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Motivating Students to Learn

This Bulletin summarizes the main strategies for enhancing student motivation as they are described by Marilla Svinicki in chapter 7 of her recent book Learning and Motivation in the Postsecondary Classroom, Anker Publishing, 2004. The CTL is also using this chapter for our series “Readings on College Teaching,” which you are invited to attend this Thursday, Feb. 19, 2:45-4:00 p.m. in Library Room 310. The readings are available in the NEIUport group College Teaching Readings, which is open to all NEIU faculty.

Svinicki synthesizes the most applicable concepts from motivation theories in the following chart, and she proposes that instructors use it to think of interventions that keep student motivation high. We can only provide a taste of the insights provided in her book and encourage you to read the chapter in NEIUport groups.

Motivation toward a goal is influenced by the learner’s goal orientation, whose strength is determined by two types of mechanisms:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The value of the goal, which is affected by:</th>
<th>The learner’s expectation that the goal can be achieved, which is affected by:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Perceived needs</td>
<td>• Difficulty of goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Intrinsic qualities of goal</td>
<td>• Prior experience with goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Utility of goal</td>
<td>• Match with learner skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Control and choice</td>
<td>• Encouragement/example of others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Influence of others</td>
<td>• Self-efficacy with respect to this goal</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Attributions about success and failure</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Beliefs/attitudes about learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The distinction between motivation that comes from valuing a particular goal and motivation that is influenced by one’s expectation regarding the achievability of that goal generates important strategies for the classroom. Svinicki outlines seven such strategies, of which we outline five on the next page. We start with Value-Related Strategies:

“If you’re having trouble with unmotivated students, trying to determine if and how they value what you’re asking of them is the first step in motivating their best work.” (p. 157)

1. Choose learning tasks with utility, challenge, and interest value
Make tasks intrinsically interesting to your students by showing them the connection between the course and their own interests. This may take on such diverse approaches as helping students understand how your course will give them an edge in the world of work; turning the course into a community of learners that supports students’ need to be accepted by a group; and supporting students’ need to feel competent and have high self-worth.

2. **Provide choice and/or control over goals or strategies to the learner**
   Classes that provide little freedom of choice because the instructor calls all the shots and supervises students’ behavior too closely, lead students to abdicate responsibility for their own behavior. On the other hand, if students are given the opportunity to make decisions for themselves, they are more vested in the outcomes of those decisions and therefore more likely to invest whatever effort it takes to make those outcomes happen. Having made their own choices, students are also more likely to make the connection between their own behavior and the consequences connected with that behavior. Research has shown that self-determination results in more creativity on the part of students and a willingness to take greater risk.

Let’s now move to the motivational strategies that are related to Student Expectations!

“Increasing students’ belief that they will be successful at reaching the goal … is more difficult because we have less access to and ability to manipulate the bases for student expectations for success.” (p. 157)

3. **Encourage accurate student self-efficacy about the course**
   Self-efficacy refers to learners’ beliefs that they are able to engage in the skills necessary to be successful at a task. In research on student achievement, self-efficacy is one of the strongest contributors to success. Self-efficacy is not the same as expectations of success that are sometimes overly optimistic. Learner self-efficacy must be based on realistic appraisal of one’s skills. Instructors should therefore help students make accurate estimates of their potential for success. For example, they should outline clear prerequisite statements that students could use to assess what they know and can do with regard to the content.

4. **Encourage attributing success to effort and interpreting mistakes as learning opportunities**
   Research suggests that students tend to have one of the following two beliefs about ability: It is either fixed or malleable. These beliefs about the nature of intelligence and ability can influence students’ reactions to learning situations. If they attribute their success or failure in certain academic tasks to inborn ability, then extra effort to improve on a task is seen as fruitless. Instructors should demonstrate models where increased student effort leads to success. Students who believe their abilities can be changed interpret mistakes as learning opportunities, and they are interested in getting as much feedback as possible so they can improve.

5. **Communicate high expectations that are in line with student capabilities**
   Challenging goals are more motivating than easy goals. However, there is a balance here that has to be considered. Challenge is good, but too much challenge threatens learners’ expectations for success. Challenging tasks should be embedded in safe environments. Make the classroom a safe place to take risks. If students know that they will be supported if they try new things, they are more likely to do so. Instructors who accept mistakes as a part of learning are making it possible for students to take risks and push themselves.
Interactive Teaching Techniques: Options for Student-Active Breaks during Lecture

While lecturing is not the preferred mode of teaching in the age of student-centered learning, we all know there are occasions where a well-structured presentation becomes the most efficient way of communicating important information to students. However, even then it is important to remember that attention span is limited to 10-15 minutes among all but the most motivated and well-prepared students. Therefore, it is good advice for an instructor to pause about every quarter of an hour and get students involved in some active processing of the lecture material. “Resetting attention span” can take as little as two minutes and will get most students ready for another 10-15 minute lecture vignette. Of course, this too has limits and should not be tried with class periods lasting multiple hours. Most of the following ten teaching techniques are summarized in Linda Nilson’s book *Teaching at its Best* (2003). Many more techniques are available. The CTL is happy to find others for you if you are looking for more alternatives.

These teaching techniques have in common that they are used after short segments of the lecture. The instructor stops after a fifteen minute vignette and gives students a carefully controlled time limit to perform a task individually, in pairs, or small groups.

SHORT ACTIVE BREAKS (2-6 minutes)

**Comparing Lecture Notes**

*Pair and Compare:* Students pair off with their neighbor and compare lecture notes, filling in what they may have missed. This activity makes students review and mentally process your lecture content. It may also help students improve their note-taking skills when they compare their own notes to what someone else in the class considered relevant.

*Pair, Compare, and Ask:* Same as above but with the addition that students jot down questions on your lecture content. You then field questions that students cannot answer between themselves. This is also a good opportunity for formative assessment revealing difficulty patterns in students' understanding.

**Free Recall of Lecture**

*Periodic Free-recall, with Pair and Compare Option:* Students put away their lecture notes and write down the most important one, two, or three points of your lecture this far, as well as any questions they have. This activity makes students review and mentally process your lecture content. Students may work individually, but if they work in pairs or triads, they can answer some of each other’s questions. This is another technique for helping students improve their note-taking skills because it teaches them to focus on the most relevant parts of the lecture rather than writing down notes indiscriminately.
Listen, recall, and Ask; Then Pair, Compare, and Answer: Students only listen to your mini-lecture—no note-writing allowed—then open their notebooks and write down all the major points they can recall, as well as any questions they have. Instruct students to leave generous space between the major points they write down. Finally, they pair off with their neighbor and compare lecture notes, filling in what they may have missed and answering one another’s questions. The technique also sharpens students’ concentration efforts.

Solve a Problem: Students solve an equational or word problem based on your lecture content. They can work individually or in ad hoc pairs or triads. Put the problem on the board, a slide, or an overhead and, to make class debriefing easier, give four multiple-choice options. Ask for a show of hands for each option. You can also ask student pairs to rate their confidence level in their answer. This activity makes students apply your lecture content while it’s fresh in their minds, and it immediately informs you how well they have understood your lecture material (i.e. formative assessment!). You can then clarify misconceptions before proceeding to new material.

BIGGER ACTIVE BREAKS (8-25 minutes)

Prewrites: Before discussing a topic or lecturing on it, ask students to write a brief account of what they already know about the subject or what opinions they hold. Then field some of their responses and have a brief discussion. (Source: Tollefson, 1988)

Quick Case Study: Students debrief a short case study (one to four paragraphs) that has them apply your lecture content to a realistic, problematic situation. Display a very brief case on an overhead or slide; put longer ones in a handout. You may add specific questions for students to answer, or teach your class the standard debriefing formula: What is the problem(s)? What is the remedy(ies)? What is the prevention(s)? Instruct students to jot down their answers. Consider taking case scenarios from current media reports to increase students’ interest and awareness of the practical relevance of your course material.

Pair/Group and Discuss: Students pair off with their neighbor or get into small groups to discuss an open-ended question that asks them to apply, analyze, or evaluate material in your lecture or to synthesize it with other course material. The question should have multiple possible correct answers. Have students outline their answers in writing. This activity makes students examine, extend, and process your lecture content and serves as a perfect prelude to a general class discussion. It also models for students what a critical thinking question looks like.

Pair/Group and Review: Same as above but with an essay question designed for pre-exam review. Student pairs/groups present their answers to the class, while you mock-grade them and explain your assessment criteria. You can also have the rest of the class mock-grade pair/group answers to help students learn how to assess their work. This is also a prime opportunity for helping students understand the criteria of a scoring rubric, should you use one for this task.

Write from a Pro or Con Position: When an argument has been presented in class, stop for a few minutes and ask students to write down all the reasons and evidence they can think of that support one side or the other. Use these statements as the basis for a brief discussion. Students always benefit from looking at an issue from more than one perspective. (Source: Walvoord, 1986)
Learning Outside the Classroom

National reports frequently suggest that twelve years of school learning have turned off the natural curiosity of many students who make it to college and that college, unfortunately, is not always very successful at turning it back on. Annual surveys like the NSSE and CIRP indicate a good deal of boredom and disengagement in high school combined with students’ conviction that school does not deal with real things. Textbook knowledge often seems contrived and largely unrelated to the experiences students have in their daily lives and in their communities. For decades, educators have looked for better approaches to make the classroom a place for meaningful learning. Increasingly the solutions to this problem point beyond the classroom and suggest that faculty create learning experiences in real life. This edition of the CTL Bulletin briefly introduces some of these approaches in the hope that faculty feel compelled to explore these alternatives themselves, starting with the readings and websites in the references below. NEIU offers an upcoming event (see this insert) that provides a good opportunity to find out more about such experiences on our campus.

One approach that has gained considerable momentum in recent years is Service Learning. SL differs from volunteer work or internships because in SL projects, students use their academic discipline to understand the underlying social, political, economic, and environmental issues that contribute to community difficulties. SL is most beneficial when the service project promotes specific learning goals and also meets real community needs. The broad goal is to make learning more meaningful by challenging students to apply theories and principles to the real world and thereby help students develop problem-solving and leadership skills, preparing them for the working world, and promoting civic engagement.

Here are a few discipline-specific examples of Service Learning projects:

**Accounting**: Students assist lower income taxpayers with answers to their tax questions and in preparing their tax returns.

**Biology/Nutrition**: Students evaluate the diets of a defined group of people (e.g., student athletes, people in a senior citizens home), determining areas of deficiencies in their diets and offering suggestions for improvement.

**English**: Students provide language mentoring opportunities to individual or groups of immigrants, focusing on general second-language coaching, citizenship preparation, etc.

**Business Writing**: Small teams of students contract their services out to local nonprofit organizations to work on writing and promotional projects.

To learn more about the approaches described in this Bulletin, join us at the Applied Learning Workshop

**Friday, January 29**

1-4pm

**SU 214**
Organizational Psychology: Course participants help high school students in the lower 25th percentile on standardized reading assessment to improve their scores by: (a) determining the motivational status of each student, and (b) evaluating organizational factors that enable or inhibit reading teachers from utilizing ongoing test scores for improving reading skills.

Political Science: Students research and learn about the presidential primary campaigns in their state and select one campaign for their SL project. They then participate in the work of the campaign staff and reflect on their hands-on experiences with the political process.

A good place for faculty to start exploring how SL works is by going to the website of the national umbrella organization for SL (www.compact.org), which has large collections of syllabi, assignments, toolkits, and publications. A brief but substantive overview of the instructional process for organizing SL-opportunities is provided in the recent chapter by B. Gross Davis (see NEIUport Group “College Teaching Readings”). Other related approaches to making classroom learning more applied include the following:

Experiential Education often functions as the generic term for all the approaches presented in this Bulletin. It is defined as “immersing students in an activity (ideally, closely related to course material) and then asking for their reflection on the experience. As a method of education, it facilitates active multi-sensory involvement of one’s students in some aspect of the course content. This immersion in the material becomes the basis for analysis and reflection on the part of the student—and hence learning.” (Cantor)

Internships require students to apply classroom learning, theories, and experiences to professional settings. The structural components include participating in an experiential education seminar, writing a learning plan, engaging in reflection, completing reading and writing assignments, undergoing assessment, and creating a learning portfolio. An internship seminar encourages self-directed learning by including tasks such as analyzing issues and critical incidents at the internship site; understanding the stages of the internship; and completing an analysis of the organization. (Giles & Ryan)

Community-Based Research is a form of Service Learning that stresses collective action, advocacy, critical analysis, and collaboration for the purpose of social change. For students, working on a CBR project can validate university-based research, since they have rarely seen it serve the needs of their communities. Students participate in most aspects of the study: research design, developing methods and gathering data, analyzing data, writing up results, and assessing the significance for the issue at hand. And because the students see how the results will be used, they are all the more interested in the work being done properly. (Strand, a.o.)

References:
National Service Learning Clearinghouse, website: http://www.servicelearning.org/
Washington Internship Institute: http://www.wiidc.org/
Diversity Issues and the Curriculum
Some Results from Workshops with Dr. Suzette Speight on March 27

Despite our attribute as the “most diverse university in the Midwest” NEIU has been struggling with effectively utilizing the educational benefits of its diversity. Our academic calendar is marked by many campus events that allow students and faculty to hear about issues of diversity. We have three academic programs with a focus on ethnic and gender diversity. Many of our faculty incorporate diversity issues into their courses. Our new First Year Experience program attempts to integrate a “Diversity of Chicago” theme into every course section. And yet, we still seem to lack an overall concept of how to address diversity at the curricular level as well as translate it into our overall campus climate. Examples for that include:

- Students on campus largely keep to their own ethnic group when socializing in between classes.
- There is a lack of public communication between people from different backgrounds regarding their experiences (on or off campus) of disrespect, intolerance, and injustice.
- Many students have little knowledge about what it takes to function effectively in our global society.
- Many students (and probably faculty) are ill-equipped with conflict resolution skills when it comes to sensitive interactions between members of different ethnic and racial groups.
- There is probably little agreement on the university’s role in not only helping students acquire critical knowledge but also acting on this knowledge and the resulting beliefs and values.

Dr. Speight’s workshop last week helped us sort out some of these issues and brainstorm steps to take toward making our efforts of dealing with diversity more coherent in the long run. The list of items generated by the workshop attendees included the following:

- Have more “hang-out” space for students (and faculty)
- Engage our alumni more effectively; hire an alumni director
- “Teaming” (as in sports, but also in academics) for creating a stronger sense of community
- Create more integration between Student and Academic Affairs and find a forum for this integration
- Increase the activity level of student clubs, and use more peer tutors and mentors as role models
- Consider teaching-excellence awards for (1) faculty who are most innovative in utilizing diversity in their courses, and (2) for faculty who best exemplify models of faculty-student interaction
- Have departments sponsor annual events on issues of diversity and globalization for their students and faculty
- Community begins at the department level: Stimulate and enable departments to have more activities that bring students and faculty together
- Have the Foundation make funds available for faculty wanting to promote faculty-student engagement
- Create more media coverage and advertising for these issues
- Name our campus buildings for prominent (campus) figures who have promoted diversity issues
Create a new name for our university that better expresses our campus identity. These are items from our initial brainstorming that are only the beginning of a discussion the campus should have on this topic. Larger events are needed (such as University Day) to develop a more coherent plan for action. Dr. Speight indicated three criteria for any large-scale initiatives to be effective. Such initiatives should be:

1. comprehensive rather than piecemeal
2. sustained over the long haul
3. coordinated across the campus

The afternoon workshop focused on ideas for the classroom. Dr. Speight built her presentation around ideas from Paul C. Gorski. The following short list is only a mini-summary. Please go to the URL below if you want to find out more about what each of these points entails.

