

T TEACHING M MATTERS

The Newsletter of the Center for Effective University Teaching

Volume 11, Edition 1

Northeastern University

Fall 2005

Welcome to new faculty members Pam Mabrouk, *Chair of the Advisory Board of CEUT*

Welcome to Northeastern University (NU)! If you are new to the NU, you have already no doubt figured out you have joined a very vibrant and diverse graduate research university, committed to quality education and research, that is experiencing an exciting and invigorating period of growth and change. As Chair of the Advisory Board for the Center for Effective University Teaching (CEUT), I would like to add my voice to the chorus of those who have already welcomed you to our campus. Through your orientation program, I hope that you already realize you will find support in developing your teaching efforts through the CEUT and its many activities and resources including teaching workshops, classroom videotaping, mid-course evaluations, one-on-one consulting, the orientation programs for new faculty and teaching assistants, and *Teaching Matters* this newsletter. The center also administers the TCEP questionnaires, the formal evaluative mechanism for course evaluations that are used on this campus in tenure and promotion reviews. If that were not enough, it also provides support for your graduate student teaching assistants through workshops, credential ship, teaching portfolios, and teaching awards. Be sure to check out the Center's website: www.ceut.neu.edu for more detailed information regarding the Center, its services, and activities.

The Center, physically located at 416 Columbus Place, is headed by Director Donna Qualters, a Associate Professor in the Department of Education, and Assistant Director, Audrey Aduama,

who provides administrative support for the center and its services. A number of faculty from each of the colleges serve on the Center's Advisory Board, which meets biannually. You will find a listing and a brief description of the Advisory Board members' teaching interests inside. They serve as active liaisons between the faculty and the CEUT and provide leadership and support roles in a number of the CEUT's faculty development programs.

If you have ideas for activities or wish to become more active in the Northeastern teaching community, please feel free to call or email any of us. Again, welcome! We look forward to working with you in support of your teaching and learning activities at Northeastern!

Best,

Pam J Mabrouk

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Pam J Mabrouk—Professor
Chemistry & Chemical Biology
College of Arts & Sciences

List of Fall 2005 new faculty members

COLLEGE OF ARTS & SCIENCES

Paul Schreyer
Lecturer

Elizabeth Lucey
Lecturer

Veronica Godoy
Assistant Professor

Paul DiMilla
Associate Academic
Specialist

Max Diem
Professor

Kumarini Silva
Assistant Professor

Craig Robertson
Assistant Professor

Zhongmin Wang
Assistant Professor

Jody Schimmel
Assistant Professor

Paul Harrington
Associate Professor

Patricia Sullivan
Assistant Professor

Patrick Mullen
Assistant Professor

Timothy Brown
Assistant Professor

William Fowler
Distinguished Professor

Daniel Kennedy
Visiting Assistant Professor

Peter Topalov
Assistant Professor

Ronald Smith
Assistant Professor

Latika Menon
Assistant Professor

Denise Marie Horn
Visiting Assistant
Professor

Nancy Kim
Assistant Professor

Sylvia Dominguez
Assistant Professor

Michael Handel
Associate Professor

Natasha A. Frost
Assistant Professor

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Natasha A. Frost
Assistant Professor

COLLEGE OF BUSINESS

Richard W. Kopcke
Visiting Professor

Frederick G. Crane
Assistant Academic
Specialist

Paul V. Croke
Visiting Assistant
Academic
Specialist

Jay P. Mulki
Assistant Professor

COMPUTER & INFORMATION SCIENCE

Timothy Bickmore
Assistant Professor

Riccardo Pucella
Assistant Professor

COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING

Hossein Mosallaei
Assistant Professor

Shashi Murthy
Assistant Professor

Yung Joon Jung
Assistant Professor

Xinping Zhu
Assistant Professor

Yingzi Lin
Assistant Professor

BOUVE COLLEGE OF HEALTH SCIENCE

Nathaniel Rickles
Assistant Professor

Richard Nichols
Clinical Specialist

Robert Volpe
Assistant Professor

George Thompson
Assistant Professor

Catherine O'Connor
Vstg Clinical Specialist

Christine Johnsen
Clinical Specialist

Maureen Holden
Assoc. Professor

Dalia Mack
Asst Clinical Specialist

Alexandria Piotrowski
Clinical Specialist

Sally Ball
Asst Clinical Specialist

Valaria Ramdin
Asst Clinical Nurse
Specialist



Teaching Academy 2005—NU Photographer, Craig Bailey

Please visit our website at
www.ceut.neu.edu to view full bios of
new faculty members.

