Facilitating Student Connections in Foreign Lands

By Spencer Benson
Director, Center for Teaching Excellence

To a large degree, students’ connections to learning and the university occur outside the classroom. Although class time is often seen as the essence of the university, in fact the majority of university experiences for students occur in dorms, study groups, the union and gathering places across campus. It is possible for a student to go through a whole semester without talking to a professor or engaging peers in their learning processes, this is especially true for large lecture classes. Fortunately the university provides a variety of learning options which require students to make connections to professors and peers and in doing so enrich their university experience. These options include seminars and honors classes, classes that involve service-learning, special topics classes, and independent study, to name a few. Some are limited to students in special programs, e.g. Honors, College Park Scholars, Gemstone, and Global Communities, etc. One venue open to all students is the winter term study abroad course. These courses provide an opportunity for groups of students to travel with a faculty member(s) to various locations around the globe to experience first-hand different cultures and to make connections to peers and faculty in ways that are not possible within normal class venues.

As I write this column I am in Vientiane, Lao PRD, having just completed a two and half week course for 15 students in which we traveled to Yunnan China and Vietnam as part of a study abroad winter term course on Water and Sustainable Development in the Greater Mekong Region. The group included three faculty from different departments, first-year
through fourth-year students in a variety of majors (animal science to business) and a graduate student. For the most part the students did not know each other or the faculty prior to signing up for the study abroad course. The exception is that four of the 15 students had taken an interdisciplinary course on the Mekong River (WRLD235) during the fall semester, which two of the faculty had taught.

The winter term course is one that the students will hope fully remember and cherish as a highlight on their university experience. Traveling with any group fosters connections via the shared common experiences and the excitement and tribulations of exploration in new environs. As a class experience it is unique, since faculty and students share time and experiences without the usual structures of classroom times and walls. Students get to see and know faculty as people, and in a similar fashion faculty get to know students as young adults each with their own personality goals and aspirations. The experience provides many opportunities for one-on-one conversations and mentoring thus allowing the needs of each student to be individually assessed and met. Through conversation, shared meals, and experiences students and faculty connect on a personal level and in doing each is provided with insights into the lives and roles of students and professors.

Students develop unique friendships and connections with peers that they might never meet through traditional class venues. The class experience provided opportunities for peer mentoring among a diverse group of students, with senior, more seasoned students providing mentoring as role models for the less seasoned first- and second-year students. Perhaps the most important outcome for students and the faculty is the knowledge, satisfaction, and confidence they gain in knowing that they can arrive in a foreign country, find the essentials of shelter and food, and with confidence be able to explore and experience a foreign land. This is something that every undergraduate student should have the opportunity to do and is a goal of the university. However, in order to provide more students with these types of unique learning experiences more faculty are needed to organize and lead study abroad courses. All (or most) faculty have international experience either directly through their own research or via colleagues in other countries. What is needed is for more faculty to adapt this international expertise/connection to include undergraduates.

If you are interested in the possibility of developing and leading a study abroad course I encourage you to contact the study abroad office for help and guidance. Many faculty, while interested in the possibility of organizing a study abroad course, are unsure of what is involved, what is required and how much work there is in preparing and delivering a winter term study abroad course experience. One effective solution for overcoming this obstacle is to join an existing study abroad
Professor Berg, Physics is Phun in Washington Post

The director of Physics is Phun, the Department of Physics’ public demonstration series, was featured in the Washington Post on January 14th. Professor Dick Berg developed the program in 1982 as part of the Physics Lecture-Demonstration Facility, which also hosts the Physics Question of the Week, provides demonstrations for faculty and students, and organizes an annual high school Physics Olympics. The Physics is Phun website outlines the objectives of the popular sessions:

1. They supplement the standard high school physics course by exposing the students to a large array of phenomenological physics background.