**Seven Key Characteristics of a Multicultural Education Curriculum**

By Paul C. Gorski ([http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/curriculum/characteristics.html](http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/curriculum/characteristics.html))

1. **Delivery**
   Delivery acknowledges and addresses a diversity of learning styles while challenging dynamics of power and privilege in the classroom

2. **Content**
   Content is complete and accurate in its representation of under-represented groups and viewpoints

3. **Teaching and Learning Materials**
   Teaching and learning materials are diverse and critically examined for bias

4. **Perspective**
   Content is presented from a variety of perspectives and angles in order to be accurate and complete

5. **Critical Inclusivity**
   Students are engaged in the teaching and learning process. Instructors facilitate experiences in which students learn from each other’s experiences and perspectives

6. **Social and Civic Responsibility**
   If we hope to prepare students to be active participants in an equitable democracy, we must educate them about social justice issues and model a sense of civic responsibility within the curriculum

7. **Assessment**
   The curriculum is constantly assessed for completeness, accuracy, and bias.

You might want to explore EdChange’s website, the Multicultural Pavilion, at [www.edchange.org/multicultural](http://www.edchange.org/multicultural) for a wealth of ideas on classroom strategies and curriculum reform related to multicultural education. One of the materials presented is a short but instructive beliefs inventory on what it means to be a good multicultural educator, which ultimately translates into being a better educator in general:

Improving Students’ Reading Comprehension

Most college teachers, especially if they are teaching lower-division courses, have experienced the difficulties many students have with reading comprehension. The 2006 ACT report on college readiness in reading states: “Only 51 percent of 2005 ACT-tested high school graduates are ready for college-level reading.” It goes on: “Unfortunately, the percentage of students who are ready for college-level reading is substantially smaller in some groups … male students, African American students, Hispanic American students… and students from families whose yearly income is below $30,000.” That describes many of the student populations at our university. What is a faculty member to do?

As students with these problems enter the classroom, faculty can help with a number of things: They can refer students to academic support offices such as the Reading Program or the Learning Center on the 4th floor of the Library. But they can also try to incorporate into their classes some tips for students to put to good use. Here are a few examples of what you can have your students practice in or outside of class, or how you can counsel individual students who seem to have particular problems with their reading assignments. They come from Dianna Van Blerkom and Patricia Mulcahy-Ernt’s 2005 book College Reading and Study Strategies.

Reading for Different Levels of Comprehension:

What students learn from a text assignment depends on the reading goals they bring to the text, which in turn reflect different levels of comprehension. Blerkom & Mulcahy-Ernt distinguish three different levels of comprehension: Literal, inferential, and critical comprehension. Here are some questions to ask for each of these levels:

**Literal Comprehension**
1. What is the main topic of the text?
2. What are the key points mentioned in the text?
3. Who (if any) are the primary people discussed in the text?
4. If this text describes an event or a story, where and when did it occur?

**Inferential Comprehension**
1. What is the main point presented in the text?
2. How do the details connect with the main point?
3. What predictions can I make about the information presented?

**Critical Comprehension**
1. What is significant about the topic?
2. What is the author’s opinion or point of view?
3. What is the author’s background and how does that relate to the topic?
4. Are the author’s points valid?
5. How is the main topic presented?
6. What textual information informs my own thinking about this topic? (p.65)
Finding the Main Idea:

One of the key issues for poor readers is the task of identifying what the main ideas are in what they are reading. Students need to be able to do this at the paragraph level. Here is a practice activity for your students:

Read p. ___ in your textbook and for each paragraph, answer the following questions:

1. The paragraph topic is (write two words):
2. The main idea of this paragraph is (write one complete sentence):
3. One example that supports this main idea is (find one complete sentence in the paragraph):
4. Another example that supports the main idea is (find another complete sentence in the paragraph): (p. 286)

The main ideas are often explicitly stated in a paragraph, mostly at the beginning of the paragraph, less often as a concluding sentence, and sometimes embedded somewhere in the middle. Things become more difficult for students when the main ideas are implied rather than explicitly stated. Under those circumstances, two techniques help with finding those ideas: Looking for “signal words” and for “organizational patterns.” The two go usually hand-in-hand. Following B.J.F. Meyer (1985), there are five different organizational patterns (or text structures) to show the reader what to look for. Each one is associated with a number of typical signal (or transition) words that indicate the author’s line of thinking and thereby help locate the main idea.

Description: Textbooks use description to define and explain new concepts. Look for characteristics, attributes, and other information that identifies the concept, which usually turns out to be the main idea. Signal words indicating description include: for example, to illustrate, for instance.

Collection: A collection is a grouping of items that may point to one of three different purposes: (1) to simply enumerate a list of things that are of equal importance (such as in a bulleted list); (2) to sequence things in a particular order (such as in a chronology of events) with signal words such as first, second, next to begin, and finally; or (3) to classify things according to common characteristics (particularly popular in the biological sciences) with signal words such as similar to, like, member of, type, class. The main idea will vary depending on which type of collection is used.

Comparison: In a comparison, the main idea focuses on both the similarities and the distinctions between two or more items in a group. Signal words include: similar…different, in contrast to, like…unlike, however, although, but, on the other hand.

Causation: Some main ideas are hidden in a “cause and effect” organizational pattern. The author presents a causal relationship that explains why something occurs. Signal words for this pattern are: because, as a result, thus, consequently, or words such as cause, influence, and effect.

Response: Longer text segments usually contain a mix of the above organizational patterns. Finding the main point here requires the reader to look for a central theme, an overarching question, or a unifying goal. Typically the author’s goal will be to respond to a question, explore a problem, or present and explore solutions. In problem-solution passages, the organizational framework usually is to (1) present the problem, (2) define and explain the problem, (3) explore possible solutions, and (4) present a conclusion. Looking for the topic and intent of the author leads to the main idea.

Following these clues will help students become more thoughtful and purposeful readers. All it takes is to provide specific practice opportunities for students to work on these skills.

Responding to Student Writing

Whether you dread or look forward to digging into that pile of student papers, responding to student writing is a time-consuming task that is an important part of the work we do to help our students to learn and to improve their skills as writers. This edition of the CTL Bulletin offers some tips for responding to student writing to help you to respond more efficiently and effectively and perhaps enjoy this task a little more.

General Tips

❖ **Start with a specific assignment** Responding to student writing is easier to do when you start with an assignment that provides clear instructions and expectations for students. Provide specific information about what students are being asked to do and how they will be evaluated. Include information about what you comment on and if they will have the opportunity (or be required) to revise their work.

❖ **Don't comment on dead drafts** Research indicates that students do not internalize comments made on final, or dead, drafts and apply them to future writing assignments. Limit dead draft comments to explaining the assignment grade rather than aiming to improve writing skills. These comments are more effective when they are made on drafts that students will be asked to revise or rewrite.

❖ **Write legibly** If instructor comments are to have any chance of being read by students, legible handwriting is the first condition for that to happen. If you have horrible handwriting or don't wish to shrink your writing to fit within margins, think about responding electronically. Using electronic files rather than hard copies allows you to type your responses (e.g., with MS-Word's “Insert Comments” function or by composing comments within the document in a different font and color) ensuring that they are legible and allowing you to use as much space as you need. Yet another technique involves creating audio comments for students (see Sipple & Sommers reference and link below).

❖ **Don't read too many papers at once** It is better to read a few papers at a time to avoid tiring out and slipping into a less stringent or more rigid commenting and rating routine. After a break, it helps going back to the last paper or two you read before in order to make sure you remain consistent.

❖ **Have students self-evaluate** The purpose of giving writing assignments is not just to assign grades but to help students become more self-reflective learners. The best way to do this is by challenging them to become critics of their own work. Give them the criteria you use to assess their work and ask them to apply these criteria before they hand in a paper. Faculty have been successful with this approach by giving students scoring sheets or rubrics that clearly express the expectations for a good paper. (Another CTL Bulletin on how to use such tools will follow later this semester!)

❖ **Invite students to meet with you** Make a specific invitation to students to come to you for one-on-one conferences to discuss your comments. These can be brief sessions in which you can explain your comments and discuss any questions the students have. This kind of dialogue is particularly helpful for working on higher-order comments such as the ideas and organization.

Tips for Composing Your Comments

❖ **Phrase comments as support** Sarcastic or impatient comments rarely lead to improved student learning. Phrase your criticism as questions or suggestions. Indicate major errors of logic, confusion, or organization, but don’t comment on every point that strikes you as problematic. Be supportive in your comments to invite dialogue with your students and encourage them to improve as writers.
Avoid vague one-word comments Given time and space constraints, we are often tempted to react with comments such as “awkward,” “unclear,” and “vague.” Students are often just as confused by such comments as you are by their prose. Be specific about what needs clarification or improvement.

Identify strengths and main weaknesses Your feedback should help students focus on the most important aspects of their paper, i.e. what it does well and what needs improvement. Those comments should be most prominent and not be buried under lots of detail on grammar, style, and spelling.

Avoid over (and under-) marking Don’t correct every error and respond to every idea. Treat the student paper as a “teachable moment” that allows you to illustrate the two or three major areas where increased student effort would benefit the most. On the other hand, don’t score a paper without having justified through your comments why the student deserves a particular grade.

Focus on errors that indicate cognitive confusion Comments in the margins should focus on sentences in which the writing confuses the reader and leads to ambiguity or complete lack of understanding. Avoid commenting on issues related to personal writing style or surface-level issues that do not impede understanding.

Write an end comment After making marks within the paper or in the margins, compose a short end comment. Begin this comment with a comment related to your interest in the student’s ideas or a positive comment on some aspect of the student’s work. Conclude the end comment with specific points for revision (e.g., a “next steps” section) that you expect the student to make.

Dealing With Grammar, Punctuation, and Spelling Errors

Don’t worry about every error Many of the errors that students make in their writing are actually mistakes. They are the result of students not carefully revising and proofreading their work. Many of these errors disappear through multiple drafts without the errors indicated on initial drafts.

Don’t correct student errors Correcting errors on student papers can actually do more harm. Students become overwhelmed by the number of corrections. Students can also be distracted by these surface errors and subsequently do not work on higher-order issues such as organization and development of ideas. Correcting or indicating every error also prevents students from gaining the practice to find their own errors.

Resist the urge to identify every error Research suggests that students can find their own errors and can improve their grammar, punctuation, and spelling skills if they are required to locate and correct these errors on their own. Rather than correcting or identifying each sentence error, use a mark in the margin to indicate to students that the sentence contains problems or mark a few errors and make a note that other similar errors exist throughout the paper.

Want to learn more about responding to student writing?

Workshops: Workshops on responding to student writing or other topics related to writing can be designed for departments or small groups of faculty. Contact the CTL secretary, Diane Gritton, at x4467.

Online Resources: Go to CTL website and click on “Curriculum & Teaching” and then on “Topics on Writing for Instructors” for links to resources on responding to student writing and other topics related to writing.

References & Sources
Designing & Responding to Writing Assignments: Online Resources

The new CTL website offers a variety of information on a range of topics related to teaching and learning. The newest addition is a list of resources on designing and dealing with writing assignments across the curriculum. The links to these resources can be found on the CTL website under the Curriculum & Teaching section at http://www.neiu.edu/~ctl/teaching.html.

As a way to introduce these new resources, a few of the topics that can be found on the CTL website are highlighted here. The links here and on the website are organized by topic and include a short description of what each offers. Other topics on the website include how to address plagiarism, how to evaluate student writing, how to utilize reading journals, and how to design peer review activities.

How to Design Writing Assignments
Developing good writing assignments is not an easy undertaking. Have you ever given a writing assignment that created confusion for students, created a stack of papers for you, and ultimately did not meet the objectives you had hoped? Instructors can find direct links to concise, easy-to-use guidelines and checklists on the design of writing assignments via the resources below and on our CTL website.

- **California State University at Sacramento** ([http://www.csus.edu/wac/checklist.htm](http://www.csus.edu/wac/checklist.htm))
  This site provides a checklist for designing writing assignments as well as links to more information on grading rubrics for writing and pointers on using peer response.

- **Colorado State University** ([http://writing.colostate.edu/guides/teaching/wassign/index.cfm?teaching_guides_active=assignments](http://writing.colostate.edu/guides/teaching/wassign/index.cfm?teaching_guides_active=assignments))
  This is a comprehensive site with links to principles for designing writing assignments. It includes other resources such as sample assignments and grading criteria.

- **Manhattan College** ([http://www.manhattan.edu/services/wac/pages/designing_assignments/assigments.html](http://www.manhattan.edu/services/wac/pages/designing_assignments/assigments.html))
  The Manhattan College site provides a checklist for designing writing assignments and other suggestions. It provides specific information on designing informal assignments and creating writing assignments particular to your discipline.

How to Handle the Paper Load
Writing assignments create a paper load for instructors – whether hard copy or electronic. Are there ways to manage the load and keep it at a minimum? The websites listed below offer practical tips on handling the paper load from the design stage through the response stage of writing assignments.

- **University of Texas at Austin** ([http://www.swc.utexas.edu/planning/workload.shtml](http://www.swc.utexas.edu/planning/workload.shtml))
This University of Texas page provides a short list of practical tips for handling the paper load that results from writing assignments. Several of the tips are linked to pages that provide more details and guidance.

- **WAC Clearinghouse** *(http://wac.colostate.edu/intro/pop2k.cfm)*
  This is another excellent Writing-Across-the-Curriculum (WAC) Clearinghouse site that provides information on how to handle a load of papers. Tips on such topics as "focusing your commenting energies" are provided. This page also offers information on grading criteria and grading sheets and how they can help diminish the paper load.

**How to Respond to Writing**
Responding to student writing can be a daunting task. For any given assignment, it seems possible to write responses that are equal in length to what the student wrote. Figuring out what to respond to, how to respond, and when to respond takes some preparation. The links below provide resources on various aspects of responding to student writing.

- **Colorado State University** *(http://writing.colostate.edu/guides/teaching/fys/respond.cfm)*
  This page offers answers to the question "how do I respond to student writing?" with information on becoming a writing coach and focusing on the drafting process. The page includes a link to sample materials and examples of various kinds of comments.

- **Dartmouth Writing Program, Dartmouth College** *(http://www.dartmouth.edu/~writing/materials/faculty/methods/responding.shtml)*
  The Dartmouth Writing Program offers a comprehensive look at responding to student writing with links to several topics on the stages of responding to writing and other resources.

- **University Writing Center, Texas A&M University** *(http://writingcenter.tamu.edu/content/category/13/45/67/)*
  The University Writing Center at Texas A&M provides information on responding to student writing via a list of links that offer information on responding to graded and ungraded writing.

**How to Address Student Errors**
Addressing student errors is an important component in helping students to improve their writing. Students with poor writing skills or students who are non-native speakers of English may need guidance related to specific types of grammar errors. The Colorado State University webpage below provides numerous tips on how to identify and address student errors.

- **Colorado State University** *(http://writing.colostate.edu/guides/teaching/error/index.cfm?teaching_guides_active=assignments)*
  Separate from the general topic of how to respond to student writing, is the specific topic of addressing errors in student writing. This website provides information on topics such as initial error marking, ranking and highlighting errors, and determining error patterns, as well as tips on working with students to address errors.

