Center for Teaching Excellence
Hampton University
Teaching Matters

October 2010 Volume 5, Number 4

In This Issue

Teaching Excellence Related Links

♦ Bloom's Revised Taxonomy

http://coe.sdsu.edu/eet/Articles/bloomrev/index.htm

♦ TechLearning – Free subscription

http://www.techlearning.com/

Other Useful Links

♦ Stimulus Funds from the U.S. Department of Education

http://www.ed.gov/news/pressreleases/2009/03/03072009.html

In the Next Issue

♦ More Interviews with the Edward L. Hamm Distinguished Teaching Award Recipients

An Interview with the Edward L. Hamm, Sr. Distinguished Teaching and Provost Teaching Innovation Award Recipients

By Zina McGee

Each year, Hampton University honors and recognizes outstanding faculty who serve as models of excellence for their profession and exemplary mentors for their students. This month, I had the pleasure of interviewing two recipients of these awards: Dr. Carmina Sanchez-del-Valle, who received the 2008-2009 Edward L. Hamm, Sr. Distinguished Teaching Award, and Mr. Robert Willis, who received the 2009 Provost Teaching Innovation Award. In our next issue, we will continue our discussions with Ms. Eleanor Earl and Dr. Carl G. Harris, Jr. who also received the 2008-2009 Edward L. Hamm, Sr. Distinguished Teaching Award.

Interview with Dr. Carmina Sanchez-del-Valle

Briefly describe your teaching philosophy. What strategies do you use to create a student-focused learning environment?

The experience of teaching is intrinsically linked to learning – in other words, there is no teaching without learning. The role of the teacher, particularly in the context of professional education, is to open doors to possibilities, to walk some of the paths to potential knowledge with the students. Yet, not all paths are linear success stories. Some have had to struggle, even face failure, before learning to lead themselves forward. I want students to realize their own courage in difficult pursuits and to not retreat from the challenge. It will serve them well personally now, and professionally later. Knowledge is not static. New avenues are discovered in the process of teaching learning together. It is also the responsibility of the teacher to provoke – as positive incitement - students into the challenge of critical thinking, and to encourage its pursuit, even if it is daunting. To do so, the teaching-learning environment needs to be open to all, respectful of the ideas and worldviews represented in the group. A dialogical relationship may be reached by allowing devil's advocate roles or positions, but it cannot be established by bullying and intimidation. I am not saying that such

tactics are common approaches; however, somewhere out there is a larger societal perception that it is necessary to win no matter the method. It is necessary to show it is possible to do well, to solve a problem, to understand a situation through collaboration. In-class discussions are a well-known first step to collaborative learning. These cannot be too restrictive or closed, because the spirit of collaboration implies peer-to-peer learning through respectful challenge and acknowledgement. I am part of the process through that type of in-class exchange. And I am part of the process in my collaborations with colleagues in our department and in the university. I always continue to learn much from others; I want my students to graduate from this university with an understanding of that knowledge source, and how to access it critically.

How do you recognize creativity and innovation both within and outside of the classroom setting?

The teacher is a model of both. We have to demonstrate approaches to teaching, practice, and scholarship that are creative and innovative. Our task in architecture - to maintain the relevance of the knowledge we share and create - is not different from other disciplines. However, as a trans-disciplinary field of knowledge – architecture is an amalgam of domains – which effort is then spread out. The dilemma is how to maintain the focus without losing sight of all the threads. Our students are encouraged to practice with us in how to perceive, and then concentrate holistically. I create an environment where, together, we challenge each other to make sense of the world. Students bring knowledge to the class, which are both an expectation and an asset. We must facilitate their recognition of their own contributions, and their various ways to present it. The challenge is twofold: how to convince students it is worthwhile to share it, and how to integrate it into a class – particularly in highly structured courses. Ultimately, it all depends on providing space for mystery, struggle, and discovery no matter what subject is taught. And, find meaningful ways to fold what is discovered into the consideration of the class, or studio. The mystery must not be in trying to figure out what the teacher wants.

In what ways do you stimulate self-growth and professional development among your students?

Students have to be convinced that learning is a creative process, and not a routine, a thing to do. An artist memorizes a script to play a role, but to perform they have had to research and reinterpret it, and make it their own. Thus, recitation has a place in the teaching-learning experience simply as a preparatory exercise, but it is not where most of the learning happens. Students will own their future if they see their role as active learners, and can act on it. We hold the keys to the room where they can become aware of both freedoms, and can discuss the responsibilities those carry. Students must be able to contribute to class by introducing new material, interpretations, and approaches.

What strategies do you use to facilitate reflection, professional learning and enhanced student accomplishment?