2. They encourage younger students to study science (and even physics) by developing the students’ interest in physics.

3. They provide some background for the scientific culture in which we live. We live in a scientific and technological culture. Like many of the non-science disciplines, it may be important to expose people in an experiential manner to some of the great scientific principles on which this culture is built. With these aims in mind, we attempt to provide programs which are both interesting and entertaining, involve little or no mathematics, and include an engaging sequence of physics demonstrations which adequately survey each area of physics.

(Source: http://www.physics.umd.edu/lecdem/outreach/phph/phph.htm)

A full outline of the Physics Lecture-Demonstration Facility programs, including more about Physics is Phun, can be found at http://www.physics.umd.edu/lecdem/.

The Washington Post article, “Physics Phanatic: For U-Md. Professor Dick Berg, the Trick Is in the Performance” By Darragh Johnson (Saturday, January 14, 2006; Page C01) is available at http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/01/13/AR2006011302062.html.

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**Annual Guide to Instructional Policies and Resources**

- Can I cancel my office hours because of weather?
- Should I post student grades outside my office?
- When should I assign a grade of “I”?
- Where can I find the University Human Relations Code?

This guide offers a brief introduction to the University’s policies, procedures, and resources related to teaching, advising and mentoring. It’s available at the following addresses: http://www.faculty.umd.edu/teach/InstructionalGuide.htm

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**Academic Integrity Notice for Your Course Syllabus**

The Student Honor Council encourages any individuals teaching a course Spring semester to include the following information in the course syllabus:

The University of Maryland, College Park has a nationally recognized Code of Academic Integrity, administered by the Student Honor Council. This Code sets standards for academic integrity at Maryland for all undergraduate and graduate students. As a student you are responsible for upholding these standards for this course. It is very important for you to be aware of the consequences of cheating, fabrication, facilitation, and plagiarism. For more information on the Code of Academic Integrity or the Student Honor Council, please visit http://www.studenthonorcouncil.umd.edu/whatis.html.
Graduate Teaching Assistant Development Grants Awarded

Each year, CTE awards a number of small grants to improve the development, support, and recognition of Graduate Teaching Assistants. We are happy to announce the 2006-2007 recipients:

Jane Gilhooly, Meredith McCarthy and Ashley Zauderer, Department of Astronomy: Graduate Teaching Assistant Resource Center, $1000.


Graduate Council Association for Students in Theatre (GCAST), Department of Theatre: Collaborative Arts Project: Experiential Learning through a Performance Object, $500.

Women’s Studies Graduate Student Organization, Interdisciplinary Graduate Student Conference: Dangerous Places, Potential Spaces, $2500.

CTE congratulates the awardees and celebrates their commitment to graduate teaching assistant development at the University of Maryland.

2005-2006 Lilly-CTE Teaching Fellows

This year’s cohort of Lilly Fellows are meeting regularly to discuss ways to improve teaching and learning across campus. Pictured at right (l-r) are Fellows Maryann McDermott Jones (Chemistry), Peter Beicken (School of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures), Susan White (Finance), Ricardo Medina (Civil and Environmental Engineering), Philip Silvey (Music), and Glenn Schiraldi (Public and Community Health). Not Pictured: Marcia Marinelli (Learning Assistance Services), Joe Redish (Physics), Laura Rosenthal (English), Lilly Griner (University Libraries). Photo courtesy of Outlook.
Spring 2006 Teaching & Learning Series

**Distinguished Lecture:**

**Jay Labov, National Research Council**

“**The Evolution Controversy and the Increasing Importance of Teaching About the Processes and Nature of Science**”

**February 3**

Jay Labov is senior staff member of the National Research Council’s Center for Education. Dr. Labov is the Senior Advisor for Education and Communications, splitting his time between the Center for Education and the National Academies’ Office of Communications. In this capacity, Dr. Labov leads an institution-wide effort to leverage the National Academies’ work in education by helping to make more deliberate connections between the work of the Center for Education, the National Academy of Sciences, National Academy of Engineering, and the program units of the National Research Council.