For further information on workshops, consultations, or the resources listed here, contact Kate Hahn at mk-hahn@neiu.edu or 442-4490, or call our office assistant, Diane Gritton, at 442-4467.
Suggestions for Helping Non-Native Writers

The recommendations below come from the University of Minnesota’s Center for Writing, which provides a variety of best practices and resources in teaching non-native speakers and writers. The resources can be found at: http://writing.umn.edu/tww/nonnative/nonnative_index.htm. Another excellent resource is Simmons College’s Faculty Resource Kit for Teaching Non-Native English Speakers at: http://my.simmons.edu/services/asc/pdf/resource-kit.pdf.

The following list of nineteen recommendations was written by Eric S. Nelson. Some of these suggestions are not specific to non-native writers. Those that apply especially to non-native writers are listed first.

1. Keep in mind that your non-native writers are likely to be very diverse, including permanent residents who have graduated from U.S. schools as well as international students. Residents who are fluent in the spoken language may still have serious problems with both reading and writing in English.

2. Remember that your idea of good writing may be fundamentally different from theirs. For example, in some other cultures, directness and conciseness are not highly valued. Use course readings or old student papers to show what you value in writing.

3. Pay careful attention to the language of assignments. Sometimes simple words are less understandable to a non-native speaker than more "academic" words.

   Less likely to be clear . . . More likely to be clear . . .

   I want your take on the subject . . . I want your analysis of the subject . . .

   What do you make of . . . How do you interpret . . .

   Sketch the development . . . Describe the development . . .

   In order to make it in politics . . . In order to succeed in politics . . .

4. In assignment sheets, use culture-neutral terms when possible (for example, "six-year-old child" instead of "first-grader"). When you use culture-specific terms (for example, Rosa Parks or DFL), explain them or provide resources that explain.

5. Keep in mind that interpreting handwritten comments is very difficult for many non-native speakers. One student from East Asia, for example, could not interpret the handwritten word "location" because it looked like the numeral 10 followed by the nonword "cation."

6. Discuss how to use sources: summarizing, paraphrasing, quoting, and so on. Different cultures may have different rules of academic honesty.
7. Give assignment sheets that spell out what you expect: purpose of the assignment, length and format of the paper, use of sources, connection to course content, organization, evaluation, and so on.

8. Make your criteria clear from the start. Consider including with the assignment sheet a criteria sheet that students attach to their work as the final page; design it so that it can serve as a checklist for the student and a grading sheet for you.

9. If you have students work on papers in groups (writing or discussing), suggest structure for the activity. For example, in each group appoint a "summarizer" who periodically sums up what the group has said. This will lead to clarification that will benefit native-speaking students as well as nonnative speakers.

10. Try "paraphrase the assignment" discussions. Ask students to explain in their own words what they think is required of them.

11. Provide examples of successful papers, partial or complete.

12. Encourage students to turn in trial drafts. A quick read of a trial draft can save you time later.

13. Suggest that students signal their moves in writing overtly, and show examples of language that can help them do this.

"I will examine the consequences of..."

"What conclusion can we draw..."

"An example of this is..."

"I have tried to explain..."

14. Encourage the use of subheadings: "Background," "Discussion," etc.

15. Form peer reading groups so that every draft is read by at least one reader before it reaches you.

16. Read papers once through without marking.

17. Be specific in suggestions for revision. Cryptic comments like "vague" or "unclear" are often hard to respond to. Fleshted-out comments ("Do you mean --- or ----?"  "Are you trying to say that...?") take more time to write but get better results.

18. Point out successful parts of a paper ("This example helps") as well as weaknesses.

19. Consider devoting class time to allowing students to help each other interpret your feedback on papers.

All CTL Bulletins are available on our website at: www.neiu.edu/~ctl/
Implementing the Writing Intensive Course Requirement

The Faculty Council on Academic Affairs recently announced a new graduation requirement regarding the improvement of student writing skills. Students who enter the university in Fall 2008 will be required to pass a writing intensive course in their major. This requirement is the result of work done by the Faculty Council and two task forces and prompted by faculty concern about student writing skills.

Writing Intensive Q & A

- **What are writing intensive (WI) courses?**
  WI courses are not simply courses that require a lot of student writing. WI courses include explicit instruction on writing within the discipline, provide ample opportunities for feedback on student writing, and include informal and un-graded assignments. A set of guidelines for WI courses were recommended to and approved by the Faculty Council. See the box on the next page for details.

- **If WI courses include writing instruction, won't they have less content?**
  Departments are asked to look carefully at any existing courses that are determined to be candidates for WI courses. Accommodating the guidelines for WI courses may require a reduction in some course content.

- **Our department has been interested in developing hybrid or online courses. Could we make this a WI course?**
  Departments have some flexibility to determine how best to prepare for the WI course requirement. WI courses may be good candidates for a hybrid or fully-online design. Faculty development support will be available to departments that wish to pursue this option.

- **Writing intensive sounds work intensive, won't faculty end up buried under piles of student papers?**
  The recommended guidelines for WI courses include a recommendation that WI courses have a maximum enrollment of 25 students. The guidelines also encourage the use of informal writing tasks that do not require grading on the part of the instructor. Faculty development support on ways to minimize the paper load will be available to faculty designing and teaching WI courses.

- **Our faculty are not trained to teach writing, how will our department be able to prepare for this requirement?**
  The coordinator of the writing intensive program will assist departments in reviewing their curricula to help determine how best to prepare for the requirement as well as to provide faculty support in the design and implementation of WI courses, assignments, and activities.
- **Do departments have to create brand new courses?**
  No. Departments have some flexibility to determine how they would like to prepare for this requirement. An existing course may already meet the WI criteria or need only a few adjustments to do so. Departments may determine for themselves if they wish to create brand new courses.

- **What if our department already has WI courses?**
  Departments that feel they have existing courses that meet the recommended guidelines to be designated WI should contact Kate Hahn so that they can begin the process to have any potential courses reviewed and prepared for approval.

- **How soon does our department need to have writing intensive courses in place?**
  The WI course requirement will be in effect for all students who enter NEIU in Fall 2008. Therefore, those programs who graduate a large number of transfer students may find that they need to have a WI course in place relatively quickly (perhaps as early as Fall 2009) in order to accommodate these students.

**Recommended Guidelines for Writing Intensive Courses**

*Approved by the Faculty Council on Academic Affairs, May 2007*

1. The writing activities should be an integral part of the course and should be designed so that students will receive active instruction in disciplinary writing. Students will write the equivalent of at least 15 pages of graded assignments.

2. Each writing-intensive course will require multiple types of writing in a course. Writing assignments might include correspondence, memoranda, proposals, progress reports, research reports, work-logs, site descriptions, observations, case studies, lab reports, creative writing, problem-solving, or computer programming, as well as other forms of course-related writing.

3. The graded assignments, consisting of multiple types of writing, will constitute a significant portion (at least 50 percent) of the final grade for the course; the grade on each assignment will reflect effective and correct written expression as well as knowledge of content.

4. On some graded assignments, students will be provided an opportunity to produce multiple drafts, in order to learn that writing is a process as well as a tool for invention and discovery. Students will get feedback from the instructor on those early drafts of written work before the grade is assigned.

5. Each writing-intensive course will also provide an opportunity for students to engage in “ungraded” assignments, such as writing-to-learn activities in order to practice writing and also to become actively engaged in processing the information that is presented in class or in a textbook. Informal journal writing is another useful means of developing students’ critical thinking skills.

6. Given that implementing these guidelines will require time and effort, we recommend (a) that sections of Writing-Intensive Courses have an absolute maximum of 25 students so that the instructor can devote a great deal of time to feedback on early drafts of written work and (b) that CU class-size adjustments for Writing-Intensive Courses should be made, following the contractual guidelines specified for ENGL 101.
Teaching Your Students Learning Skills

Please reserve your seat by contacting the CTL for a two-part workshop with Dr. Terrence Doyle on Thursday, October 19.

Dr. Terrence Doyle from Ferris State University’s Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning has many years of experience helping faculty and other academic personnel devise effective ways of improving students’ study skills. His workshops and presentations have been very well received across the country. If you have ever wondered how you could possibly integrate study strategies into your content course, you could not wish for a more competent and eloquent introduction to the topic (see also the FCTL’s website at: http://www.ferris.edu/HTMLS/academics/center/Teaching_and_Learning_Tips/T_LHome.htm).

How Current Research on Learning can Enhance Study Skills  
1:40 – 2:55 PM, CTL, LIB-310

This workshop will focus on how to use the most current research about how college students learn to design the best tools and strategies for assisting them with their course learning. It will begin with a discussion of what is learning and how does learning occur in college students, continue with a discussion of how tutoring activities can be enhanced by developing strategies that mirror the current research on learning and conclude with a discussion of specific tutoring strategies in the areas of reading textbooks, test preparation and study and organization of information into familiar patterns.

Integrating Learning How to Learn Strategies into Content Teaching  
3:00 – 4:15 PM, CTL, LIB-310

This presentation will focus on the how to learn skills that are needed by all college students if they are to be successful learners, especially in content areas that are new to them. Six areas where faculty can help students learn how to learn their content will be discussed. They include: ways to organize and pattern information into familiar structures that aid students’ learning, strategies for helping students better comprehend lectures and readings, ways to assist students in development of long term memories of course content, tools for helping students to locate the important information in lectures and readings, strategies for helping students learn how to think about the content area subject matter and finally, helping students to monitor their learning to know if they have successfully learned.
Helping Students to Interact with Assigned Readings

A common frustration among faculty is the difficulty in getting students to complete the assigned readings at the assigned time and to gain a basic understanding of this material to enrich classroom discussion or other activities. There are many reasons why students fail to successfully complete reading assignments. Below is a brief synopsis of some problems students may be having, strategies that faculty can employ, and sample assignments for helping students to read. Many of the ideas presented below are adapted from John Bean's book, *Engaging Ideas* which is available in the CTL library. You can also learn more about this topic in the upcoming CTL workshop Helping Students to Interact with Assigned Readings. See the bottom of this page for details.

**Why don't students read?**
Students fail to complete reading assignments for many different reasons. Some of the reasons are related to reading and language proficiencies. For example, students may lack the vocabulary necessary to handle academic readings. Students may not have experience with the complex grammatical and rhetorical structures of college-level reading. Many students have difficulty uncovering the argument while they read. Students also might not complete readings if they feel that they will not be held accountable for the material or if it will not greatly impact their course grade.

**What strategies can I use to help my students do the readings?**
Like with other assignments, students benefit from good models. Show your students the note-taking process you employ when you read by providing them with a copy of your marked-up version of an assignment that they are to read. Create reading guides for texts that are significant to the course or may be particularly difficult to read and distribute them to introduce a reading assignment. Help students to see how authors of texts are trying to get them to change their view of something by having students answer simple questions about what the author wanted the reader to believe after completing the reading and how successful or unsuccessful the author was and why. Develop ways to make students responsible for material that is provided in the readings but not specifically covered in class.

**How can I implement these strategies in my courses?**
Different assignments can be created and employed to focus on specific reading issues your students may have. For example, if students have difficulty with the reading process for most assignments, training students on the marginal notes approach can help. When using this approach, students stop themselves before highlighting any text in a passage and ask themselves "why is this important?" Students then make notes in the margin concerning why they wished to highlight something. This approach can help train students to read for important content and not just add color to the pages. If students have difficulty discovering the argument in readings, writing simple "what it says" and "what it does" statements can help. For each paragraph, students write a brief "what it says" statement that summarizes the main point of the paragraph and a brief "what it does" statement that indicates the paragraph's purpose. For example, the "what it says" statement might be a paraphrase of the topic sentence of the paragraph and the "what it does" statement might include information such as "provides data to support point," "gives an example," or "provides an opposing view." Through this analysis students will be forced to carefully read the assignment and construct an outline of the assignment's structure.
Essential Communication & Research Skills
For College Students

Last year’s NEIU-faculty survey confirmed a nationwide trend: Too many students enter college with low preparation levels in basic skills areas such as reading, writing, oral communication, math, or information gathering. While these trends are not readily reversed in a 16-week Gen-Ed or major’s course, faculty can point students toward online resources that provide basic instruction outside of class. The following websites provide useful job aids for specific skill areas you might want your students to review as they work on certain assignments in your course.

WRITING

The OWL at Purdue: Academic Writing
http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/545/01/
Includes the following topics: The Writing Process; Professional, Technical, and Scientific Writing; General Academic Writing, Research and Citation, Grammar and Mechanics, Literary Analysis and Criticism, Writing in the Social Sciences, Creative Writing, English as a Second Language, Job Search Writing

University College for the Creative Arts at Canterbury, UK: Essay Writing
http://www.kiad.ac.uk/careers/ssg_essay.asp
Provides key points on the following topics of Essay Writing:

READING

Dan Kurland
http://www.criticalreading.com
Includes a wealth of information on the connection between reading and writing. The information is in-depth but probably too complex for students who have problems with critical reading. They might need some instructor help with this website. Key topics of the website are: The Steps of Critical Reading: (1) The nature of the text, (2) The working environment, (3) The goal or assignment, (4) Three formats for discussion. All of this is followed by twenty annotated principles for critical reading and writing.

Mind Tools Ltd.
http://www.mindtools.com/rdstratg.html
Describes six strategies for reading efficiently: (1) Knowing what you want to know, (2) Knowing how deeply to study the material, (3) Active reading, (4) How to study different sorts of material, (5) Reading ‘whole subject’ documents, and (6) Using glossaries with technical documents. Additional links are provided to topics such as Concept Maps or using the Cornell Note Taking System.
PRESENTING

University College for the Creative Arts at Canterbury, UK: Presentation Skills
http://www.kiad.ac.uk/careers/ssa_presentation.asp
Provides key points on the following topics of Presentation Skills:
Check the brief – Plan what to show – Plan what to say – Organization – Strategies – Overcoming nerves – Related web links and study skills guides

LIBRARY RESEARCH

Ira C. Eaker College for Professional Development: Meta-website on Library Research Skills
The above site includes references to the following Library Research Tutorials at:

RESEARCH INTERVIEWING

Free Management Library: General Guidelines for Conducting Interviews
http://www.managementhelp.org/evaluation/interview.htm#anchor1404957
Briefly outlines:
1. Preparation for interview
2. Types of interviews
3. Types of topics in questions
4. Sequence of questions
5. Wording of questions
6. Conducting interview
7. Immediately after interview
Don’t forget to click on the final link: CASAnet’s Interviewing Principles!

The OWL at Purdue: Conducting Primary Research Interviewing
http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/559/04/
http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/559/06/
In the context of Conducting Primary Research, briefly outlines:
1. Types of interviewing
2. Setting up an interview
3. Interview do’s and dont’s
Creating good survey and interview questions (see 2nd URL)

The OWL at Purdue: PowerPoint Presentation on Interviewing Skills
http://owl.english.purdue.edu/workshops/pp/interviewing.ppt - A PowerPoint presentation with the following topics:
1. How to conduct an interview
2. Setting up the interview
3. Preparing for the interview
4. Coming up with questions
5. Meeting the interviewee
6. Online interviewing
7. Following up the interview
8. Conducting an interview
Preparing Students for Group Work: Teaching Essential Collaboration Skills

Group work has become common practice in college teaching. Faculty use it for a range of purposes: to refocus students’ attention span during what otherwise would mostly be lecture; to stimulate students to share and develop their opinions; to have students in the science lab perform experimental procedures; to work on a group project for a part of the semester; etc. The increased popularity of group work is also due to the demands of the work world which tells us that teamwork, writing, and oral communication skills are the key to success in the job market.

