

You are the supervisor of a small telephone-based customer service team in an international nutrition corporation. One of the Chinese-speaking customer service representatives receives a complaint from a Chinese client about another customer service representative. The client demands to speak to the Vice President of the company, knowing that he is the

Tips for Group Work

Dr. Michaelson, Dr. Fink and Dr. Knight in Designing Effective Group Activities: Lessons for Classroom Teaching and Faculty Development in To Improve the Academy: Resources for Faculty, Instructional and Organizational Development, 1997. DeZure, D. [Ed.]. Stillwater, OK: New Forums, postulate that the Readiness Assurance Process (RAP) is the best method for group work. The Readiness Assurance Process is used at the very beginning of each major instructional unit (i.e., prior to any lectures) to ensure that students master basic course content. It involves four steps:

1. Individual students complete a test over a set of pre- assigned readings and turn in their answers,
2. Groups then re-take the same test and turn in their consensus answers for immediate scoring (group scores are posted on the board to provide immediate cross-group comparisons),
3. Groups are given time to re-study their assigned readings to prepare written appeals for any questions they have missed, and
4. The instructor provides input that is specifically focused on remediating student misunderstandings that have come to light in the previous three steps of the process.

For more information on team-based learning, visit Dr. Michaelson’s web site: www.teambasedlearning.org.
highest-level Chinese speaker in the corporation. The customer service representative sends an e-mail to the Vice President. The Vice President is upset that the information came to him and directs the e-mail to you and the denounced colleague and asks you to take care of the situation. The denounced colleague is angry that this complaint was seen by the Vice President. What should you do?

Several questions can be asked about this case that would spur critical thinking skills in business students, helping them to specifically plan for and deal with issues of this sort. For example: Where did the initial breakdown occur? How could the supervisor have avoided this situation? What can the supervisor do now to regroup? This model can easily be worked into collaborative and team-based structures in order to get more discussion of issues and solutions.

Learner-centered Teaching

And finally, learner-centered teaching is a broad model that adheres to the principle that the instructor be the facilitator and the learner steer the learning to incorporate the new information within his or her neuronal constructs. But won’t this take the teacher out of the picture and lessen the quality of instruction? Isn’t it just the lazy instructor’s model of making the students do all the work? On the contrary, the teacher is still an extremely important feature of this learning model. In fact, the amount of structure and planning that go into a successful learner-centered course usually far outweigh its teacher-centered counterpart. The only difference is that the instructor is no longer center stage—she or he becomes the director behind the scenes and the learners play the central parts.

MaryEllen Weimer, author of Learner-centered teaching (Jossey-Bass publisher, 2002), specifies five important points that instructors must recognize in order to see the changes that must be made for their course to become learner-centered:

1. **The balance of power**: Who is in control of the learning process in the classroom, the instructor, the students or the material?
2. **The function of content**: Does the material allow the students to process the information and construct their own knowledge?
3. **The role of the teacher**: Does the instructor act as a guide, allowing the students to work with the information and find their own understanding of the truths of the material?
4. **The responsibility for learning**: Does the curriculum create independent learners who are able to search out the information and teach themselves about the material?
5. **Evaluation purpose and process**: Does the evaluation of learning give the students mechanisms to self-evaluate and to find ways to improve their understanding?

As these models have shown, the most important aspect of active learning is to give the students this ability to take control of the information and to manipulate it into their own neuronal structures, helping the students’ brains to do the work necessary for meaningful learning. More information on active learning activities and how to best implement active learning in the classroom can be found at the Center for Teaching & Learning Excellence (CTLE). Come visit us in the Sill Center, room 136.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ELIZABETH TAYLOR
Karla Zimmerman, a political science major, recalls one of her most frustrating classes: Ancient World Civilizations. In this history class, a tremendous amount of material was being covered, and she found herself trying to write everything down. She soon found that focusing on writing the lecture word-for-word was not an effective note-taking strategy. She couldn't write as fast as the professor could talk, and she found herself missing out on just as much material as students who missed class completely. To complicate things further, her professor spoke with a heavy German accent, making him hard to understand. After almost failing her first exam, she took advice from another student and switched her note-taking strategy. She began listening intently to the lecture, then jotting down what she felt were the most important points. However, her poor test scores still did not improve. Apparently, what she felt were key lecture points, differed from what her professor intended. "It was far from motivating. I felt like I was putting f0l1h my best effort and getting nothing in return." What could have improved her situation? She says PowerPoint.

Using PowerPoint to outline a lecture can be more effective than lecturing alone. Students are better able to follow the lecture and focus their note-taking on what the professor emphasizes as key concepts. PowerPoint can also be helpful in instances where there are language barriers. Students have visual displays of what the professor is talking about and don't have to focus their attention on figuring out what was just said.

Although PowerPoint can be a more effective means of engaging students, it is the easiest technology in the classroom to misuse. Technology should not take over teaching, and entire lectures should not be posted. Instead of motivating students to be involved in class, this will encourage them to disengage in the class, only reading over the PowerPoint slides right before the test.