This presentation will summarize the various approaches that have been taken across the U.S. to limit the teaching of evolution or to introduce “alternatives” into science classrooms and what recent court cases may mean in helping to shape discourse about these issues in the future. One of the reasons that this debate is likely to continue in some form is because many people do not have a deep understanding of the processes, nature, and limits of science and we will consider ways that scientists might address these issues.

**Facilitating and Grading Participation and Discussion**

**February 27**

This workshop will address the important role of student participation during class. A faculty panel will discuss approaches to and strategies for facilitating discussion and other types of active learning, and we will address the challenges of assessing class participation components of course grades.

**Facilitating and Measuring Critical Thinking**

**March 13**

Few terms are deployed so often in higher education as “critical thinking.” Join us for a panel discussion of critical thinking, in which faculty and staff will address varying senses of critical thinking across the disciplines and strategies for measuring this fundamental practice.

**Communicating Expectations: An Undergraduate Panel**

**April 28**

CTE is hosting an exciting opportunity to discuss the business of communicating and sustaining teacher expectations. A panel of undergraduate students, moderated by expert faculty, will address their experiences with effective methods for articulating teacher expectations for individual assignments, course objectives, assessment, and other aspects of teaching and learning.

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**Teaching & Learning Events are held from 2:00 and 3:30**

**in the Maryland Room of Marie Mount Hall**

**Look forward to further details on these and more teaching & learning events.**
Help on Teaching (HoT) Program

If you are a graduate teaching assistant (GTA) with a teaching-related concern, issue, or crisis, and you want the advice of a seasoned and trained GTA, call on one of CTE’s Help on Teaching Fellows. The HoT Program fellows are prepared to work with you on:

- Assessment
- Course design
- Teaching methods
- Discussion strategies
- Student evaluation data
- Classroom management
- Motivation strategies

As a UMD GTA you can have up to three one-hour consultation sessions with a fellow each semester. These sessions are informal, voluntary, and confidential and are intended to address your teaching issues. If you seek an ongoing mentoring relationship, you should contact your department’s graduate director and inquire about opportunities for mentoring within your department.

To arrange to meet with a HoT Program Fellow, contact Peggy Stuart, CTE’s Coordinator of Graduate Student Programs, at 4-1283. Peggy will put you in contact with the fellow who can best address your needs.

Try Clickers for a Day

Are you interested in the student response devices known as clickers? CTE has a loaner program by which you can borrow a set of radio frequency (RF) clickers and a laptop equipped with the RF receiver which makes any classroom with an LCD projector a clicker classroom.

For more information about classroom response technology, see the last issue of Teaching & Learning News or contact CTE at 4-9356.

Online Teaching Resource Packets

CTE has made available—on its website—valuable teaching resources for the campus community. Visit http://cte.umd.edu/PODresources.htm to review a number of teaching resource packets published by the POD (Professional and Organizational Development) Network.

POD packets address current, relevant topics in higher education teaching and learning. Each is composed of past “Essays on Teaching Excellence,” a POD Network publication series that begun in 1989.

Written by expert scholar-practitioners, these thoughtful and succinct essays can be used as readings for faculty development workshops, seminars, individual consultations, and classes on college teaching.

EXAMPLES OF AVAILABLE PACKETS:
- The Learning Process
- Change, Renewal, and the Professoriate
- Thoughts on the future
- Technology and Related Issues
- Improvement of Teaching and Assessment
- Alternatives to Traditional Teaching Methods and Learning Strategies
- The Student/Teacher Relationship
- Defining and Characterizing Teaching
- Motivating Students
- Cooperative/Collaborative Learning, Small Groups
- Critical Thinking
- Diversity Issues
- Grading, Testing and Assessment
- Introductory Courses/General Education
The University Teaching and Learning Program (UTLP) is an elite cohort of graduate teaching assistants who come together informally to discuss aspects of teaching and learning, engage in mentoring relationships, and create their teaching portfolios. UTLPers have a common commitment to improving undergraduate education and an eagerness to make their classes the best that they can be.