ADVISORY BOARD MEMBERS 2005—2006

***Betsey Blackmer**

Associate Professor
Cooperative Education

Elise Dallimore

Assistant Professor
Communication Studies

Thomas Gilbert

Associate Professor
& Interim Dean
*School of Education/
Department of Chemistry*

***Michael Gonyeau**

Associate Clinical Specialist
Pharmacy Practice

Malcolm Hill

Vice Provost
Undergraduate Education

Nancy Hoffart

Dean
School of Nursing

****Patricia Mabrouk**

Professor
*Chemistry Department &
Chemical Biology*

***Maria Meirelles**

Assistant Professor
Visual Arts

Emmett Price

Assistant Professor
Music

***Daniel Quinn**

Associate Academic Specialist
Psychology

Jack Reynolds

Chair & Professor
Pharmacy Practice

Andrew Rohm

Assistant Professor
CBA – Marketing

Rick Scranton

Associate Dean
School of Engineering

***Daniel Scheirer**

Associate Professor
Biology

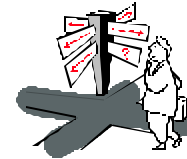
***Thomas Sherman**

Associate Professor
Mathematics

Please visit our website at www.ceut.neu.edu to view
full bios of advisory board members

*New board members for 2005-2006

**New Chair of the board



CEUT: NEW LOCATION

716 Columbus Ave, suite 416 CP. We invite the
university community to visit our new office space.

FROM THE DESK OF THE DIRECTOR

As you can see from this issue there are a number of important changes occurring at the Center for Effective University Teaching. First, we've moved! We have new offices in Columbus Place and we encourage you to "come on over" and visit us in suite 416. We've also had some staffing changes. We are currently interviewing for a new Assistant Director of Academic Programs, a new Administrative Assistant, and a new Systems Coordinator. These reconfigured positions will allow the CEUT to operate more efficiently and continue expanding our offering to the campus community with a relatively small staff.

We have also expanded our advisory board to better meet the needs of the Northeastern diverse faculty. Please feel free to contact an advisory board member in

your area with ideas for new programs or feedback on current programming. The board is an important part of the CEUT and we value their dedication and input.

Another happy event has been the promotion of Audrey Aduama. Most of you know Audrey in her role as TCEP coordinator. We are pleased to announce that she has been promoted to Assistant Director for Administration. This expanded position will allow us to tap Audrey's skills and talents for all our current and future programming.

So look out for new offerings, new personnel, new ideas as we commence the spring semester!

Donna M. Qualters

New Faculty Orientation 2005

Forty new faculty members attended the New Faculty Orientation program for 2005. President Richard M. Freeland was the keynote speaker for welcome breakfast on Wednesday, August 31, 2005.



Teaching Academy 2005—NU Photographer, Craig Bailey



New Faculty Breakfast 2005—NU Photographer, Craig Bailey



President Richard M. Freeland
New Faculty Orientation 2005—NU Photographer, Craig Bailey



CEUT Director—Donna M. Qualters
New Faculty Orientation 2005—NU Photographer, Craig Bailey



Teaching Academy 2005—NU Photographer, Craig Bailey



Teaching Academy 2005—NU Photographer, Craig Bailey

On Connecting Your Course to the Overall Intellectual Life of the Student.

Robert Case— *Mathematics and Education*

Every once in a while I'm reminded of why I got into teaching in the first place, and why I've stayed in it. I had glimpsed the possibilities of an absorbing and stimulating intellectual life myself, and I wanted in turn--through teaching--to be in on helping students go down the path of a wide and rich intellectual development. The student would then have the opportunity for a career, not simply a job. She/he would develop a fulfilling life of personal and social responsibility and leadership built upon a creative, productive and growing intellectual capacity.