Unfortunately, group work and team skills have traditionally not been part of the graduate training that faculty received and often run counter to the competitive inclinations academic careers have typically favored. It is therefore not surprising that many faculty have difficulties making learning groups work in their classes, since neither the faculty nor the students tend to have a good grasp at what the component skills of effective group work are and how to teach them. As a result, students are often merely instructed to “form groups and discuss.” But sometimes neither the results nor the process are what one might hope for. The following paragraphs try to address this dilemma by providing a breakdown of the skills that need to be considered and some tips for teaching them.

Our main suggestion is: Help students explore amongst themselves and with you, the instructor, what skills they need to learn and how to alter behavior that gets in the way. Collaboration or group work skills cannot be taught directly, they need to be experienced. As with other learning and study skills, collaboration can best be learned by a mixture of doing and reflecting. This starts with a discussion of group norms.

Set Aside Class Time to Determine Group Norms

M.T. Towns, reported in B. Mills (1998), has students first answer questions about group work independently, and then work toward team expectations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Working in Groups—Your Personal Viewpoint</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Next class meeting will be our first problem solving session. During these sessions you will work with three or four other students to solve a problem. In order to prepare you for working in a group, answer the questions below:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. List what you believe your responsibilities are to your group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. List your group’s responsibilities to each member.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Describe the advantages of working in a group or as a team.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Describe the disadvantages of working in a group or as a team.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Working in Groups—Your Team’s Viewpoint</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. We believe an individual member of our group has the following responsibilities to the group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. We believe our group has the following responsibilities to each individual member.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Names of Group members: ___________________ ___________________ ___________________ ___________________
In filling out this form, many groups will establish norms such as “We will respect one another’s opinions”; “We will all contribute our fair share”; “We will come to class prepared and willing to participate”; “We will contact one another if we must be absent”; “We will help one another succeed”; “We will criticize ideas, not people”; “We will all listen attentively.” Having individually thought through and then collectively agreed upon such norms (in writing!) helps set the stage for what happens in groups throughout the semester.

Student Behaviors Required in Effective Learning Groups

The above discussion of norms already suggests some of the skills/behaviors students need to exhibit in effective learning groups: Asking for others’ opinions – Listening – Reflecting on what has been said – Being concise – Giving reasons for ideas – Allowing everyone to contribute – Pulling ideas together – Finding out if group is ready to make decision (Cohen, 1986). Students must be given opportunities to practice and reflect on these behaviors. Epstein (1972) provides a four-step approach for such practice and reflection. At the same time, these four steps illustrate the key components for effective group discussions: Conciseness, Listening, Reflecting, Contributing.

Epstein has students observe and reflect on their own behavior. Students are placed into five-person groups and given an interesting topic to discuss for five minutes at a time. Throughout the four practice activities, group members take turns being the timekeeper for the task at hand.

Step 1, Conciseness: “Getting quickly to the point and not beating around the bush”
During the five-minute discussion, the timekeeper makes sure that each person talks for only fifteen seconds at a time.

Step 2, Listening: “Paying attention to what is being said”
During the second five-minute discussion, each person must wait three seconds after the previous person has spoken before he or she may speak.

Step 3, Reflecting: “Repeating out loud to the group something of what the person before you has said”
Another five-minute discussion session during which each person talks for only fifteen seconds at a time and waits three seconds after the previous person has spoken. In addition, everyone who speaks must begin by repeating to the group something that was said by the person who spoke immediately before (“reflecting”). The previous person needs to indicate agreement (by head nod) with the summary before the new person can continue.

Step 4, Everyone Contributes: “All the people in the group have to speak”
All previous rules apply, as well as a new one: No one may speak a second time until everyone in the group has spoken.

After each step, the timekeeper reports on how well the group did on the skill being practiced. The timekeeper may have other observations to make about how difficult it was and what happened. The exercise is partially symbolic—no real group discussion consists of only 15 second contributions with 3 second wait-times in between. But the experience is important for allowing students to reflect on the key skills it takes for an effective group discussion.

Discuss with the whole class why each skill is important and how common it is that group activities fail because these behaviors are not followed. Of course this procedure will not guarantee that students will continue to exhibit these behaviors throughout the semester. But having had the experience will make it easier to remind students later of the essential skills and allow for occasional self/group-assessments throughout the semester. Having this framework can also positively influence other group behaviors that often impede effective group work, such as coming unprepared, clowning around to disrupt the work of the group, aggressive behavior, blocking or nit-picking, or blaming others for poor group performance.
Online Tutorials to Improve Student Learning

Every college course tends to be pressed for time that needs to be devoted to content. Time spent on helping students practice important skills to help them better understand and apply that content, is therefore often a scarce commodity. This is an area where the Internet can help. Whether you are teaching an online or face-to-face course, you can integrate any number of online tutorials and “learning objects” (short tutorials) into your class that students can work on outside of class. Such tutorials can help with the core skills of reading, writing, math, information literacy, or with more subject-specific skills in the various disciplines. Either way, computer-assisted studying helps students review and practice tasks, for which there is rarely enough time in class.

The following online references provide a brief introduction to a few key repositories for such online tutorials and learning objects. We then present select suggestions for the practice of core learning skills as well as some discipline-specific tools. Any suggestions for additional references are welcome!

Repositories for Online Tutorials

MERLOT: www.merlot.org
Contains 22,000 peer reviewed online teaching and learning materials in many different subjects, from Biology to World Languages.

Wisc-Online: www.wisc-online.com
Is a digital library of Web-based learning resources called “learning objects” (which are small online tutorials). Wisc-Online contains over 2,000 such learning objects.

Connexions: http://cnx.org/
A place to view and share educational material made of small knowledge chunks called modules that can be organized as courses, books, reports, etc. Connexions has close to 16,000 reusable objects.

Vocational Information Center: www.khake.com
Probably the largest guide available to free online tutorials, learning objects, open courses and self-paced learning modules on the Internet.

Core Skills

Writing Summaries
Wisc-Online features a number of tutorials on writing skills, among them:
Writing Effective Paraphrases: http://www.wisc-online.com/Objects/ViewObject.aspx?ID=WCN4902, and
Reading for Understanding
The BBC’s Skillwise site has short tutorials on reading topics such as: ‘Fact and Opinion,’ ‘Types of text,’ ‘Scanning’ and ‘Skimming’ text, ‘Summarizing’ important points, etc.:  http://www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise/words/reading/

Information Literacy
The 21st Century Information Fluency site has a wealth of resources on information literacy/fluency and provides over 35 micro-modules with which students can test their ability to search the Internet while considering issues of accuracy, bias, authorship, evidence, expertise, plagiarism, and many more. There are also citation style wizards for APA, CSE, and MLA. http://21cif.com/tutorials/micro/

Sets of Core Skills
Wisc-Online has almost 70 learning objects under its label “core skills” (which itself is listed under “Technical”). These relate to: Critical Thinking, Communication, Teamwork, Problem Solving, and Attitude: http://www.wisc-online.com/ListObjects.aspx

Skills for Business
Among Merlot’s 3,071 learning materials in business are 479 tutorials: http://www.merlot.org/merlot/materials.htm?category=2202&sort.property=overallRating

Skills for Education

Skills for the Humanities
Among Merlot’s 3,435 learning materials in the humanities are 339 tutorials: http://www.merlot.org/merlot/materials.htm?category=2327&sort.property=overallRating

Skills for the Social Sciences
Among Merlot’s 1,802 learning materials in the social sciences are 131 tutorials: http://www.merlot.org/merlot/materials.htm?category=2787

Skills for Science and Technology
Among Merlot’s 8,666 learning materials in the sciences are 1,351 tutorials: http://www.merlot.org/merlot/materials.htm?category=2605&sort.property=overallRating

Skills for Mathematics and Statistics
Among Merlot’s 1,833 learning materials in Math and Stats are 224 tutorials: http://www.merlot.org/merlot/materials.htm?category=2513&sort.property=overallRating

West Texas A&M University’s Virtual Math Lab offers a wealth of tutorials consisting of printed examples, videos that talk users through these examples, and practice tests with answer keys and specific references to previous tutorials. The site includes tutorials on: College Algebra, Intermediate Algebra, Beginning Algebra, GRE Math Study Session, and THEA and ACCUPLACER Math Study Session: http://www.wtamu.edu/academic/anns/mps/math/mathlab/

Another relevant site is WebMATH from Discovery Education: www.webmath.com/index.html
Ten Reasons for Teaching Online

Thanks to all of you who were able to attend last week’s symposium on *The Future of E-Learning at NEIU*. Ninety students, faculty, and staff members participated in the sessions featuring information and examples of how online teaching benefits students and invigorates faculty. If you couldn’t participate but want to learn more about a successful online program, visit our keynote speaker’s blog at the University of Illinois, Springfield: [http://uisonlinesuccess.blogspot.com/](http://uisonlinesuccess.blogspot.com/).

During the symposium we pointed to the large body of research that has found no significant difference between the outcomes of online and face-to-face teaching. Today we highlight the pedagogical value of e-learning that sometimes actually surpasses what can be accomplished in face-to-face classes. Here are ten good reasons for teaching online.

1. **Flexibility**
   This is probably the most obvious advantage: Online teaching is time and space independent. Both students and faculty can participate in class without having to come to campus at a fixed time. This is a considerable benefit to many of our upper-level students who are working during the day and have a hard time commuting to campus for their evening classes. Online courses offer the opportunity to “attend” class when the students are most ready for it, e.g. later in the evening and/or during the weekend.

2. **Intensive Writing Practice**
   Most of the communication in online classes takes place in writing. While this is often not the type of writing we expect in class papers, it nevertheless provides students with considerable writing opportunities they would not have in ordinary classes. Modeled properly, these low-stakes writing activities represent learning experiences for students who never had to express their ideas to an audience (other than the instructor) on a regular basis.

3. **Everybody “Talks”**
   Active student participation in face-to-face classes is often limited to a handful of extroverted individuals. In online courses, students don’t hide in the back of the class. Good online learning is structured such that every student can contribute to the same extent as everybody else. If so desired, both the quantity and the quality of student contributions can be assessed and factored into students’ grades because the medium keeps a complete record of those contributions.

4. **Reflective Student Contributions**
   Part of the problem with lower student participation in on-campus courses is the fact that some students are shy and take more time to formulate a response. This can be particularly true for second-language learners, almost half of NEIU’s freshmen classes. The “asynchronous” nature of most online communication allows those students more time to compose their responses. It will take some purposeful modeling and structuring of electronic discussion forums, but the additional time allowed in those electronic discussions makes more reflective student responses possible and likely.
5. Periodic Synthesis
Since Blackboard documents every contribution made by students and faculty, online courses can build in periodic synthesis activities that have class members look back at key arguments or points that were made in previous sessions or over several weeks. Research on learning has taught us the importance of cycling through new material more than once, so that stronger connections can be made between new knowledge and already existing understanding. This process also allows students to recognize the progress they have made throughout the semester.

6. Practice Opportunities
Effective online classes are structured for maximum student involvement. That includes involvement with the faculty member, with other students, and with course material. Classroom lectures are replaced not just by passive readings but active, hands-on opportunities to practice new skills and apply new knowledge to authentic case scenarios. The Web is full of such opportunities, and textbook publishers increasingly supplement their books with online course cartridges and web tools.

7. Student Contributions to Class
As the above ‘point 5’ shows, student discussions are designed to become part of the course material itself that is reflected upon and periodically synthesized. In addition, groups of students may collaborate on projects whose results also become part of the course materials. Online class discussions can be structured so that they involve student moderators who get to practice valuable group and leadership skills.

8. Preparation for Lifelong Learning
The ability to function as lifelong learners is an important outcome of higher education, especially at a time where people are likely to change their careers multiple times during their lives. A critical aspect of lifelong learning is independence. Students need to learn to become less reliant on the direct guidance and physical presence of a teacher and increasingly work with a wide variety of resources that include e-learning and mediated interaction with other learners as well as teachers at a distance. Few people will be able to come to campus throughout their lifespan when they have to upgrade or change their professional qualifications. E-learning will be an important tool for the lifelong learning of our students.

9. More Student-Faculty Contact
This may seem counter-intuitive: How could learning at a distance offer better contact opportunities than face-to-face encounters in the classroom? And yet, the presenters from UIS emphasized repeatedly: Their interactions with online students tend to be more frequent and deeper. They make it a point to communicate with every student individually and, whether that communication is through e-mail, discussion forum, online chat, or audio/video conferencing, the interaction is less hurried and more substantive than the typical encounters with students shortly before or after a class session on campus.

10. Improved Planning for Face-to-Face Classes
Being able to improvise is both a strength and a potential shortcoming of on-campus classes. Having taught the same classes for years, it is easy for a faculty member to be convinced that teaching is at its best when it’s spontaneous and follows the teacher’s instincts so that classes may develop in directions not anticipated at the outset of the semester. Online teaching requires very detailed planning upfront and, almost invariably, faculty who have done it say that it has benefited the way they have subsequently prepared their face-to-face classes as well.
Assessing Online and Hybrid Courses

While online and hybrid courses have become very popular in higher education, there has always been some concern about how to guarantee the quality and effectiveness of such teaching formats. This CTL Bulletin shares some resources to help ensure that this quality issue is properly addressed.

Technology use for teaching spans a very broad range. When categorized simply by the amount of tech use (rather than the types and variety of tools or, more significantly, the learning methods used), you will typically see the following:

- Web-enhanced (using some tech tools within a primarily face-to-face course)
- Hybrid (AKA blended; according to NEIU’s official definition, “At least 20% of class sessions in hybrid courses will take place online”)
- Fully online courses

Because the latter two categories are significantly different from classroom-based courses, alternative assessment criteria and methods are of use. For those faculty already teaching online and/or hybrid courses, as well as for those who are interested in learning more about what it takes to do so, the following resources may be of interest.

Blackboard provides its own assessment instrument, called the Greenhouse Exemplary Course Evaluation. This rubric is designed primarily for online courses, but has some sections that discuss blended course offerings. Faculty can submit their own online or hybrid courses to the program’s annual review. The rubric assesses a course based on four main categories. The descriptions below give some examples of the elements of an exemplary course:

1. **Course Design** – Clear objectives, reflecting student learning outcomes, are integrated into the course, from syllabus through content modules and assignments. Visual and auditory tools are used to enhance content and support learning. Additional resources are included for both remedial and more in-depth work.

2. **Interaction & Collaboration** – Expectations about student participation are plainly delineated, including communication protocols. The instructor has incorporated efforts to develop a community of learners through the use of e-mail, discussions, chat, and/or other communication tools to facilitate student-to-student, instructor-to-student(s), and student-to-instructor interaction.

3. **Assessment** – Expectations for assignments are understandable and complete, and are directly connected to learning outcomes. Constructive feedback and self-assessment opportunities are also included.
4. Learner Support – The instructor has provided clear instructions, contact information, links to university resources (library, tech support, tutorials on required software applications), and content files in multiple formats (taking student access and connectivity issues into consideration).

More information about the Greenhouse Program, including information about exemplary courses, can be found at [http://www.blackboard.com/ecp](http://www.blackboard.com/ecp). (Take a look at the Freshman Composition course demo.)