Supported by the Office of the Provost, UTLP is administered by the Center for Teaching Excellence and coordinated by Peggy Jerome Stuart, a graduate student from the department of Education Policy and Leadership. For more information about the UTLP, contact her at mjstuart@umd.edu.

Want to improve your teaching? WORK WITH A CTE FACULTY TEACHING CONSULTANT!

The Faculty Teaching Consultation Division is designed to help provide support for campus instructors who would like to improve their teaching. Teachers work one-on-one with a Faculty Teaching Consultant, based on their own goals. The requesting teacher determines the issues to be explored, and the consultant provides an outside perspective, peer support for a plan of action, and suggestions for additional resources.

Any faculty member who teaches for the University of Maryland at College Park can request a teaching consultation, and they are completely confidential. For more information, contact the Center for Teaching Excellence at 301-405-9356 or via email cte@umd.edu.

Upcoming Conferences of Note

Co-sponsored by The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, the University of Wisconsin Office of Professional and Instructional Development (OPID), and the UWS Leadership Site for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning.

For more information, see http://www3.uwm.edu/dept/leadershipsite/proposal06.cfm

The Lilly Conferences serve as the premier forums in the country for demonstrating, modeling, and discussing innovative teaching practice at the university level. Internationally-known scholars join junior and senior faculty colleagues to discuss pertinent topics such as incorporating technology into teaching, encouraging critical thinking, using student portfolios as an assessment tool, implementing collaborative learning, and evaluating teaching effectiveness. New deadline for submissions: FEBRUARY 1.

Cosponsored by Towson University

For more information, see http://www.udel.edu/lillyeast/
Voices of Experience: Memorable Talks from the National Institute on the Teaching of Psychology is the first collection of talks and workshops from one of the National Institute on the Teaching of Psychology (NITOP) annual conventions held each January. The chapters center around five themes: history, contemporary issues, teaching tips, the scholarship of teaching and learning, and lessons learned from the front lines. Several of the chapters are very engaging; particularly “Cross-Cultural Perspectives in the Psychology Curriculum,” “Using Evolutionary theory to Promote Critical Thinking in Psychology Courses,” “The Brain and Your Students…,” and “What’s Your Prediction?”. I found myself reading them again the night before my class.

Chapter one talks about including more in depth biographical information on the famous and not so famous names in your psychology lectures. Case in point from the book: Lester Sdorow talks about how Fritz Perls, who suffered from what we now know as posttraumatic stress disorder, may have come up with his “Gestalt prayer,” a favorite mantra of 70s new age practitioners:

I do my thing and you do your thing. I am not in this world to live up to your expectations, and you are not in this world to live up to mine. You are you and I am I and if by chance we find each other, it’s beautiful.

This is a wonderful idea; usually students are not exposed to this type of information until graduate school. However, there have been many times when undergraduates, either by look or direct question, ask how Freud came up with his theories. Giving them a little more than just the usual general biographical information would perhaps put not only Freud, but other theorists and researchers into perspective.

Chapter four, “Cross-Cultural Perspectives,” gives tips on how to incorporate diversity in the psychology classroom. Using studies from ethnic psychology, psychological anthropology, and cross cultural research Dr. Goldstein challenges us to rethink the universality of our most basic psychological theories, that are presented as etic, when they are better described as emic. Referring to the neologisms coined by Kenneth Pike (1954, etic is a construct that can be applied across cultures and emic is particular to a given culture (Lett, 1996). Dr. Goldstein points out that the theory of intelligence and the concept of self have already been challenged by cross cultural research. Therefore by presenting classic psychological studies as representative of all cultures (etics), we perhaps do a disservice to the novice student.