I guess I don't need to tell you that the everyday reality of my teaching often seems to run directly counter to this goal. My course seems one small discrete piece in the pile of required courses, unconnected to the rest. The students themselves, instead of nurturing an intellectual life, are engulfed by the high-level consumption center that the university has become. Colleges and universities argue they need to act this way in order to maintain their "market share". Students' interest in the courses they take often seems confined to the grade. Conditions are constantly taking us farther away, it would seem, from Newman's "Idea of a University" or Paul Goodman's "Community of Scholars". Dialogue, inquiry, and intellectual growth are often near the bottom of any list of priorities, and the main student question all too often becomes: "Will this be on the exam?" We want our course to be a building block in a rich intellectual edifice, and instead we often fear it might just be a brick by the side of the road.

But in my better moments, I'm optimistic enough to be convinced that the vital center of education is still accessible to us and to our students, and that bridges to the entire range of intellectual creativity can still be built

(maybe our individual success is often modest, but it's still a contribution).

Here are some things that seem to work (on and off) for me:

1. At the very beginning of the course clearly lay out the conditions, the content, and goals. This provides an envelope for intellectual development.

We need to establish a consistent environment for learning, which includes incentives for attendance, participation, coming to conference hours, etc. This environment isn't in itself the intellectual life, but, especially for freshmen, it is often the necessary prerequisite.



2. Make sure the course's inner identity is paramount. The rigor of the course itself is our first obligation. Every course has a standard and that is what we have to maintain and communicate. A mathematics course, for example, must have a demanding level of rigor. Simultaneously, this rigor must not be formulaic but driven by powerful and exciting concepts. The instructor must struggle to find and maintain "the right level" for each course. We are not going to connect the course to a wider intellectual horizon unless we have something to connect, and that is the curriculum, the ideas and outcome-skills involved in Calculus I, or English, or Sociology, or Nuclear Physics. The course itself must have its own intellectual vitality.

3. Be concerned with the broader methods of the course, the skills that are needed across the board for most other courses. There is Socratic dialogue, the use of discussion, group work, projects that demand inquiry and investigation. In each course, the student should progress in writing, in designing ways to express him/herself, and in problem-solving. These will be applicable in future courses, in discussions with others, and in creative professional work.

4. Make connections to other sources and the media. Ask students if they read newspapers.

Much of the really important news is hiding in the business pages, of all places. If the NY Times has a popular article touching on your curriculum, bring it in. Recommend books like James Gleick's "Isaac Newton" in calculus, or the recent novel containing an entire survey of philosophy, "Sophie's World". If a film or exhibit explores important issues connected to the course, write the information on the board. Also, students should come out of each course with a more keenly developed critical sense for asking questions when they're exposed to the internet or other media, shouldn't they? This way, intellectual growth can emerge as a lifelong entity.



6. Connect the subject to its applications, to practice.

(I remember a Boston Harbor project an Honors student developed.) He was applying the curriculum to solutions in the surrounding society. This is important to intellectual growth, because such growth thrives in the tension between the concrete and the abstract. As he wrote a paper on the copper pollution cleanup in Boston Harbor, this student approached the matter from the point of view of exponential decay, envisioning a half-life for

the amount of copper in the harbor. Surprisingly, the people responsible for the clean-up had not ever looked at it this way. It turned out to be a surprisingly good model for prediction. And like any good model, it uncovered yet more problems and questions for future exploration.

5. Connect your course to other disciplines.

Ask them if they think philosophy is important. Recently I tried to relate the basis of calculus to (the) thinking of Kant about space and time, and therefore, tried to portray modern mathematics as a response to one of the great modern problems, the problem of continuity. I don't think it went over very well. There was too much dissonance (in my presentation, at least) to what a student expects in a calculus course...the very challenge we're discussing here. But I won't give up on trying again, maybe by using small-group discussion around a few questions. And you need to talk about the limitations of the discipline—what is not known—which somehow connects your course to something broader and deeper. Students taking mathematics should find out that no one yet knows if each even number can be expressed as the sum of two primes (Goldbach's Conjecture). Even more startling—they should know that it is possible that this question may not be able to be **ever** settled. Ask students about their major and their other courses. Talk to one of their other teachers, and see if it is practical to co-conduct one of your classes with this instructor, concentrating on a point of overlap or connection.