Texas A&M University (TAMU) has created an online course assessment that can be accessed through a simple registration process at [https://elearningtools.tamu.edu/checklist/login.do](https://elearningtools.tamu.edu/checklist/login.do). They break out their reviews into a number of interrelated areas including:

- Content
- Navigation & Organization
- Learning Outcomes & Activities
- Communication & Collaboration
- Consistency & Accessibility
- Assessment & Evaluation

This tool is intended for self- or peer-assessment, and provides feedback through an assessment report once the form is completed and submitted. Noticeably, TAMU includes a full category on course content, while Blackboard only specifies in the Course Design category that content be easy to access, navigate, and manage. Not as much emphasis is put on connecting a student to support resources, though that may be handled through another internal resource at TAMU.

While not an assessment, University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee (UWM) offers online resources specifically in support of hybrid course developers. One faculty member is quoted as saying, "My students have done better than I've ever seen; they are motivated, enthused, and doing their best work." Comments and ideas from several faculty members are featured, as well as a discussion of the advantages and challenges of this teaching method.

UWM's Learning Technologies website provides ten questions to consider when developing a hybrid course, as well as some tips for faculty beginning the process. Our favorite tips include concentrating on the design of the course rather than the technology used, and making use of existing resources, such as:

- The “peer reviewed online teaching and learning materials” available from MERLOT ([http://www.merlot.org/merlot/index.htm](http://www.merlot.org/merlot/index.htm)) and other sources
- textbook cartridges from publishers
- experienced colleagues and university support staff (in this case, the CTL)

See more information at [http://www4.uwm.edu/ltc/hybrid/faculty_resources/questions.cfm](http://www4.uwm.edu/ltc/hybrid/faculty_resources/questions.cfm).

Interested faculty can find a listing of NEIU’s online and hybrid course offerings in the printed schedule under the heading Distance Education. These courses can also be found online using the Search Course Schedule link on the Faculty tab in NEIUport (select Hybrid and/or Online in the Schedule Type field). Those who are interested in learning more about teaching with technology at any level are encouraged to contact the CTL staff at x4467.
Social Bookmarking for Your Classroom

This CTL Bulletin starts a series of Bulletins that will introduce you to a set of relatively new technology tools, commonly referred-to as Web 2.0 or also “the Read/Write Web,” that have tremendous potential for classroom use and beyond. The big pedagogical advantage of these tools is that they get students actively engaged in not only learning, but also producing knowledge. These Bulletins will be supplemented with additional information on the CTL website at: www.neiu.edu/~ctl/teaching/web2.html.

Introduction to Social Bookmarking

Social bookmarking is one of a number of popular Web 2.0 tools—along with wikis, blogs, and social networking—that are known for free access, ease of use, and collaborative potential. A social bookmarking site allows a user to save links to sites as they browse the web. The user can “tag” each site saved with one or more descriptive keywords, which are then used for sorting and organizing the overall collection of sites. For example, a user might save the link to the CTL’s Blackboard page and tag it Blackboard and Tutorials. A page is created for each user where his or her links and tags are listed. Social bookmarking sites serve individual needs not only by keeping track of sites to revisit, but also by allowing access to those site links from any connected computer (unlike the favorites feature in a browser application).

Will Richardson (2006) gives a good example of how Social Bookmarking works: “Say you’re teaching Romeo and Juliet, and you come across a great resource site for the book. When you tag it with your bookmarking software, you see that a dozen other people have also saved the site. When you click on one of the user names, you find that person has a whole folder dedicated to Romeo and Juliet resources. Great! You can now subscribe to that person’s Romeo and Juliet folder. Then, any time that person adds another site about Romeo and Juliet, you’ll be notified… You can do the same for your class of students. First you have your students subscribe to a particular folder you created just for that subject. That way, any time you link and comment on a site you’ve found relevant to their study, they’ll automatically get it too.”

The important characteristics of this tool are: (a) Users become engaged in customizing personal collections of relevant resources; (b) They can easily find other people with similar interests; (c) They share specific resources with a few like-minded people; (d) They can grow quality resources on a particular topic rapidly; and (e) They have the experience of becoming part of a larger community (potentially across the world) that shares a similar interest.

Classroom Uses of Social Bookmarking

The following suggestions come from Gabriela Grosseck’s online article “Using Del.icio.us in Education.”
Support for Lectures
One option for using social bookmarking for a course is to assemble a collection of sites and provide students information on accessing them. You might include sites of specific use in your course, some that provide additional references for students who want to do further research on a topic, or, alternately, some that work as basic references to get students up to speed on one or more course topics. You can also tag specific sites for specific students, assigning tags that identify an individual or group. The notes field in the tagging window can contain your comments about why the site is relevant as well as questions students should ask themselves as they peruse it.

Mechanism for Building Learning Communities
Invite students to contribute to an archive of links for a particular course. In addition, have them recommend sites to each other on the basis of different projects and interests fellow students are pursuing in your course. Advantages: (a) the links database is enriched year after year and remains available to students even after they graduate. The instructor, too, benefits from richer resources semester after semester. (b) After the course ends, interested students can use the periodically updated tags in order to stay informed long after textbooks have been resold and Blackboard courses have become unavailable.

Contributing to Audiences beyond the Campus
Students are producing for a “real” audience, not just for a grade. The bookmarked resources tagged and created by students can reach people beyond the classroom and may even attract authorities in the field. That way, even students can become valued sources of information for a scholarly audience.

Mechanism for Getting to Know Your Students
Faculty can discover what the students’ needs and interests are by following their accounts: what subjects they link to, what tags they use, how they annotate and classify resources, etc. This allows teaching to become more tailored to students’ interests and experiential backgrounds.

Developing Content Management Abilities
Creating a personal system for storing web resources contributes to students’ information literacy. They have to weigh whether a resource is important, what makes it worth sharing with others, how to tag it meaningfully, which notes to add, etc. This helps students learn how to organize and engages them in the learning process.

Getting Started with del.icio.us (http://delicious.com)
If your students are already using social bookmarking, there are a number of sites they might be using; del.icio.us is one of the most well known. As is typical of these sites (and Web 2.0 sites in general), it’s easy to create an account and begin using del.icio.us. Click Join Now on the home page and fill in a bit of information. You will also want to install the del.icio.us toolbar during the sign-up process; this toolbar will make it easy for you to create your collection of links. Brief tutorials are available for new users, though many will find it easy enough to jump right in without instruction.

To tag a site, simply visit the site and then click the Tag button. A window will open where you can add tags and notes. You can also give the link a more memorable title. There is an option to make a link private if desired (all links are public by default, meaning others can see what you’ve linked to). Click Submit to finish the process.
Wikis in College Teaching

The previous Bulletin started a new series on Web 2.0 tools that, despite their relative novelty, have already demonstrated great potential for the college classroom. As we said last time, the big pedagogical advantage of these tools is that they get students actively engaged in not only learning, but also producing knowledge. Today we will take a look at the most commonly known of these tools: Wikis. Again, we are supplementing our treatment of these tools in the CTL Bulletin with additional information on the CTL website at: www.neiu.edu/~ctl/teaching/web2.html.

What is a Wiki?

You can obtain a quick overview of how a wiki works from a four-minute video on Youtube or from EDUCAUSE’s two-pager “7 things you should know about Wikis” (see references at bottom). In short: A wiki is a collaborative research and writing tool or, as EDUCAUSE puts it: “A wiki is a Web page that can be viewed and modified by anybody with access to the Internet.” It is “a composition system, a discussion medium, a repository, a mail system, and a tool for collaboration” that is “able to incorporate sounds, movies, and pictures.” It “allows users to create Web pages ‘on the fly’. “A wiki is essentially a database created by a group rather than an individual.”

The important features of this tool include (following UIUC’s classification):

Access: All team (or class) members can have access to it anytime anywhere
Easy sharing: Team members don’t have to send files over e-mail and download them to their computer
One version: Everybody is working on the same document; no need to add version numbers to each document
History: Every previous version can be recovered in an instant and compared to the newest version
Notification of changes: A wiki can be set up so that team members will be automatically notified via e-mail if a change has been made to its files
Over time collaboration: Collaboration does not end with the semester but can build over multiple semesters and classes.

A Taxonomy of Classroom Uses

The following taxonomy of wiki uses in the classroom comes from Mark Phillipson (2008).

1. The Resource Wiki
The best-known example of a resource wiki is Wikipedia, an online encyclopaedia constructed by thousands of largely anonymous contributors that, by some accounts and despite occasional missteps, rivals the Encyclopedia Britannica in accuracy and quality and surpasses it in timeliness. The same format can be utilized in the classroom where students and instructors can build an expanding reference resource for any number of purposes, such as: book reports/reviews, customized glossaries and concept maps, (supplemental) course textbooks, course-specific case scenarios and real-world illustrations, student-generated poetry, course-related histories of the surrounding community, a virtual museum of paintings and other art objects, collections of maps,
rocks, bones, archeological artifacts, etc. The extra bonus of the wiki: These reference resources don’t have to be limited to one class or one semester. They can grow across semesters and involve multiple classes.

2. The Presentation Wiki
As the name suggests, presentation wikis tend to generate material primarily for the convenience of the class, for peer evaluation, and for providing practical experience in the effective use of a communication forum. While the focus of the resource wiki is often turned outward to an audience beyond a classroom, the presentation wiki has more of an inward focus. Its material and writing style may resemble a reflective journal, but a journal written for a limited peer group calling for peer-feedback and evaluation. Presentation wikis are particularly suitable for education classes, where students may build “best practices clusters” of learning objectives, teaching strategies, and lesson plans.

3. The Gateway Wiki
Gateway wikis lend themselves to facilitating the study of science. Part of this wiki is the (unedited!) provision of data (i.e. scientific measurements, statistics, calculations, survey results, metrics, and any number of other datasets). These datasets may have been provided by the instructor, obtained from authoritative sources, or collected by students themselves. Students may then introduce, illustrate, and supplement these data sets, as well as conduct interpretive or ethical analysis. The gateway wiki can supplement student lab sections and provide a platform for students to log results, share experiences, air questions, and connect their observations to theory.

4. The Simulation Wiki
Simulation wikis can be useful choices for creative writing projects and for the study of historical events. They don’t describe a subject, they are built to explore a world (such as San Diego State’s Holocaust Wiki Project, or Skidmore College’s Greek Tragedy Project). These wikis can be somewhat unpredictable. Their content may be browsed through negotiation of unique pathways, confrontation with decision points, exploration of one possibility over another, and comparison to real-life models. The simulation wiki is intended to mirror and to mimic its subject. Hence the term: simulation.

5. The Illuminated Wiki
The main purpose of this wiki is the communal mark-up of source documents. It does not act like an encyclopedic resource wiki, but focuses on the act of explication of its subject. Students mark up source text with the results of their interpretation and investigation. The wiki then represents a record of exegesis. For example, the Romantic Audience Project wikis developed by students at Bowdoin College focused on the explication of a limited group of 18th and 19th-century poems. Students chose a word or phrase from such texts and created links from this source text to their analysis. Such analyses may become even more interesting when compared across classes over several semesters. How did students react to a specific poem in 2003 versus students in a class five or ten years later?

References

Wikis in Plain English at www.youtube.com/watch?v=-dnL00TdmLY
Blogs in College Teaching

This bulletin continues our Web 2.0 series with one of the easiest tools to integrate into classroom use, the Weblog or “blog”. We will present examples of blog projects that demonstrate their potential to engage students in reflection and discussion, as well as guidelines for their use. Also included will be some basics for getting started with your own class blog project. You can find additional resources on Web 2.0 tools on the CTL website at: www.neiu.edu/~ctl/teaching/web2.html.

What is a blog?

A blog is a personalized web site that allows quick and easy updates by its owner. While blogs originally developed a reputation as diaristic and lacking in substance, “…blogging has evolved to [be] a respected vehicle for editorials on specific topics” (Educause, 2005). According to Will Richardson, “Blogging is a genre that engages students and adults in a process of thinking in words, not simply an accounting of the day’s events or feelings” (2008).

Typically, blog posts are text entries combined with links to related sites as well as image files and, often, video or audio clips. Each post is dated and posts are listed in reverse chronological order, so that the most recent entry is shown first when you go to the site. Many blogs are maintained by one owner/poster, with comments added by others. Some blogs, however, have multiple owners/posters, which allows for greater variety of opinion around the main topic of the blog.

Why use blogs for a higher ed course?

Does your course require students to absorb and discuss information? Do you look for assignments that provide opportunities for reflection and sharing of opinion around course material? Do your students benefit from a bit of debate on the meanings they derive and the perspectives they take? If so, you may want to add blogs to the types of activities you use in your courses. Richardson tells us that “through the unique process of blogging…students are learning to read more critically, think about that reading more analytically, and write more clearly. And they are building relationships with peers, teachers, mentors, and professionals within the Weblog environment” (2008).

Can you provide some examples?

From Blended Learning in Higher Education: Framework, Principles, and Guidelines:

- “After completing each course assignment, and review[ing] the instructor’s assessment feedback, the students then post responses to the following reflective questions on their weblogs: (a) What did you learn in the process of completing this assignment? (b) How will you apply what you learned from this assignment to the next class assignment, other courses and/or your career?”
- “In terms of peer review, students paste or attach drafts of specific course assignments to their blogs. Other students in the class then review these documents and post responses to the author’s weblog. Guiding questions for the peer review process can include: (a) What did you learn from reviewing this document? (b)
What were the strengths (e.g. content, writing style, format and structure) of the document? (c) What constructive advice and/or recommendations could you provide for improving the quality of this document?” (2008).

From Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts, and Other Powerful Web Tools for Classrooms:

- A description of one student’s blog tells us, “readers of her site will find reflections on the work she did in class, homework assignments handed in through the Weblog, and links to articles that she has found relevant or interesting to her studies...Readers will also find comments from classmates, teachers, and from Scott Higham, the Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist from the Washington Post who mentored her through her article process. Ultimately, [her] Weblog became her online archive of all the work related to our class” (2008).

- Another project was based on a book assigned in the course. “…I thought to use a Weblog to have my students create an online reader’s guide to the book. In the process, I contacted the book’s publicist to see if the author might want to join us in our study of the book...after a few back and forth e-mails...she agreed. So, while my students read and commented online, [the author] was able to follow along and then respond to a series of questions they had at the end of the book” (2008).

How do I get started?

The following are some points to consider when developing a blogging assignment for your class:

- Seek out a few blogs with topics related to your class, and have your students read and discuss them. Google Blog Search (http://blogsearch.google.com) is one service that lists blogs by topic.
- Demonstrate the blogging activity by starting your own class blog first. Allow students to follow and comment on your posts, and talk with them about your experience. Blogger (http://www.blogger.com) is a popular option for those new to blogging.
- Don’t assume all your students are familiar with the use of Web 2.0 tools. Walk them through starting and posting to a blog, or find a web-friendly class member to do so.
- Consider creating an account at a newsreader service such as Google Reader, from which you can link to and keep track of all your students’ blogs.
- Introduce outside influences. Invite colleagues or relevant authors to interact with your students through the blogging process.
- Blogs are not packed away in boxes at the end of the term. Think about how the project can be structured so that the blogs have the potential to continue to be of value after the class ends.

What are some guidelines for blog projects?

As with any new activity or resource, you will want to discuss guidelines for blogging with your students at the beginning of the project.