Chapter five, “Using Evolutionary theory to Promote Critical Thinking in Psychology Courses,” serves as great source of debate on the various theories of development and personality. The author gives examples of how to compare and contrast evolutionary theory with other theories such as psychoanalytic theory, in particular defense mechanisms; and with Humanist theory, the concept of self. Dr. Gray also gives tips on how to bring evolutionary theory into the classroom. This is especially useful if text you are currently using doesn’t cover that perspective. There are also useful tips on how to avoid common misconceptions regarding evolutionary theory (e.g., that it is not testable). Teachers of all disciplines look for ways to encourage debate and critical thinking in the classroom. This is especially useful if text you are currently using doesn’t cover that perspective. There are also useful tips on how to avoid common misconceptions regarding evolutionary theory (e.g., that it is not testable). Teachers of all disciplines look for ways to encourage debate and critical thinking in the classroom and get students out of the “sponge” mode where they are absorbing information as fact and spitting it back on exams. Students don’t always have to agree with the information presented, but as long as teachers promote a
Bain’s work presents the findings of a fifteen-year study, in which he and colleagues observed and analyzed the practices of effective college and university teachers. The following are excerpts from his six “major conclusions of this study, the broad patterns of thinking and practice we found among our subjects.” TLN passes them along here not as a checklist, but in the spirit of Bain’s suggestion that “the ideas here require careful and sophisticated thinking, deep professional learning, and often fundamental conceptual shifts. They do not lend themselves to teaching by the numbers” (15).

1. “Without exception, outstanding teachers know their subjects extremely well,” and “[t]hey know how to simplify and clarify complex subjects, to cut to the heart of the matter with provocative insights, and they can think about their own thinking in the discipline, analyzing its nature and evaluating its quality.”

2. “Exceptional teachers treat their lectures, discussion sections, problem-based sessions, and other elements of teaching as serious intellectual endeavors as intellectually demanding and important as their research and scholarship.”

3. “...they avoid objectives that are arbitrarily tied to the course and favor those that embody the kind of thinking and acting expected for life.”

4. “While methods vary, the best teachers often try to create what we have come to call a ‘natural critical learning environment.’ In that environment, people learn by confronting intriguing, beautiful, or important problems, authentic tasks that will challenge them to grapple with ideas, rethink their assumptions, and examine their mental modes of reality.”

5. “Highly effective teachers tend to reflect a strong trust in their students.”

6. “All the teachers we studied have some systematic program ... to assess their own efforts and to make appropriate changes.”


What the Best College Teachers Do is available, alongside hundreds of other print resources, at the CTE Library. Visit us at 0405 Marie Mount Hall and browse the collection.
An Interview with Ming Tomayko,
Department of Curriculum & Instruction Graduate Teaching Assistant and UTLP Participant

This is the fifth in a series of interviews with exemplary graduate student teachers at the University of Maryland. We hope to recognize and celebrate the significant contributions to undergraduate education made by our graduate students.

TLN: Tell us a little about your teaching experience. What sorts of courses have you taught?

MT: I began my teaching career as a mathematics teacher at Montgomery Blair High School in Silver Spring, Maryland. Over the course of three years, I taught Pre-Algebra, Algebra 1, Algebra 2, Pre-Calculus, and Calculus. My responsibilities included designing lessons, activities, and assessments and evaluating student work. While at Blair HS, I mentored two student teachers from the University of Maryland. As I worked with the student teachers preparing lessons and assessments and providing feedback on their teaching, I realized I could have a greater impact on students by helping to develop new teachers.

As a result, I began my doctoral studies at the University of Maryland. To gain experience teaching at the university level, I interned in Elementary Math Methods, High School Math Methods, and Student Teaching Seminar in Secondary Education. As an intern, I planned lessons with the course instructor, taught portions of lessons, and assisted in grading assignments. I then taught the Elementary Math Methods course autonomously during two semesters. This course prepares students to teach math in the elementary grades. I planned lessons and activities and maintained a webpage through WebCT where I facilitated discourse between my students throughout the semester. The course syllabus and assignments were common across all sections and were written and designed in collaboration with instructors from the other sections.