7. Make connections to the social, the political and the personal.

If you believe we're despoiling the world we live in, and your course has something to say about changing that, say so. If you believe the social and economic inequalities on the planet are unacceptable, say that, too. Distinguish this from the particular material of your course, and from your own authority (always open to question, in any case) over the curriculum. Say your position is only as good as your evidence, and invite students' written or verbal challenges. Recognize that students have a right to see in their instructor a whole human being who's thought about a range of things (and who is not necessarily always right). But don't lose time on this. Bracket these matters—you might mention them as possible position papers in this or other courses. Remember the first commandment: Thou shalt not go off on tangents!

8. Be clear –first to yourself –that the process is intellectual growth, not cultural socialization-- which can be alienating. Our students are, hopefully, coming from a wide variety of cultures and

backgrounds. They want to be true to their roots. This is especially true as America once again re-invents itself requiring expanding opportunity for a new wave of first-generation college students. Many young people seeking access are from new immigrant families or from underserved urban environments. They have the potential to be the leaders in their communities. But there is always the tendency to teach students the way we were taught, and that means, for example, if the faculty went through graduate school in the Ivy League, they'll be tempted to replicate that at whatever school they teach (a process called by McDermott "The Laying-on of Culture", when he analyzed it years ago in a trenchant article in *The Nation*). This is the classroom counterpart of the corporate uniformization of the university mentioned earlier in connection with the student as consumer. We are not moving into a cookie-cutter out-of-body experience called "becoming an intellectual", some kind of inauthentic veneer. We need to keep asking ourselves: "What is needed to make the colleges of today capable of playing the role in the twenty-first century that places like City College of New York played in the twentieth when they became fruitful in leading new immigrants' children to become agents of thought and creativity"?

9. Remember the *emotional* temperature of the classroom. We are speaking of intellectual life, but that life (like organic life, which is possible only within a limited temperature band) thrives within a definite personal and emotional range. Your classroom is the opposite of the "null environment". You love the subject. You believe this student can be successful in this subject. You will help in this process. This is the personalist vehicle on which the intellectual content rides.

10. Invite the students to go beyond the university and share their growing intellectual strength, their personal creativity, their problem-solving capacity. This "practice-oriented" intellectual growth can be achieved through tutoring and mentoring younger students or by participation in a commu-

nity project. Build on the students' generosity. The campus is the field on which the inherent generosity of the young is at war with the consumerism to which Americans are everywhere subjected. Student magnanimity is often latent but it can be elicited because there is a reservoir of selflessness in each of them. The students can be invited to tutor in the same subject which you are teaching, but in a local high school or middle school. Students can design a practical solution to a problem in a local community, applying their developing creativity. In this way their intellectual life is shared with others and simultaneously enriched for the sharer.

The above are some suggestions about stimulating the intellectual life. Some of them are productive some of the time. But we sometimes lucky enough to hear from former students and they have positive things to say about our course in terms of what they do and who they are. The betting here is that it is not the course in itself to which they are referring. They are usually describing the way the course connected to their overall intellectual life.



CEUT Staff at Teaching Academy 2005—NU Photographer, Craig Bailey



The purpose of the Jonas Chalk "Chalk Talk" column is to initiate a dialogue on best practices, successes, and frustrations in teaching. (Although the concerns covered are often universal, we do put a particular emphasis on the challenges and rewards of teaching freshmen.) This column hopes to stimulate, engage and occasionally nudge professors to share their wisdom and ideas about the best ways to achieve outstanding learning outcomes in. Readers can submit letters, questions, or ideas that you have to jchalk@coe.neu.edu.

Old Jonas columns can be accessed at: <http://gemasterteachers.neu.edu/documents/documents.html>

If you would like to subscribe to the weekly Jonas e-column, contact Jonas at jchalk@coe.neu.edu with your e-mail address and put "subscribe" in the subject line.