- Remind your students that they are not only representing themselves to the world, they are also representing the class and to some extent the school. Talk with them about what it means to address the audience of the Internet.
- Remember that your class blogs may attract others who are not part of the class. Prepare your students for potential discussions with strangers. Don’t let this possibility stop you, however. Richardson tells us that his six year old son is a blogger; prepare your students well and they will be better able to handle public discussion.
Podcasting for College Courses

The term podcast officially denotes a series of audio recordings delivered over the web via an RSS feed that can be subscribed to by listeners. However, the term is also generally used to indicate audio or video files that are posted on the web for playing and downloading. The latter meaning is often used in higher ed, when an instructor wants to record a lecture or sections of a lecture and make the recording available to his or her students on Blackboard. Podcasts of this nature can be “not too hard” to create and very useful for students who appreciate a break from reading text. These recordings can be played on a home computer, in the campus computer labs (students can request the use of headphones), or they can be downloaded to a portable device (iPod, iPhone, etc.) and listened to on the go.

Preparing to Record

While the tech side of creating an audio recording may worry some instructors, the more important part is planning the content. This does not need to be a formal lecture; some might say the shorter the better. (See Pennsylvania University’s 60 Second Lectures series here: http://www.sas.upenn.edu/home/news/sixtysec_lectures_archive.html.) It’s helpful to consider how much content you want to include in each file. Breaking a longer lecture into shorter chunks makes for files that are quicker to download and easier to digest.

You may want to have a written version of what you want to say, or an outline of it, to make the recording smoother. You may also want to consider how “perfect” you want the recording to be. We are all used to hearing very polished recorded media, but speaking in a relaxed manner and not fretting over the occasional “misspeak” can make for a more personable and user-friendly talk. Give yourself time to practice—with both the tech aspects (software, headset or microphone) and the preparation of your talk—before you are rushed to get something posted. That way you’ll have time to play your recordings back to get a feel for how you come across to the listener.

One professor we know has provided several audio files to her students via Blackboard. Usually, she simply opens the recording software when she has the urge to explain something to students, records herself explaining, saves the file and posts it on Bb. These short lectures typically last three to five minutes, and offer quick insight into the current reading or discussion forum topic. She has also posted longer audio files (30 minutes), which are great for downloading onto an iPod or other device. On another occasion, she recorded herself discussing the slides in a PowerPoint presentation, ringing a bell when she wanted us to move to the next slide. While her home-made style may not work for all situations, her students really appreciate her efforts and find the recordings to transmit not only her ideas but her personality—a nice plus when communicating via the web.
Recording Needs

While a professional recording studio is always nice, most podcasters get started using their computer, simple recording software, and some kind of microphone. Generally speaking, preference goes to a decent headset rather than the mike built into your laptop. A quiet office or workspace (with a door that can be closed) is always a plus. One popular software option for recording audio files is the free Audacity program, available at http://audacity.sourceforge.net. Audacity supports not only recording but also editing of “tracks,” and allows you to add in a bit of sound such as intro music fairly easily. Of course, we recommend learning the basics and then deciding how involved you want to get as you try things out.

You will want to save your audio files as .mp3 files, because they are compressed for quicker upload and download and compatible with most players. To do this on Audacity, you also need to download and install a small plug-in application, the LAME MP3 Encoder. Instructions for this process can be found on the Audacity support wiki. You will also have to set a “bit rate” for recording. This rate determines the quality of the recording (i.e.: a higher bit rate equals a higher quality piece, but also a larger file size).

Please Note: Blackboard recommends no more than 250 mg of uploaded content per course. While most Word documents are only a fraction of that, the size of audio files can be significant. According to the Audacity website, “a 128 kbps bit rate [the default setting for the program] takes up about 1 MB of space per minute.” If you want to use multiple large files for a given course, you may want to consider uploading each one for a limited period of time.

How to Get Started

Here are some resources to get you started podcasting:

1) If you are tech-comfy and a DIY-type, you can download the Audacity software and try it out on your own. There are several how-to sites for Audacity users. Here are some places to get started:

The Audacity Homepage
http://audacity.sourceforge.net

Brief Audacity Demo
http://net.educause.edu/Screencasts/Audacity/Untitled.html

Instructions for installing the LAME MP3 Encoder plug-in
http://audacity.sourceforge.net/help/faq?s=install&item=lame-mp3

2) If you would prefer one-on-one support to get started, make an appointment with the CTL. Expect a brief review of the info covered here, questions about your specific needs, and a hands-on tutorial on Audacity. Prepare a short script (no more than 5 minutes of material), and you’ll leave with at least a practice version of your own podcast.

A Final Thought

Depending on the type of courses you are teaching, you may want to consider assigning your students to create audio files, too. After all, who wouldn’t appreciate a fresh approach to making class presentations? A group assignment, including a written script and a recorded and posted audio file, is one way of incorporating the activity. The MLRC (3rd floor library) is equipped to support small group projects such as this. We recommend that you contact them for specifics as you are planning the activity.
Copyright Basics for Instructors Using Blackboard

In this edition of the CTL Bulletin, Associate University Librarian David Green has compiled some useful information and resource materials to help faculty deal with copyright issues. As instruction goes increasingly electronic (at least as a supplement), we all need to be more aware of what we can and cannot do in our efforts to bring authentic, up-to-date information to our students. Here are some useful tips to keep in mind.

Did you know?

- If you use something produced by someone else in your Blackboard class for more than one semester without the copyright holder’s permission, regardless the number of semesters between offerings of the class, you are most likely violating copyright law.
- Information and files on the internet are usually not free from copyright protection.
- Copyright is automatically granted. It is not necessary for the producer of the work to register the work, or to put the copyright notice on the work.
- Fair use states that you are allowed to make copies of or post electronically – in a secure area such as Blackboard (not a publicly available website) – a resource for your students for a one-time use.
- Copyright infringement can leave you personally liable to court-ordered damages ranging from $250 to $150,000, plus attorney’s fees, for each act of infringement. Additional fines and even jail time can result if the offense is considered “criminal copyright infringement.”

Where can I learn more?

- **Here is a simple guide to see if you are covered by fair use or not:** The Copyright Management Center of IUPUI has developed a quick checklist for the academic community to help guide you in determining if your use of an item is likely to be considered fair use or not. Please read the brief introduction to the checklist before completing the checklist itself.
  - Introduction: [http://www.copyright.iupui.edu/introchecklistfairuse.pdf](http://www.copyright.iupui.edu/introchecklistfairuse.pdf)
  - Checklist: [http://www.copyright.iupui.edu/checklist.htm](http://www.copyright.iupui.edu/checklist.htm)
- **Here are several sites that give advice for typical scenarios:** These sites give answers to common scenarios instructors find themselves in when trying to determine if it’s OK to post something on their Blackboard site or not.
  - The Copyright Management Center of IUPUI offers six scenarios based on different source types (chapters, journal articles, videos…) with suggestions at [http://www.copyright.iupui.edu/fuscenarios.htm](http://www.copyright.iupui.edu/fuscenarios.htm)
  - The Hartness Library System of Vermont has developed an extensive question/answer document called, “Copyright, Fair Use and Plagiarism” which helps answer common questions and is found at [http://hartness.vsc.edu/hartness/copyright/copyright.php](http://hartness.vsc.edu/hartness/copyright/copyright.php)
- **Contact your library liaison for assistance:** The library cannot offer legal advice and each instructor assumes their own liability when making a decision, but a librarian can direct you to other resources than those listed here to help you with a specific question on copyright and fair use. To find the librarian for your discipline check this site: [http://www.neiu.edu/~neiulib/about/libinformation/liaisons.html](http://www.neiu.edu/~neiulib/about/libinformation/liaisons.html)
- **Check the next page for simple chart outlining copyright do’s & don’ts.**
Copyright and Blackboard*

As a general rule, simply putting an item up in Blackboard does not exempt an instructor from copyright regulations. Here is a chart for a general idea of what is o.k. to post.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Posted in Blackboard</th>
<th>Green Light ☺</th>
<th>Red Light ☹</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Web site containing copyrighted material</td>
<td>Link to the web site in Blackboard</td>
<td>Copying and pasting the content of the web site into Blackboard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copyrighted image from a website</td>
<td>Put up in Blackboard for ONE semester</td>
<td>Use from semester to semester without permission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article from Library Database</td>
<td>Link to the article</td>
<td>Download the article to your hard drive and then post in Blackboard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scanned personal picture</td>
<td>Put up anywhere in Blackboard</td>
<td>Use from semester to semester without permission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scanned copyrighted image</td>
<td>Put up in Blackboard for ONE semester</td>
<td>Use from semester to semester without permission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scanned chapter from a book</td>
<td>Put up in Blackboard for ONE semester</td>
<td>Use from semester to semester without permission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio Files</td>
<td>As long as it meets other fair use and TEACH guidelines, put up in Blackboard for limited time (10 days)</td>
<td>Use from semester to semester without getting permission or keep up for longer than 10 days.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video Files</td>
<td>As long as it meets other fair use and TEACH guidelines, put up in Blackboard for limited time (10 days)</td>
<td>Use from semester to semester without getting permission or keep up for longer than 10 days.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are also guidelines regarding how much of a source you may use.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Portion Restrictions:</th>
<th>Media Allowable Portion for Fair Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Motion Media (e.g. video)</td>
<td>Up to 10% or 3 minutes, whichever is less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text material</td>
<td>Up to 10% or 1000 words, whichever is less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music, lyrics, music videos</td>
<td>Up to 10% but no more than 30 seconds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illustrations, photographs</td>
<td>No more than 5 images from an artist/photographer, or no more than 10% or 15 works from a published collective work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numerical data sets</td>
<td>up to 10% or 2500 fields whichever is less (e.g. database)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* These charts were developed by the Z. Smith Reynolds Library, Wake Forest University, and are provided with its permission.
The Future of Educational Technology in Higher Education, Part 1

The last two decades in higher ed have moved the focus of the teaching-learning process from instructor input to learner outcomes, and from relatively inert content knowledge to the learners’ ability to do something with that knowledge. The classroom is no longer the only learning environment, and no effective teacher can ignore technology’s capacity for putting the learner into the educational driver’s seat. We will outline in this and the next issue of the CTL Bulletin four developments in educational technology that will likely effect significant changes in the next decades of higher education. We start with a brief overview of these developments, and then address the first two here and the remaining two in the next Bulletin.

1. Web 2.0 Knowledge Organization Tools
   New knowledge organization and production tools, such as Wikis, Social Bookmarking, Blogs, and Podcasting provide the potential for collaborative knowledge construction that is targeted at real audiences. Students can take an active role in this process.

2. Virtual Realities for Case-Based Learning
   Virtual Reality Programs offer students authentic performance tasks that resemble real-world challenges and engage them in realistic problem-solving activities.

3. Blended Learning
   Instruction can no longer use a “one size fits all” approach. The merging of computer-mediated and live instruction now allows us to optimize every student’s personal learning processes and accommodate diverse preferences for pacing and learning style.

4. Electronic Learning Portfolios
   Learning happens across the whole curriculum and requires ongoing reflection and synthesis across classes and semesters to accomplish personal growth. E-portfolios can support this in new ways.

Web 2.0: Collaborative Knowledge Organization Tools

In previous CTL Bulletins (#55-57, 61) we have described the educational capabilities of the new Web 2.0 tools. These innovations not only have great potential for improved education for everybody, they also make new demands on helping our students become information-literate. In his recent book, Will Richardson (2009) observes some of the trends and literacy demands that innovations such as Wikis, Blogs, Social Bookmarking, Podcasting, etc. are creating:

**Trend #1:** To quote Thomas Friedman (*The World is Flat*): “We are now in the process of connecting all of the knowledge pools in the world together.” The Internet has become the most comprehensive source of knowledge in history and the go-to-place for anybody seeking information on any topic imaginable.

**Trend #2:** More and more, the creation of that knowledge is collaborative. Students need to develop the ability to work closely with others in virtual environments. Employers have been telling higher education for years that our graduates need to be able to function in teams. That bar has now been raised: face-to-face collaboration remains important, but students must also be able to collaborate online and around the globe.
Trend #3: Consumers of Web content need to be editors as well as readers. That means that we must teach students to become more active consumers of information instead of just passively accepting it as legitimate.

Trend #4: We must be literate in the ways of publishing. Since everyone now can have a voice, instructors must increasingly teach and model the ways in which ideas and products can be brought online.

Trend #5: We need to know how to manage the information that we consume. The good news is: these new virtual tools help us manage information more effectively and efficiently. The bad news: they are also the main culprits for creating the information explosion that needs to be managed.

This new technological potential and these new literacies that technology requires, make learning more learner-centered, more collaborative and much more oriented beyond the classroom.

Virtual Realities for Case-Based Learning: Authentic Performance Tasks

For decades educators have searched for richer and more realistic (less text-bookish) learning environments, in which students acquire complex skills that typically can only be acquired in real-life. New technologies are making this possible. We can now provide students with problem-solving tasks that closely resemble the real world with its messy complexity that presents too much information, much of which turns out to be irrelevant for the issue at hand. These new simulated environments become the proving ground for students to demonstrate what they have learned.

A variety of tools exist that challenge students to explore complex virtual realities: WebQuests, simulation games, online science labs, virtual field trips, etc (see Bonk & Zhang, 2008). Probably the biggest such environment is “Kelsey,” a virtual town recently created by the University of Phoenix. Fictional companies were designed with great attention to detail in order to simulate the experience of working in a typical corporation, school, or government agency. Each fictional entity comes with detailed, simulated scenarios designed by professionals in the respective field.

This virtual town is used for Phoenix’s business, information technology, education, and health-care courses, in other words: its usability cuts across a wide section of the curriculum.

- The virtual schools and businesses function like case studies that students use to diagnose and solve typical problems of organizations
- Teachers can have a hundred scenarios and randomly assign them to different students
- Students then have to hunt for data in multiple files, documents, and records, some of them confusing and incomplete, just like in real life
- For example, a student can track an imaginary child’s progress from Kelsey’s elementary school to community college through files of report cards and e-mail messages between teachers and parents

The advantage is that the software lets students examine an organization at a level of detail not accessible even to most employees. Students can work on cases that have no more disciplinary boundaries. For example, an educational issue can be connected to business decisions affecting the school, health care issues affecting the town, and problems with information technology affecting businesses and schools alike.

References:
The Future of Educational Technology in Higher Education, Part 2

Our last Bulletin described two promising trends in educational technology: (1) Web 2.0 Knowledge Organization Tools, and (2) Virtual Realities for Case-Based Learning. The current Bulletin adds two more: (3) Blended Learning and (4) Electronic Learning Portfolios. Each one of them provides some unique capabilities, but together they share three general pedagogical strengths that face-to-face teaching has struggled with in recent years. Those strengths include:

1. Increasing students’ time-on-task and their persistence in practicing crucial skills
2. Engaging students through collaborative, inquiry-based projects that mimic realistic tasks
3. Providing diagnostic (self-) assessment opportunities to better understand what learning/teaching approaches are effective in courses and curricula.

The following paragraphs will illustrate how new technologies support these functions.