In the summer, I am a mathematics instructor at the Johns Hopkins Center for Talented Youth. I recently taught Data and Chance, a data analysis and probability course for 5th and 6th graders, and Numbers: Scope and Scale, a course for 3rd and 4th graders on measurement and estimation. As an instructor, I planned lessons and activities and assessed and evaluated students for each three-week course.

TLN: What sorts of relationships exist between your research and the courses you have taught? Do you look for connections between your work as a graduate student and your work as a classroom teacher?

MT: My work with pre-service teachers has relevance to my research interests. I am currently studying the quality of work life of Maryland mathematics teachers with an eye on helping enhance the effectiveness of teachers and ultimately, schools. Teachers, such as my methods students, enter the field with the belief that they can make a difference and with a desire to help educate our students. However, more and more teachers are confronted with working conditions that can hamper their efforts to teach. These conditions, which can lead to conflict, stress, tension, and even burnout, are certainly apparent in mathematics teaching. Mathematics has historically been considered essential as it is one of the three R’s – Reading, wRiting, and aRithmetic. However, increased accountability and higher standards have led to changes in mathematics testing and curriculum. Even my methods students, who work closely with experienced teachers in their field placements, come to class with questions about how to manage all of the pressures they face. These questions and the resulting discussions help in the design and analysis of my own research.

TLN: Could you articulate some major principles that shape your teaching?

MT: For many of my students, mathematics has consisted of memorizing procedures, pra-
The First Class Meeting

Reprinted Suggestions from CTE’s 2005-2006 Graduate Teaching Assistant Resource Guide

On your first day of class it is important to be well-prepared and to lay the foundation for an effective teaching and learning environment. The following is a list of tips that may contribute to a successful first class meeting.

• Adopt the demeanor of a teacher and resist undue familiarity.

• Stage your entrance. If you want to achieve a more informal tone for the course, arrive a few minutes early and chat with students as they come into the classroom. If you want to establish a formal tone for the course, arrive promptly.

• Introduce yourself. Briefly tell your students something about yourself, such as your general research interests, the focus of your dissertation, what interests you about the course topics, and what you hope to learn as a teacher from teaching this class.

• Ask students about themselves. Ask them why they are taking your course, whether they have any prior knowledge or experiences that relate to the topics you will explore, what they want to do when they graduate, and what skills and understandings they want to acquire in their tenure as undergraduates. If your class is small, consider getting this information by going around the room and asking students to share these details. If your class is large, consider an exercise in which you ask questions to the entire class and students respond by raising their hands. You might hand out index cards and have each student write one or two sentences about him- or herself. Of course, be mindful of student privacy.

• Review the syllabus. Describe the course’s goals, explain expectations and what is required for successful completion of the course, review the course format, and briefly describe any major projects. Solicit students’ questions regarding the syllabus or course.

• Make note of which students on the roster are present and the names of any students who are present but not on the official roster (in some cases, you or your professor may not allow unenrolled or waitlisted students to attend).

• Have students make name cards to be used during the first few sessions until both you and your students learn everyone’s names.

• Articulate protocols for communication. Should students use your first name? When will you be available for phone calls to your office? Consider dedicating time to discussing appropriate email communication and tell students how long they should expect to wait for an email reply.

• If things do not go as well as you might like, don’t despair, as you will have other chances, beginning with the next class meeting.

Copies of the Graduate Teaching Assistant Resource Guide are available for your department’s TAs. Contact CTE to request this and other resources.
CTE Redesigns Website

CTE improved its website with a major redesign last November. Web and Technology Coordinator Jaimin Ghandi developed an accessible design while making sure that valuable resources remain available to site visitors.