A business student, Emily Cutler, complained that one of her professors used the CD-Rom included with the course text as his daily PowerPoint lecture. "Everything we needed to know for the test was taken directly from the lecture notes, which was word-for-word out of the text." When asked about the class's motivation, she said "More than half the class was absent everyday, and a quarter of the students who showed up left within the first half-hour.”

Dr. Kristin Smith-Crowe, an organizational behavior professor at the University of Utah, is an excellent example of a teacher using technology to enhance learning in the classroom. She attributes her success with PowerPoint to the way she uses it. Her PowerPoint slides carefully outline main lecture points, but do not contain her lesson plan word-for-word. Each semester Smith-Crowe surveys her students concerning the use of technology in her classroom. She receives consistent feedback from her students: “Students tell me that they don’t usually like PowerPoint, but they like it in this class” she says. That’s because her slides are posted prior to class and students are able to print them off and use them for note-taking during the lecture. This allows students to shift their focus from trying to write everything down, to understanding concepts, and filling in pertinent information.

Videos are also often viewed as an abuse of technology. “No student wants to feel they are paying tuition to be taught by a video.” Cutler said. But there are ways to incorporate this technology in a valuable way. Smith-Crowe has used videos more than she has in past semesters and has really enjoyed it. “My students say they also enjoy the videos because they are visuals learners, but what I think they mean is that the videos provide them with a real life tie in, or tangible example of what we are talking about, and that makes it easier to remember.” After video clips are played,
discussion follows helping students identify concepts, and see real world application.

Smith-Crowe is also using WebCT for her course. "I would say that 98 percent of students really like WebCT. They can check their grades, get the PowerPoint slides for the lectures, or download handouts they may have lost. It's also a great way for me to communicate with them and vice versa."

Kyle Gardner, a business major, and student of Smith-Crowe says, "I really appreciate the professor who takes the time to use WebCT. It's definitely beneficial to be able to see where you are in a class by having your scores posted. And the e-mail can be used to communicate with other students in the class as well as your professor. When a professor makes an effort to use WebCT, you feel like they are taking an active part in helping you succeed in the course."

In today's world, people are being bombarded with various forms of entertainment. Technology has given birth to interactive graphic video games and movies. The old style of teaching, with only a dusty chalk board and monotone voice, is most often viewed by students as ancient and boring. However, some criticize teachers for taking up important in-class time trying to figure out how to load a program or work an audio or a video portion. Sometimes 5 to 10 minutes of class is wasted by glitches in a program, which can make a teacher appear inept with technology. But the question remains: how much time is wasted when the student dozes off or daydreams during a mediocre presentation?

"Even if it takes a few minutes longer to set up something using new technology, I think it's worth it. Probably like most students, I can't listen intently to every word said in a lecture anyway. The extra minutes that are possibly lost are beneficial because the new technology usually grabs my attention and I listen better," said Dan Bischoff, a communication student.

Instructors who are feeling a little less than technologically inclined aren't doomed to use a dry-erase board and markers for the rest of their career. The Technology Assisted Curriculum Center (TACC), located on the second floor in the Marriott Library, offers support to teachers who aren't sure how to use available technology. Its primary purpose as stated on its homepage is "to support the efforts of University of Utah faculty members to integrate various technologies and information navigation skills into their curriculum for the enhancement of quality teaching and learning." Workshops on WebCT, Photoshop, Dreamweaver and much more are offered. There are even workshops with information on plagiarism software. Staff are ready and willing to set up appointments for one-on-one help sessions so teachers can become savvy enough to use this available technology in their classes.

In our fast-paced world, people are directing their attention to whatever can best keep it. Effective teachers need to compete for their student's interest. University of Utah senior, Dan Bischoff, experienced a good use of technology in an astronomy class he took at UVSC that enhanced his learning. "We sat in a dome shaped room and the chairs could lean back to look at the ceiling," he said. "During some lectures the teacher would turn off the lights, turn on this thing that would light up the ceiling like a clear night sky revealing the galaxy's stars. He then would teach us about constellations through each season as if we were actually outside looking at the sky everyday throughout the year. I'm not a science major, but I thought that was really cool. It was probably the best technology I've seen in a classroom."

Eric Sorte, a multi-degree student who is currently working on attaining a doctorate in physics, is impressed with the various forms of instruments used in the University of Utah physics program to teach principles. "No longer are we taught abstract principles from drawings in books," he said. "For instance, lasers and masers (lasers using microwaves) are used to show refraction of light in water molecules. Something that is only theory in a lecture has become reality by new technology. Instead of telling us about a principle, a teacher can show the real world in action."

With more technology available in the classrooms to enhance education methods and motivate students, professors can move beyond conventional lectures. The source for course information shouldn't be limited to the class text. Students can be exposed to information from outside the box of the traditional classroom, and methods of teaching and learning are being enhanced.
INSTRUCTORS BATTLE TO MAINTAIN AN EQUITABLE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

BY KEVIN E. HARRIS
PHOTOGRAPH BY ELIZABETH TAYLOR

When preparing her lectures, Prof. Margaret Toscano considers the dynamics of her students and their various levels of ability in her language and classic literature classes. She believes an environment driven by cooperation, not competition, creates a classroom more conducive to learning.