Blended Learning: Coordinated Learning Environments

Coordinated Learning Environments—typically called Blended Learning—are named for their ability to combine physical and virtual spaces as well as social groupings in order to optimize students’ academic success. In recent years, blended learning has taken off as an instructional format that combines the best of face-to-face and online instruction. Not surprisingly therefore, leaders in educational technology recently concluded: “In the long run, almost all courses offered in higher education will be blended… It is almost a certainty that blended learning will become the new traditional model of course delivery in ten years.” (Ross & Gage) The important question is: How do you structure Blended Learning so that the different parts actually benefit each other? Carol Twigg, founder of The National Center for Academic Transformation (NCAT), has identified several Blended Learning models, two of which are described in the following. The models are characterized by (a) the number of students served in one course, (b) the degree to which in-class meetings are eliminated, (c) the main delivery environment for instruction, and (d) the types of instructional staffing required for face-to-face teaching. The first model probably comes closest to what is typically called “blended learning”:

1. The Replacement Model maintains regular class sizes and:
   - Reduces (but does not completely eliminate) the number of in-class meetings
   - Replaces some in-class time with online, interactive learning activities
   - Is typically taught by one instructor
   - Gives careful consideration to why (and how often) classes need to meet face-to-face
   - Assumes that certain activities can be better accomplished online—individually or in small groups—than in a face-to-face class.

2. The Buffet Model—admittedly a somewhat unfortunate name for a pedagogical approach—typically accommodates large class sizes by combining multiple sections of a course. It:
   - Eliminates duplicate effort of several faculty who divide tasks among themselves by offering particular learning opportunities on the “buffet”
   - Customizes the learning environment for each student based on background, learning preference, and academic/professional goals
   - Requires an online assessment of students’ learning styles and study skills
Offers students an assortment of individualized paths to reach the same learning outcomes
Provides structure for students through an individualized learning contract
Includes an array of learning opportunities for students: lectures, individual discovery labs, group discovery labs, small-group study sessions, videos, remedial training modules, etc.

The final technology differs from the previous three, which could be described as learning/teaching tools that are attached to specific courses. This fourth technology cuts across courses and semesters and deals with students’ ongoing progress throughout their whole college studies.

**Electronic Learning Portfolios: Diagnosing Learning Over Time**

If the college of the future is to ensure the success of students with increasingly diverse academic backgrounds, abilities, and interests, we need to better understand our students’ strengths and weaknesses. We also need to understand what structures and approaches in the curriculum and co-curriculum facilitate and hinder student success. How does a given sequence of courses benefit some or inhibit other students’ learning? How do successful students go through their program, and what can “at risk” students learn from this?

Currently, a number of tools exist that can help us with these questions. The previous segment on Blended Learning referred to the use of diagnostic tutorials that assess certain prerequisite skills for specific courses or track students’ performance, including aspects such as time-on-task, or the improvement of conceptual understanding. Some institutions have created E-portfolio systems that provide important information for program review and accreditation purposes. Probably the most comprehensive and well thought-out initiative has come from Alverno College, whose Diagnostic Digital Portfolio integrates both the need to better understand student learning over time as well as institutional performance across the curriculum. Alverno’s Diagnostic Digital Portfolio:

- Follows every student’s learning progress throughout their years of study
- Helps students process the feedback they receive from faculty, external assessors, and peers
- Enables them to look for patterns in their academic work to become more autonomous learners
- Is used by faculty for program assessment (because the database is relational and searchable)
- Allows students and faculty to select “best work samples” (since entries can be coded)
- Thereby also allows students to create an electronic resume
- Can be used for faculty development by picking selected work samples to help new faculty members develop expertise in designing assessment, grading criteria, and good feedback.

The current and previous edition of the *CTL Bulletin* have showcased emerging educational technologies that we feel have the potential for inducing significant changes in higher education over the next decade. They provide the tools for engaging students more in their own learning by making it more collaborative and hands-on. They also provide faculty and administrators with new opportunities to better understand their students, and devise new course and curriculum-based structures for making higher education more effective.

**References:**


Why does Professor Cirbur Love Rubrics?

Rubrics have increasingly become a tool for grading complex work in higher education. Many faculty, especially in Education, have come to like them; some faculty seem mildly amused about them; and others just absolutely can’t stand them because they feel rubrics pretend to quantify expert judgment into neat algorithms.

This Bulletin gives an introduction to scoring rubrics and their benefits to the skeptics among you and to those still unfamiliar with them. It addresses two main points:

1. What are the parts of a rubric, and how are they used for scoring assignments?
2. What are rubrics’ benefits for the instructor and the students?

We have also created a new addition to the CTL website that provides sample rubrics that NEIU’s General Education Committee has created and is using for assessing the Gen-Ed program. Additional information will be added to this website in the coming weeks and months. So check periodically if you are interested in learning more about this topic, at: www.neiu.edu/~ctl/teaching.html

The Mechanics of a Rubric

First some distinctions are in order: There are Holistic Rubrics, and then there are Analytical Trait Rubrics; there are also Generic Rubrics, and there are Task-Specific Rubrics. The distinctions relate to the task at hand: Holistic rubrics allow you to judge simple products or performances (such as response to an essay question) without going into much detail. Analytical trait rubrics are much more precise and distinguish a variety of dimensions on which you evaluate a student’s performance (e.g. on a term paper). Generic rubrics are used for any number of similar performances (such as the quality of writing across papers in more than one course or even more than one discipline; NEIU’s Gen-Ed Assessment rubrics fall into this category). Task-specific rubrics are created for a single task in a course. They specifically list what the instructor wants to see in a particular assignment, so that scoring is quick and unproblematic. This Bulletin will focus on analytical trait rubrics because, while they take more time to develop and apply, their educational value is superior to that of the other types of rubrics.

Analytical Trait Rubrics consist of four elements, the most important one being the criteria into which we break quality performance on a given task. Take NEIU’s Critical Thinking Rubric for General Education assessment. Six criteria characterize what we are looking for in a critical thinker who needs to be able to: (1) Identify and explain issues, (2) Recognize stakeholders and contexts, (3) Frame own and others’ perspectives, (4) Identify and evaluate assumptions, (5) Identify and evaluate evidence, and (6) Identify and evaluate implications. Of course, not all assignments require all six criteria; some may just focus on two or three of these.
Once those criteria have been identified, one needs to determine how many levels of proficiency on each one of these criteria should be used to arrive at meaningful performance distinctions within the group of students one wants to assess. In many cases, four proficiency levels should be enough: High Proficiency, Proficiency, Some Proficiency, No or Limited Proficiency.

Element 3 of a rubric deals with the actual scores assigned to each criterion and the way the various scores are translated into grades. Depending on the purpose of a given assignment, some criteria may be weighted more heavily than others, especially if only two or three criteria are selected for an assignment. For example, early on in a semester, one may want to emphasize the importance of clearly identifying the issues in a complex problem scenario more heavily than identifying all the implications derived from this problem. Therefore the former criterion is given twice the weight (and twice the number of possible points) that the latter criterion receives. The more criteria are used for an assignment, the less meaningful it is to assign different weights to each criterion.

Many people stop at this point in their rubric design and leave out the fourth element of an analytical trait rubric: the description of what the students’ performance would look like for each criterion at each proficiency level. Admittedly, such descriptions are quite difficult to construct. They require considerable experience with many students and their typical abilities. It may be best to start with what characteristics one would expect from a “proficient” student (not an exceptional and not a below-average one) on any given criterion. Being able to describe in a sentence or two what typically characterizes performance at a high, medium, and low proficiency level is what makes a rubric more than a grading tool. It turns it into a teaching tool.

**Benefits of Rubrics**

Arter and McTighe in their 2001 book *Scoring Rubrics in the Classroom* list three major goals and benefits of scoring rubrics:

1. They help clarify the targets of instruction, especially those that are complex and hard to define
2. They provide valid and reliable assessment of student learning on these same complex and hard-to-assess student outcomes
3. They improve student motivation and achievement by helping students understand the nature of quality for performances and products. (p. ix)

Experts know a good performance when they see one. Because expertise is usually connected with skills that have become tacit sometime in the past, it can be difficult for an expert to explain the components that contribute to excellent performance. Creating or adapting rubrics is a good exercise for a faculty member to once again uncover what has become tacit. Breaking a complex performance into several steps or components helps faculty clarify what needs to be made explicit, while it helps students recognize how to make a complex task more manageable. Most faculty using well-designed rubrics agree that this has dramatically reduced student complaints about grading because performance criteria were communicated upfront. In fact, one creative application is to teach students how to use a rubric to score their own papers before they hand them in so they themselves develop the critical judgment for identifying the strengths and weaknesses of their own work. If an analytical trait rubric—such as NEIU’s Critical Thinking Rubric—is utilized repeatedly in the same or in different courses, students will eventually internalize the criteria with repeated applications across different contexts.

So why does Professor CIRBUR love rubrics? He may not be able to fully explain it to you, but it’s been part of his nature all along. And if you can’t understand that, just call out his name… only spell it backwards! (My apologies, but this is the April 1st edition!)
**Critical Thinking Rubric**

The Critical Thinking Rubric presented in this CTL Bulletin was created to facilitate embedded assessment of goal 2 of the Gen-Ed program. A random set of student papers across our Gen-Ed courses will be selected and scored by a panel of faculty readers using the Rubric. Beyond Gen-Ed assessment, the Rubric can also serve other functions. Virtually all instructors in all disciplines see it as their goal to help their students become critical thinkers. The Rubric helps define critical thinking in some detail. Most critical thinking tasks that instructors want their students to perform will be characterized by several if not all of the criteria described in the Rubric.

The Rubric not only defines the key dimensions of critical thinking, it also illustrates for students the typical performance levels on each dimension from “limited or no proficiency” to “high proficiency.” Not each task in a course may require all seven criteria, but with the Rubric instructors can point their students to the ones that are important for a given assignment. Students then know ahead of time how their instructor will assess their work. It takes much of the ambiguity out of essay grading and over time produces better learning results. Imagine what would happen if students saw the same (or very similar) criteria used for critical thinking tasks across most of their courses. Critical thinking takes time to develop. Redundancy of grading criteria across courses could help develop such skills in our students.

The current Rubric was designed to work best with a student paper that:

- Presents an open-ended, ill-defined problem which has more than one appropriate answer.
- Either has a predetermined topic or allows the student to define a topic within certain parameters.
- Requires the student to develop a meaningful argument supported by evidence and followed by a conclusion.
- Is related to course readings or other sources that the student ought to consider as he or she critiques arguments from the literature and/or develops arguments of his or her own.

The Rubric’s criteria include aspects of critical thinking that essays in just about any field should incorporate for a thoughtful analysis. These criteria are:

1. **ISSUE/S:** Identifies and concisely explains the problem/question at issue
2. **CONTEXT:** Recognizes the influence of the context on different stakeholders and the issue
3. **OWN PERSPECTIVE:** Presents the student’s own perspective and position related to the issue
4. **OTHER PERSPECTIVES:** Considers other salient perspectives and positions relevant to the issue
5. **ASSUMPTIONS:** Evaluates the key assumptions behind the claims and recommendations made
6. **EVIDENCE:** Evaluates the quality of supporting data/evidence and provides additional data as needed
7. **IMPLICATIONS:** Evaluates conclusions, implications, and consequences

Of course, you can modify each criterion—together with its performance levels—depending on the specifics of your discipline and your course. That’s what faculty at Washington State University have done, where the first version of this Rubric was developed (you can check out the different disciplinary variations at: [http://wsuctproject.ctlt.wsu.edu/ctr.htm](http://wsuctproject.ctlt.wsu.edu/ctr.htm)). NEIU’s version of the Rubric was developed by the General Education Committee, with special involvement of members of the Philosophy department and of the CTL.
### NEIU’s Critical Thinking Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Quality</th>
<th>No/Limited Proficiency (1 point)</th>
<th>Some Proficiency (2 points)</th>
<th>Proficiency (3 points)</th>
<th>High Proficiency (4 points)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Identifies &amp; explains <strong>ISSUES</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Fails to identify, summarize, or explain the main problem or question. (OR) Represents the issues inaccurately or inappropriately.</td>
<td>Identifies main issues but does not summarize or explain them clearly or sufficiently</td>
<td>Successfully identifies and summarizes the main issues, but does not explain why/how they are problems or create questions</td>
<td>Clearly identifies and summarizes main issues and successfully explains why/how they are problems or questions; and identifies embedded or implicit issues, addressing their relationships to each other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Recognizes stakeholders and <strong>CONTEXTS</strong> (i.e., cultural/social, educational, technological, political, scientific, economic, ethical, personal experience)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Fails accurately to identify and explain any empirical or theoretical contexts for the issues. (OR) Presents problems as having no connections to other conditions or contexts.</td>
<td>Shows some general understanding of the influences of empirical and theoretical contexts on stakeholders, but does not identify any specific ones relevant to situation at hand.</td>
<td>Correctly identifies all the empirical and most of the theoretical contexts relevant to all the main stakeholders in the situation.</td>
<td>Not only correctly identifies all the empirical and theoretical contexts relevant to all the main stakeholders, but also finds minor stakeholders and contexts and shows the tension or conflicts of interests among them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Frames personal responses and acknowledges other <strong>PERSPECTIVES</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Fails to formulate and clearly express own point of view, (OR) fails to anticipate objections to his/her point of view, (OR) fails to consider other perspectives and position.</td>
<td>Formulates a vague and indecisive point of view, (OR) anticipates minor but not major objections to his/her point of view, (OR) considers weak but not strong alternative positions.</td>
<td>Identifies and evaluates all the important assumptions, but not the ones deeper in the background – the more abstract ones.</td>
<td>Not only formulates a clear and precise personal point of view, but also acknowledges objections and rival positions and provides convincing replies to these.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Evaluates <strong>ASSUMPTIONS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Fails to identify and evaluate any of the important assumptions behind the claims and recommendations made.</td>
<td>Identifies some of the most important assumptions, but does not evaluate them for plausibility or clartty.</td>
<td>Identifies and evaluates all the important assumptions, but not the ones deeper in the background – the more abstract ones.</td>
<td>Not only identifies and evaluates all the important assumptions, but also some of the more hidden, more abstract ones.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Evaluates <strong>EVIDENCE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Fails to identify data and information that counts as evidence for truth-claims and fails to evaluate its credibility.</td>
<td>Successfully identifies data and information that counts as evidence but fails to thoroughly evaluate its credibility.</td>
<td>Identifies all important evidence and rigorously evaluates it.</td>
<td>Not only identifies and rigorously evaluates all important evidence offered, but also provides new data or information for consideration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Evaluates <strong>IMPLICATIONS, conclusions, and consequences</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Fails to identify implications, conclusions, and consequences of the issue, (OR) the key relationships between the other elements of the problem, such as context, assumptions, or data and evidence.</td>
<td>Suggests some implications, conclusions, and consequences, but without clear reference to context, assumptions, data, and evidence.</td>
<td>Identifies and briefly discusses implications, conclusions, and consequences considering most but not all the relevant assumptions, contexts, data, and evidence.</td>
<td>Identifies and thoroughly discusses implications, conclusions, and consequences, considering all relevant assumptions, contexts, data, and evidence.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The Benefits of Program Review

Two boys are walking down the street. The first boy says, “I’ve been really busy this summer. I’ve been teaching my dog to talk.” His friend responds, “Wow! I can’t wait to have a conversation with your dog.” The first boy shakes his head. “I said I’ve been teaching him. I didn’t say he learned anything.”

That’s how Mary J. Allen starts her 2004 book on Academic Programs Assessment. Unlike the boy in the story, all faculty are concerned about what and how much their students learn. But it isn’t always easy to determine those outcomes, and the many assessment tasks faculty have been asked to perform in the past have not always instilled confidence in the practical usefulness of such attempts.