Dear Jonas,

I just received the summary of my Teacher-Course Evaluations for a course I taught last term, and I must admit to being a bit confused. Let me give you some information. It was a required course taught to first-term sophomore engineers and was the first major-specific course in the curriculum (they're taking another at the same time). Overall the ratings were OK - 4.2 out of 5.0 on teaching effectiveness with a standard deviation of 0.7. Of the 39 students who completed the evaluation forms, nine wrote comments about "What has the instructor done especially well in this course?" and eight had comments for "What suggestions would you make to improve this course section?"

How do I reconcile comments such as: "He is always prepared for class and does all he can do to make sure we understand the material, very effective!" with "Teach in a more understandable manner."?

Another conflicting set of comments read: "Emphasized importance of material in engineering career. Treated students like adults, rewards those who put in effort" but "He talks to the class like they are in elementary school and is sometimes rude".

The remainder of the suggested improvement comments revolved around how much credit should be allowed for homework performance. What do I do with such contradictory comments?

Dear Mixed,

It is very common to receive conflicting feedback. There are a few issues to keep in mind when reviewing TCEP reports, so I will address some of the common perceptions, provide suggestions for improvement, and discuss the use of TCEP trends over time.

I operate under the premise that student scores and comments are honest reflections of their perceptions. One person's perception is not necessarily the last word on your teaching.

With an average score of 4.2 on teaching effectiveness and a standard deviation of 0.7, your students have uniformly

perceived your overall efforts as quite effective, especially as this is a required course. The distribution of the comments the students made was also roughly reflective of that kind of numerical distribution. However, without being present in your class, I can't reconcile the comment about treating students like adults with the one about treating them as if they were in elementary school. I can only say that by taking a figurative "average" of the comments you noted, the "elementary school" one does not seem to be a perception shared by others. I would simply make a mental note that someone perceived my efforts in a way that was not what I would have wanted; however, since no examples were given, I won't dwell on it.

I would spend more time thinking about another set of comments though. You did mention that a number of the comments in the "improvement" category addressed the amount of credit you give for homework performance. I would think about these comments in two ways. First, should I give more credit for homework? Second, even if I decided not to give more credit, perhaps I should make more of an effort on my syllabus and in class to describe the logic that underlies my grading scheme. The bottom line is that I would use the evaluations in a formative way to improve my classroom presentation for the next term.

What I look for in TCEP comments and ratings is trends over time. Everyone has a difficult semester or class at one time or other and TCEP scores reflect that. I chart my TCEP rating and comments each term for my own use. If I see that a score is lower than I would like, or that there is a set of recurring comments for 3 out of 5 rounds, then I know there is something here I have to look at seriously.

I also use TCEP scores and comments to determine if I might want some peer feedback on my teaching the next semester. Student comments, you often need another perspective, other than student opinions, to get a true picture of what is happening in your class.

Don't forget that results of other questions on the back of the TCE form might also provide useful information and shouldn't be ignored, such as providing an estimate of how much time individuals are devoting to your class and how useful they find the text.

To get the full picture of your teaching, I recommend using TCEPs, mid-term feedback, and peer observation-review collected over time.

Regards,
Jonas

Quick Tip: Save your TCEP reports - organized by course and term - for future reference to note trends and progress. You will also need them for your teaching portfolio in tenure and promotion reviews.

Teaching should be such that what is offered is perceived as a valuable gift and not as a hard duty

~Albert

Einstein




TA Award Banquet 2004—NU Photographer, Craig Bailey

TA awards banquet
April 12, 2006
Raytheon Amphitheater
6:00-9:00 p.m.

**ANNUAL
Winners' Circle
Symposium**

SAVE THE DATE
Week of
March 26—31 2006



BOOK CLUB

CEUT Specially invites you to join our book club. The current book is " To Know As we are Known" by Parker J. Palmer.

If you are interested please send an email to ceut@neu.edu, stating your interest in joining the book group and also any/all days of the week that you can meet around the noon hour.

Published by

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