However, maintaining the integrity of the classroom learning could be challenging for some instructors from the languages and literature department in which instructors must contend with advanced students taking introductory-level classes.

The instructors are trying to create an ethos in the classrooms, which an advance student may hinder, said Prof. Christine Jones, who teaches French in the department. Jones is not only concerned about the advanced students’ learning but also the impact of the advanced students on other students, she said.

For Toscano, who teaches Greek and Latin for the department, the concern stems from trying to keep her students engaged in the subject at hand. “I would worry that my graduate students were not being pushed enough,” Toscano said. For example, Toscano makes sure that the undergraduates understand all of the background information of a particular topic they need before moving toward additional questions of interpretations. “You don’t want to go over the heads of the undergraduates, but I didn’t want to make it too easy for [the advanced students],” Toscano said.

There are two types of advanced student: graduate students and students with high language proficiency. For example, a student may gain higher language proficiency from living in a foreign language environment for an extensive period. The department is most concerned about the latter students.

To help alleviate this situation, students who have received any high school credit for a foreign language class in the five years prior to registering for the same foreign language course at the university must take the language placement exam, according to the department policy. In addition, the department distributes a language background form at the beginning of the semester to all first-year students. Based on the information provided, instructors may recommend students who have extensive experience in a language to take the placement test and register for classes at the appropriate level.

“Occasionally, an advanced student will slip through the cracks, but most experienced instructors can spot them and direct them to take the placement test,” said Lucia Fernando, a former adjunct instructor for Spanish at the university.

“The reason why there is an ad-hoc policy is because, in most cases, advanced students are a hindrance rather than an asset in a beginning course,” added Fernando, who now teaches Spanish at Judge Memorial Catholic High School.

In introductory language courses, students often have to speak in the foreign language they are taking in front of their peers, Fernando said. Things get even more stressful if they know that some people in the class have a higher level of expertise. In addition, when the typical beginning students hear an advanced student in their class speaking the language, they can get frustrated when they realize that they are not able to produce at the same level.

For that reason, the department has numerous programs in place to help advanced students take challenging courses in pursuit of a degree, according the Department of Languages and Literature’s Web site. One such program includes the Special Language Credit program, which is designed to give students credit for language proficiency gained from substantial residence in a foreign language environment.
Advanced students with previous language experience may take an approved language proficiency exam to demonstrate their language ability. In addition, instructors send students back and forth to different classes during the first two weeks of the semester.

“We do our best before the class even starts to normalize the median in the room,” Jones said. “Generally, we do a good job of separating the students that will be too intimidating. One of the real concerns is that the stronger students are going to overshadow the rest of the class. We are successful in managing it in the language classes [lower-division classes], but it remains a big problem in the upper-level writing and literature culture classes.”

In the upper-level classes, students with a language background are much more comfortable at discussion; however, they all have similar problems with writing, said Jones. Therefore, that can level the playing field a little.

Despite the programs in place, instructors must still deal with the challenges of teaching both advanced and undergraduate students together. In some cases, having advanced students in a classroom hinders the learning of others. In other instances, it can be a valuable tool.

“The question of varying levels is something that a teacher always has to deal with,” said Toscano, whose classes vary between 10 and 50 students depending on the semester. “Obviously, in certain classes, it’s more of a problem. You always have students with various levels of background, knowledge, sophistication or basic ability.”

For the latter reason, instructors must manage such an environment in a way that will stimulate the students’ learning.

“Raising the bar that is acceptable to the class, teach to that level and help bring students to that level,” Jones said. “For me, that is the right ethic to create in a classroom. You don’t actually teach to the middle. You try to create the appropriate middle, but you teach above it to bring (the students up to that level).”

Toscano uses various techniques to help her create that learning environment, she said, including student mentorship. In addition, she gives out assignments that are more complicated to her more sophisticated students by giving them additional readings, longer papers and complicated questions, so they will not get bored.

For example, Toscano has a student, who is taking a second-year Latin class and is a doctorate student in literature. His Latin ability is of the same level as the lower-level students. However, when discussing various literary elements of a topic, Toscano enlists the graduate student to help the other students understand various concepts.

By doing this, Toscano may facilitate a higher level of discussion, she said. It makes the discussions more interesting. It helps the students engage with and teach each other.

While stimulating the advanced student, instructors must also balance the needs and learning of the less than advanced students. “As a teacher, I have to try to create an atmosphere where the students that are at a lower level will not resent the other students or feel that this is just so unfair to them because they can’t be expected to know as much as the other student,” Toscano said.

Sometimes, Toscano would communicate to her students about the different levels of students in her classes, she said. She will tell her students that everyone has a chance to succeed in her classes.

Toscano encourages other teachers across disciplines to approach every class in a different way. She challenges teachers to think about the individual situation in the different classrooms, be aware that there might be a problem, assess the sophistication level of the students and be creative in advancing the knowledge of every student regardless of their sophistication level.
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