This year, ten departments are undergoing program review on our campus, and we hope the results will be meaningful to these departments. A few things from the literature to keep in mind: “assessment is about student learning; it is not about faculty evaluation.” (Lopez, 1999) “Effective assessment focuses on improvement rather than accountability.” (Peterson & Vaughan, 2002). And “one of the most valuable aspects of program assessment is that it provides a forum for faculty discussion of student learning.” (Allen)

The remainder of this Bulletin tries to make the case for program assessment. It raises the three major questions that program reviews need to address and briefly illustrates how the pursuit of these questions can benefit departments in their daily work.

**Q1. What does our program try to accomplish?**

This question requires a mission, goals, and objectives statement for the academic unit. Without such, any further assessment attempts will be relatively meaningless. Mission, goals, and objectives should define the unit’s unique purpose and strengths. The program ought to be cognizant of the contexts in which it functions. Contexts include: The student body and what interests, needs, and capabilities students bring to the table; similarly the faculty body; the University and its mission within the geographical area; potential employers; and finally the profession itself and the direction in which it is moving.

What benefits result from this type of assessment? Faculty come to an agreement on how to focus their work as a department. They describe who their students are and what they need; what niche their program fills within the region (a marketing issue); which new options are emerging and how the program needs to change to take advantage of those options. This analysis impacts the definition of the desired qualities in new faculty hires, needed changes of the curriculum and co-curriculum, student recruitment efforts, and building of alliances beyond the campus. Declining enrollments on our campus and across Chicago illustrate the importance of researching one’s mission, goals, and objectives periodically.

**Q2. How do our program goals align with what happens in individual courses?**

Curricular alignment is one of the key requirements of an effective academic program. It is also often one of the most neglected tasks of curriculum development and review. The recent assessment of NEIU’s Gen-Ed Program
has indicated a frequent lack of coordination between different sections of the same course taught by different instructors. While exacerbated in Gen-Ed, the situation in your major may show a similar picture.

A curriculum is supposed to provide a blueprint that allows students to gradually become familiar with the relevant aspects of a field. These aspects include concepts, theories, skills, procedures, values, and behaviors that have to be acquired over years of studying. If coordination between courses and course sections is lacking, students are not likely to acquire the components necessary to become competent practitioners.

Checking for curricular alignment in a program review requires a detailed investigation of how individual program objectives are integrated into different courses and co-curricular activities to ensure that all goals are sufficiently addressed over a student’s move through the program. Years of teaching the same courses by changing instructors are likely to create holes in curriculum implementation. Only a systematic assessment can reveal those holes.

**Q3. What do our students actually learn?**

If certain aspects of the intended program goals are not addressed in the curriculum (s.a.), it is unlikely that students will live up to the expected learning outcomes. But misalignment in the curriculum is not the only reason why student learning may not match desired outcomes. Outcomes assessment attempts to capture student learning that endures beyond the end of the course. Teacher input alone—what an instructor covers—is not indicative of actual learning outcomes, as the story at the beginning of this Bulletin illustrates. To measure complex learning, we need clear performance criteria and multiple ways of assessing program results. Some measures are direct (requiring students to demonstrate their achievement), others are indirect (based on opinions such as student self-reports of skill improvement). Much can interfere with student learning, which is why both self-reports and direct measures are helpful in gaining a more complete picture. An effective curriculum generates *longterm* learning. A series of letter-grades earned in different courses is poor evidence for that. Only program assessment with its emphasis on the integration of learning and on longterm retention can reveal to what extent students have achieved the objectives detailed in the program’s mission and goals statement.

**Conclusion:** A meaningful program review needs to address all three questions above and utilize a variety of targeted measures. This task may seem daunting, but it doesn’t have to be. Not everything has to be done all at once. Assessment should be meaningful, manageable, and sustainable. Program faculty should focus on a few measures each time. They should also avoid mammoth tasks that will discourage ongoing assessment. One way to do that is by using *embedded* assessment, e.g. including strategically selected exam questions, in-class activities, fieldwork activities, and homework assignments into certain classes to serve both course and program assessment purposes. Finally, for program reviews to be effective, the assessment should be “forward-looking,” i.e. try to uncover what is possible in the future, not simply providing an inventory of what has already happened (Allen).

**Sources:**


Evaluation of Teaching: What the Research Says

PART 1

Evaluation of teaching has always been a sensitive and sometimes controversial issue. At a time where most departments are rewriting their DAC’s, it seems only appropriate to take a look at what the research has to say about common practices for evaluating effective teaching. It may not come as a surprise that those practices do not always provide the most valid results and that more valid results come at a cost … mainly of more time invested. But with a little more effort common practices can be enhanced, while generating the added value of helping instructors improve their teaching. Here are the main points:

- Teaching can only be properly assessed if the assessors (say, within a given department) agree on what they consider to be effective teaching at certain course levels and in certain types of courses.
- While there is no commonly accepted definition of effective teaching, there are some general principles with which most scholars on college teaching tend to agree.
- Teaching consists of more than classroom performance. Student learning is equally influenced by good course design, subject matter mastery, instructor-availability to students, and development of a coherent curriculum.
- Unfortunately, the most common methods for evaluating teaching focus almost exclusively on classroom performance and thereby leave out many components that determine student learning outcomes.
- Student evaluations of teaching (using appropriate instruments and procedures) have been shown to be more valid and reliable than other commonly used techniques, especially peer evaluations.

This is the first part of our recommendations from the literature. The second part will be out in print next week, but it is already available online at www.neiu.edu/~ctl/bulletin.html. We start with some references to defining effective teaching.

Useful Criteria for Evaluating Teaching

Different disciplines require different methods and settings for instruction, which should result in different methods and criteria used for evaluation. In addition, even within a discipline instructional methods will differ between classroom formats such as lecture, discussion, lab, small group interaction, studio, etc. Research on classroom performance (focusing on lecture and discussion formats) has widely converged on categories of good teaching that include: Good organization and planning, Teacher-student interaction or rapport, Clarity and effective communication, Flexibility of teaching approaches, Impartial evaluation of students, Enthusiasm for subject and teaching. Advocates for student-centered teaching have embraced Chickering and Gamson’s (1987) Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education, some of which go beyond the classroom context. According to these principles, learner-centered teachers: (1) Encourage contact between students and faculty in and out of classes; (2) Develop reciprocity and cooperation among students; (3) Encourage active learning that involves regular opportunities to talk, write, and relate course content to daily lives; (4) Give prompt feedback and
suggestions for improvement; (5) Emphasize time on task and effective time management; (6) Communicate high expectations; and (7) Respect diverse talents and learning styles. Lists such as these can serve as discussion starters for departments to come to an agreement on what members of the department will recognize as elements of good teaching.

The following table presents the relative strengths of four commonly used evaluation tools and their best use for generating data on different aspects of teaching. There are certainly other ways of breaking down teaching skills, and the evaluation tools can be made to cover them somewhat differently as well. But the overall picture remains largely the same: Each evaluation tool only addresses a limited proportion of teaching effectiveness. While there is some overlap, multiple methods will be needed to provide a full account of how effective a given instructor is as a teacher.

TABLE: Contributions of Different Evaluation Tools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching Aspect</th>
<th>Student Eval's</th>
<th>Peer Observ.</th>
<th>Document Review</th>
<th>Portfolio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Teacher triggers students’ interests</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Teacher motivates students to learn</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Teacher is easy to understand by students</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Students feel challenged by teacher</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Teacher organizes material and class activities well</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Teacher has good rapport with students</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Teacher has good command of the subject matter</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Teacher uses an appropriate variety of instructional methods</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Teacher reacts to student needs/classroom demands w/ flexibility</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Teacher has created a coherent course design</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Teacher’s assessment of student learning is fair</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Teacher’s assessment criteria are meaningful</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Assessment shows evidence of achievement of learning outcomes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Teacher communicates well in writing (giving instructions or feedback)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Teacher mentors students outside the classroom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Teacher shows growth in teaching abilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Teacher demonstrates an understanding of the students’ background</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Further Information

Next week’s second part on this topic will discuss the research on the four data sources listed in the above table: Student evaluations, peer observations, document review, and teaching portfolios. A wealth of information exists on issues of teaching evaluations, much of it by now in condensed version on the Web. The Center for Teaching and Learning is happy to provide additional input. Contact us at ex. 4468 or e-hansen@neiu.edu

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1 For a short essay on these topics, see: [www.ou.edu/idp/tips/ideas/evaluation.htm](http://www.ou.edu/idp/tips/ideas/evaluation.htm); for a thorough review of the literature, see R.A. Arreola, 2000. *Developing a Comprehensive Faculty Evaluation System*, 2nd ed. Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing.

1 See Guidelines for Evaluating Teaching: [www.crit.umich.edu/crittext/guidelinestext.html](http://www.crit.umich.edu/crittext/guidelinestext.html)

1 See Kansas State’s Idea Paper #32: [www.idea.ksu.edu/resources/Papers.html](http://www.idea.ksu.edu/resources/Papers.html), U.C.-Santa Barbara: [http://www.oic.id.ucsb.edu/Resources/Teaching/GoodTeaching.html](http://www.oic.id.ucsb.edu/Resources/Teaching/GoodTeaching.html), and Student Evaluation of Teaching: [http://ctl.unc.edu/fyc16.html](http://ctl.unc.edu/fyc16.html)

1 For more detail, see [www.byu.edu/fc/pages/tchlnnpages/7princip.html](http://www.byu.edu/fc/pages/tchlnnpages/7princip.html). For a self-evaluation instrument, see: [www.unh.edu/teaching-excellence-9](http://www.unh.edu/teaching-excellence-9)

1 For an excellent meta-website of such literature, see: [www.tlc.eku.edu/tips/evaluating_teaching/](http://www.tlc.eku.edu/tips/evaluating_teaching/)
Evaluation of Teaching: What the Research Says

PART 2

This continues our two-part series on evaluating teaching effectiveness. The previous part emphasized two key points: (a) Teaching is a multi-faceted skill that cannot be adequately assessed by just one or two data collection methods, and (b) Faculty and departments need to have discussions about the criteria they want to use to measure effective teaching in the contexts their curriculum provides. "I know good teaching when I see it" simply will not do.

Classroom Peer Observation

Having such discussions about teaching is particularly important before embarking on a peer observation program. Too often faculty assume that with experience in the classroom comes good judgment of effective teaching. The truth is that there is often relatively little consensus on how individuals define good teaching, even between colleagues in the same department. Some instructors consider a well-delivered lecture the hallmark of good instruction; others prefer to orchestrate interaction in small student groups. Some instructors like a fast-paced change of activities, while others take a slower, more reflective approach. Some instructors teach mostly upper-division and graduate students; others have honed their skills for Gen-Ed and intro-level courses. Without an explicit understanding about the range of acceptable classroom methods, faculty will tend to impose their own style as the yardstick for measuring others' teaching. There is an abundance of peer observation guides available that can help departments create more coherent observation results across their faculty. However, the first requirement is that all department members agree on the relevant criteria to be used before any observation form is selected.

In addition, there are other guidelines that are crucial for meaningful peer observation results: (1) Reviewers should be appropriate judges who have no conflicts of interest or longstanding personality conflicts with the observed and who are familiar with the content area. (2) Reviewers need to have sufficient time—at least one hour per visit—and sufficient contextual information to understand the observed class period. (3) A single classroom observation by one rater is not reliable; at least two or three observations should be made. (4) Observers should be as unobtrusive as possible during the observed classroom period. (5) Conclusions should be tied to evidence, i.e. rooted in the specifics of the documentation that has been provided. Unless such rules are followed, peer observations may remain the most unreliable tool currently used for teacher evaluations.

Student Evaluation of Teaching

Most student rating forms are mainly concerned with the delivery of instruction. That leaves out many important aspects of teaching that should be evaluated with other tools (see Table in Part 1). Contrary to many opinions, appropriately-phrased and administered student evaluations turn out to be a valid and reliable form of evaluating classroom performance. Global ratings of the teacher or course (e.g., "Overall, this is an excellent course" "Overall, the instructor is an excellent teacher") correlate higher with student learning than do more specific items. There are only a few factors that tend to bias students toward creating lower ratings: (a) If the course is required rather than an elective; (b) if the course is taken by lower rather than upper-level students; (c) if students entered with little prior interest in the course.
material; (d) if the courses are in math & sciences rather than the humanities or social sciences. Generally, students are able to report on the extent to which a teacher appears prepared for class session, communicates clearly, stimulates interest, and demonstrates enthusiasm and respect for students. On the other hand, students tend to be poorer judges of the intellectual quality of a course, of its academic rigor, or of its appropriateness to the curriculum.\textsuperscript{x} Other common problems with student evaluations relate to how items are phrased (e.g. with a bias for lecturing); how the instrument is administered (someone other than the instructor should administer it, while the instructor leaves the room; students are informed that the results are anonymous and that the instructor will not see the results until after grades have been handed in); and how results are interpreted (evaluations by less than 10 students or less than 75% of enrolled students have low reliability; averaging dissimilar items in an instrument is not appropriate).\textsuperscript{xi}

Evaluation of Course Materials
This is where peer judgment can generate results that are much more valid and reliable than those from typical classroom observations that the literature has shown to be least reliable.\textsuperscript{xii} Besides classroom performance there is a whole other side to teaching that is relatively invisible in any one class session. This side involves the structural decisions every instructor has to make about the scope of the course, its educational goals, reading materials, handouts, multimedia, tests and assignments, assessment system, and a full range of teaching methods and course procedures. These structural elements are every bit as important as the actual live delivery of instruction.\textsuperscript{xiii} An instructor’s isolated classroom performance may look good but could possibly hide poor planning, inappropriate student assessment, and a narrow range of teaching methods that exclude students with different learning styles. Colleagues with subject matter and pedagogical expertise can extract these instructional elements by reviewing syllabi, graded assignments and tests, and course handouts such as assignment sheets, rubrics, and lecture notes.

Teaching Portfolio
Teaching portfolios have become more popular recently because they can equally serve evaluation and improvement purposes. Portfolios provide a longterm perspective that is otherwise difficult to obtain. They allow an instructor to reflect on and document personal growth, describe an underlying teaching philosophy, and lay out the conceptual framework for course and curriculum design that guide his or her classes.\textsuperscript{xiv} While performance and results are what ultimately counts, understanding the context in which an instructor operates makes interpretation of student or peer observation data much more valid.

Further Information
A wealth of information exists on issues of teaching evaluations, much of it by now in condensed version on the Web.\textsuperscript{ixv} The Center for Teaching and Learning is happy to provide additional input. Contact us at ex. 4468 or e-hansen@neiu.edu.

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\textsuperscript{iii} See Kansas State’s Idea Paper #32: \url{www.idea.ksu.edu/resources/Papers.html}, U.C.-Santa Barbara: \url{http://www.oic.id.ucs.edu/Resources/Teaching/GoodTeaching.html}, and Student Evaluation of Teaching: \url{http://cti.unc.edu/fyc16.html}
\textsuperscript{iv} For more detail, see \url{www.byu.edu/fc/pages/tchlrnpages/7princip.html}. For a self-evaluation instrument, see: \url{www.unh.edu/teaching-excellence-9}
\textsuperscript{v} For an excellent meta-website of such literature, see: \url{www.tlc.eku.edu/tips/evaluating_teaching/}