Our world increasingly demands we live fast just to keep up; time for contemplation and reflection occupy a tiny slot in our agenda. Writing in class, no matter how short or extended, provides for moments of personal introspection. In our case, this is also achieved through another type of thinking – sketching. Writing and sketching allow focusing critically on an idea or condition. Including some form of teamwork offers a chance to role-play and to develop awareness for creating consensus, and collaboration to be fully exercised in professional practice. Teaching for many learning abilities is consistent with both Howard Gardner's seven intelligences, as well as the multiple skills that are required from an architectural designer.

Present in our discussions in class and studio must be the ethical dimensions involved in the practice of architecture. These opportunities for critically assessing the profession can be controversial and confrontational, but are essential to reveal and face the complexity of the problems that need to be addressed, and to let students see for themselves how to adapt to rapidly changing circumstances. I use montage – the contrasting of a variety of resources such as a short story, the analysis of an architectural project, a clip from a film, a comic, an article from a scholarly journal – to present the complexity of reality and to discuss responsibility. The idea that everything is interconnected is fundamental – although may now seem a bit trite from continuous vandalization by superficial advertisements. There is always so much to be learned. One must have the skills to think critically, to put that acquired knowledge to best use. We can and must work on it. I expect much from the students, and imagine they do likewise. At the end, my students must feel some sense of achievement and satisfaction for the work they have completed. And I must do the same.

Interview with Mr. Robert Willis

Briefly describe your teaching philosophy. What strategies do you use to create a technologically enhanced student-focused learning environment?

Be where your students are. We must understand that our customers change over time and that we cannot successfully use the same techniques year after year. Each generation of students is different. Indeed, the students in a particular class (say CSC 120) may have radically different learning requirements from one semester to the next. We must take the time and continually adapt our teaching methods while maintaining standards. I believe in treating all students equally while realizing that we facilitate the education of gifted (academically) students, teach average students and work very hard with marginal students.

I try to use (at a minimum) the technology that our students use. Whenever possible, I infuse graphics, social networks, and environments, gaming and even cell phones into projects, lectures, and

assignments. I constantly remind myself that today's students have used technology since kindergarten and expect to continue using it in the classroom. For instance, I allow cell phones and computers in class (not for personal use). When a question arises and I do not have a ready answer, we use the technology for web searches. I often assign web searches during the lecture to highlight certain concepts. I also use Skype for office hours.

How do you recognize creativity and innovation both within and outside of the classroom setting?

Within the classroom setting, I try to pose questions that require disciplined thought and guide students to respond using novel methods. While it is easy to determine the level of creativity (or lack thereof) of the more flamboyant student, it is more difficult to determine the creativity of the reserved student. I find that an assignment using challenging technical scenarios (Second Life[1], Unity[2] or Alice[3] programming) helps in finding the creative and innovative student. Receiving unexpected responses (even if not correct) that display thought, research and imagination is rare and often the sign of a unique mind. Outside of the classroom setting, I often engage students in conversations about non-academic matters.

In what way does technology help you to stimulate self-growth and professional development among your students?

This is a difficult question for a computer scientist! Obviously, we use computing devices for almost everything we do. The past few years have seen a quantum leap in the technology used to build these devices. Their use (for computer scientists and everyone else) has become ubiquitous. While software development has not kept pace, it has grown rapidly, as well. Therefore, it is easy to become over stimulated. There is too much to learn, too little time to learn most things and too many ways to learn them. The newer software tools (mentioned above) stimulate students to learn computer science in novel ways. However, students must also master many of the tools required to be successful in a professional environment. Educational and industrial grade tools such as JGrasp[4], Eclipse[5], Rational Software Architect[6] and Visual Studio[7] are used in various courses. In short, I use the "exciting" tools to enhance students' learning experience and the industrial tools to prepare them for the professional environment.

What strategies do you use to facilitate reflection, professional learning, and enhanced student accomplishment through technology?

I honestly do not know how attempting to be a very good professor and "strategies" differ. Since our department focuses on software

[1] http://secondlife.com/whatis/
[2] http://unity3d.com/
[3] http://www.alice.org/
[4] http://www.jgrasp.org/
[5] http://www.eclipse.org/
[6] http://www-01.ibm.com/software/awdtools/swarchitect/websphere/
[7] http://www.microsoft.com/visualstudio/en-us/products/2008-editions

development, most of the things we do are geared towards professional learning and virtually everything uses software and hardware technology.

Reflection has always been difficult. Sometimes (in class) we take a break and just talk about anything. Whatever the topic, I try to provide subtle comments that students will think about after class. I want students to take the time to consider their futures in terms of faith, morality, camaraderie, and family. I want them to decide whether faith and morality are the same and whether camaraderie is more important than family. I really want them to decide when personal and professional are the same, and when do they differ. I want them to think about being mature, thinking adults.

Online Teaching Tips: Sweat the Small Stuff

By Errol Craig Sull

When we teach online courses, there are many fundamental issues that concern us: knowledge of our subjects, teaching strategies, engagement of students, school policies, deadlines, grading and returning of assignments, posting announcements, and responding to students—the list goes on.