Have a look at the new www.cte.umd.edu and review our campus programs for faculty and graduate students, our grant and fellowship offerings, libraries of print and electronic materials, schedules of upcoming workshops and lectures, and materials from previous teaching and learning events, among many other resources to help improve undergraduate education at the University of Maryland.

We reproduce here screenshots from the website...
About Us:

Hello and welcome to the Center for Teaching Excellence's web site!

The University of Maryland's Center for Teaching Excellence is an initiative of the Office of the Associate Provost and Dean for Undergraduate Studies. Its purpose is to support the campus-wide efforts to enhance and reform undergraduate education and to offer tangible assistance to individual faculty and TAs as well as to the departments and colleges in which they work.

The Center for Teaching Excellence provides:

- A range of campus-wide Workshops and Conversations related to teaching and learning issues;
- Assistance to departments and colleges in organizing and implementing faculty teaching workshops, TA training activities, and evaluation/support strategies related to improving teaching;
- Consultation with individuals on particular areas of concern in teaching and learning, research into teaching practice, and implementation of innovative teaching-learning strategies;
- A regular newsletter, CTE's Teaching and Learning News, which covers events and developments related to teaching across campus;
- An electronic listserv for the exchange of ideas about teaching using the university electronic mail system; and a library of video and print resources on teaching and learning.

CTE also facilitates a Professional development program for graduate teaching assistants University Teaching and Learning Program, as well as the Undergraduate Teaching Assistants program, the annual Celebrating Teachers campus-wide awards program for outstanding teachers, the Lilly-CTE Fellows program, the Classroom Climate Training Project, the Instructional Improvement Grants program which supports innovations in teaching, and the Large Classes Project.

Click here for an opportunity to meet our staff.
course as a faculty observer. Last year in preparation for this year course I tagged along for seven days with a study abroad course to this region of the world. By observing how the logistics where handled and spending time with last years students’ and faculty I gained the confidence to do this year course. A second means to learn the ins and out developing and fielding a study abroad course is by partnering with a colleague who has expertise in organizing study abroad courses. There are resources available to support faculty and course development through each of the mechanisms. The second obstacle that deters some faculty is the perception that they will be out of contact with family, colleagues, and work for an extended period of time (several weeks). Although to many this might see a positive rather than a negative outcome the reality is that faculty lead busy, complex lives, and many can not afford to be out contact for extended periods. However, in today’s world, being out of contact is a choice. Throughout this trip in both cities and rural areas I remained connected via the Internet and phone on a daily basis. Even in small villages along the Mekong there are a multitude of Internet cafes, and most two- and three-star hotels have wireless Internet access similar to that in the US. It is no harder to connect to the web in Can Tho, Vietnam than in Milwaukee, WI. With the lost cost availability of cellular phones it is easy and inexpensive to have phone access anywhere in the world. I am amazed with the ease and clarity of a call home to Maryland while on a boat tour on the Mekong River in China.

If you are interested in a unique, meaningful, and lasting means to connect to students and to build strong student-faculty connections I urge you to consider organizing a winter term course for 2007. It will be a teaching experience that you will treasure and remember, and it will help to meet the campus’s need for more international experiences that involve undergraduates.

Other chapters in the book address issues not confined to the teaching of psychology, but applicable to any discipline. “How to Ruin a Perfectly Good Lecture” talks about the pitfalls of new technologies like PowerPoint. “Low-Technology, High-Impact Teaching Techniques” emphasizes student engagement and teacher-student contact. “Professing Psychology with Passion” imparts the wisdom of a veteran teacher on “career and life lessons.” “Storytelling as a Teaching Strategy” gives a compelling example of how to weave different concepts into a narrative that connects them in a meaningful way. “Was it Good for You, Too?” sparks the imagination with tips to make the material exciting and fresh for students. There’s also a chapter on the scholarship of teaching and learning. All of these articles can be helpful to beginning professors and graduate teaching assistants looking to increase their effectiveness as teachers of psychology in particular or any undergraduate course in general.