There also are some "not-so-major items" that are important but do not seem quite as crucial. However, when one of these is overlooked, it can become the ugliest wart on your class, resulting in negative student attitudes and a diminishing of your stature as instructor.

The following list contains a few of these "small things" that often are overlooked in online courses.

Look over your course before it begins. Because a course is usually preset by the school, many online faculty assume that everything is ready to go. But often this is not the case. Be sure to check for broken links, duplication of or missing assignments, and typos. Confirm that all course material is visible to the students and that grading/points have been assigned to each project, homework, and test; and that final exam dates (if applicable) and all related information are posted.

Check your spelling and grammar. Students will not appreciate emails, announcements, and other postings with spelling errors, typos, or punctuation/grammar errors. Sure, it takes a bit more time to check for these—but it is your reputation and the school's reputation at stake. While no one is perfect, students expect their instructors to be—and all it takes is one typo from you for a student to feel that you are not prepared to teach.

Be sure that page numbers in assignments match the text(s). Sometimes the assigned pages do not match the pages in the text(s)

students have. This happens most often when an instructor is teaching a course again and again and forgets to check for a new edition of the text(s) being used, page numbers are entered incorrectly, or the text(s) you assigned does/do not match the one(s) ordered by the bookstore. Be sure all assigned readings are in sync with the text(s) used—your course will proceed much more smoothly if they are.

Make a checklist of all school policies applicable to your course. It is so easy to overlook or forget one or two school policies or procedures, especially if you are new to the school. Make a checklist so you will not overlook any. If you are unsure of a policy, ask a supervisor.

Always be positive in your feedback and postings. You will be teaching many students, so you will be typing many thousands of words during one course; this can make it easy to overlook your tone or word choice now and then. Do not let it happen. A negative tone, use of all caps, and no positives in assignment feedback, emails, or other postings can be devastating to a student. So check all before you send, and always end each missive with an upbeat, optimistic tone.

Be substantive in your announcements, feedback, postings, etc. Students cannot see you (except in rare webinars) or shake hands with you; all they have are your words, so it is crucial that they are, for the most part, many. The "Great paragraph, Tom!" or "Good point, Cathy!" postings are fine, but they should never be representative of your writings to students. Be substantive (and do so often, not occasionally) in these so they know that you are invested in the class, care about the class, and are interested in the class.

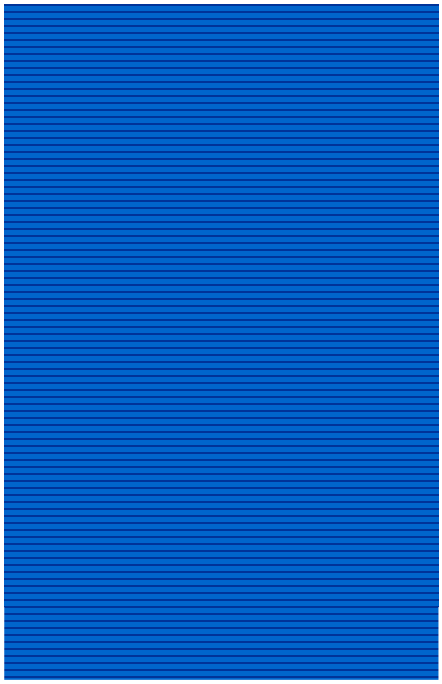
Keep track of the errors and oversights you discover for future courses. We all make mistakes in each course we teach. But as long as we use these errors as lessons to improve ourselves, they are not for naught. Make a list of these errors and keep them handy so that when you next teach a course the same problems will not occur. Your class will run more smoothly, the students will have a more positive learning experience, and you will feel more relaxed.

Errol Craig Sull has been teaching online courses for more than 14 years and has a national reputation in the subject, both writing and conducting workshops on it.

Excerpted from Teaching Online With Errol: In Teaching Online Never Overlook the Small Things, March 2009, *Online Classroom.*

Announcements

The *Grantmanship Center* will be hosting the "Grantmanship Training Program" Workshop in Jacksonville, FL from November 1-5, 2010 and in Washington, DC from November 15-19, 2010. Registration is open online at www.tgci.com. As a response to increased demand and competition for funding support and training, as well as the high cost of



many programs, the Center is offering this these courses on the proposal writing and development process. Focusing on the format and structure of the successful grant proposal, this course provides attendees with an overview of each part of the grant proposal, avenues for researching available grant programs, and concludes with fundamental proposal writing techniques. This workshop is an excellent introduction for the beginning fundraiser, those requiring a refresher, and those required to write their own grant proposals. Those interested in attending must register at www.tgci.com. Registration will remain open until the maximum amount of registered attendees has been reached. For more Information about this training, please call at 1-213-482-9860.