Overall, Voices of Experience... represents a good beginning for NITOP. The chapters are interesting, and some are even entertaining, while presenting practical teaching tips that readers can use right away. One curious exception is chapter 2, “Archival Adventures.” The chapter begins with a confession that the author’s best moments are not teaching related. He only mentions that archive research can be useful and possibly enjoyable for students in passing. This subject seems more appropriate for some other psychology conference. Despite this one incongruity, the collection offers valuable information from different perspectives, and can be a great resource for those interested in improving the pedagogy of undergraduate education. I look forward to the next volume.
As an instructor of future teachers, I take my responsibility to teach very seriously. While my actions have an immediate impact on the students in my classroom, those students will go on to have a lasting impact on generations of students to come. Therefore, my goal is to not only model good teaching techniques but to also instill these qualities in my students.

TLN: What moments from your experience as a teacher are likely to remember for a long time? What makes that scene (or those scenes) memorable? How have they affected your teaching?

The moments I remember most are when students tell me that mathematics finally makes sense. Whether they are in 4th grade, 11th grade, or their senior year of college, I am thrilled to know that the time spent in my classroom helped them regain confidence in mathematics and develop a more positive disposition towards the subject. It is these comments which make me want to educate more teachers who will cultivate classroom environments where mathematics makes sense.

TLN: What sorts of mentors have you had? What elements of their mentorship has been the most effective for you?

MT: I have been fortunate to work with wonderful faculty throughout the department of Curriculum and Instruction. As a novice instructor, the faculty has been especially helpful in answering questions, providing guidance, sharing ideas, and recommending resources. I have worked most closely with the team leader for Elementary Math Methods. As an intern, she treated me as colleague and respected my opinions and comments. As a fellow instructor, she welcomed me into her classroom to observe her teaching. The most valuable lesson she has taught me is the importance of reflective teaching. Since I have been fortunate enough to work with her for three years, I have watched how she continually reflects about her instruction and as a result modifies future lessons. She has been a true role model for me.

TLN: What are you teaching this spring? Are there aspects of this class (or these classes) about which you’re especially excited?

MT: This semester, I am the instructor for the Focus Group in Mathematics Education, a course designed to develop reflective practitioners. Students enrolled in this course are also student teaching in a public, secondary school setting. I enjoy crafting activities and assignments for this seminar-style course and I am particularly excited about helping my students create their teaching portfolios. I have utilized my own experiences as an undergraduate education major, a teacher, a mentor, a supervisor, and a participant in the CTE Portfolio Retreat to shape the portfolio-writing exercises I design.
The Office of Undergraduate Studies and the Center for Teaching Excellence

Improvement of Instruction Grants

The Office of Undergraduate Studies and the Center for Teaching Excellence are pleased to sponsor the Improvement of Instruction Grants (IIG) program for the 2006-2007 academic year. IIG selection criteria give priority to proposals that contribute to the University’s efforts to improve undergraduate teaching and learning, and we solicit projects that have the potential to produce the greatest impact. Previous Improvement of Instruction Grants have underwritten exciting initiatives at the University of Maryland; these projects have fostered the development of valuable and effective educational programs. Individual faculty members, as well as departmental or interdisciplinary clusters, are invited to apply.

Eligible Categories:

1. High-Impact, High-Enrollment Courses
   (A list of eligible courses is available at http://www.cte.umd.edu/grants/iiginformation.html)
2. International Experiences for Undergraduates
3. Teaching with Technology
4. Civic Engagement and Service-Learning

Proposals are due March 1, 2006.

For proposal guidelines and submission procedures, please visit http://www.cte.umd.edu/grants/iiginformation.html (or simply follow the link from http://www.cte.umd.edu) or contact Spencer Benson, Center for Teaching Excellence, 314-1288, cte@umd.edu.