



Minnesota  
STATE COLLEGES  
& UNIVERSITIES

# MONTHLY UPDATE

A MONTHLY COMMUNICATION FROM THE CENTER FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

November 5, 2007

## SoCTL *The Scholarship of Teaching & Learning at CTL*

### Faculty Strategies: Student Behavior in the Classroom

It's apparent to most faculty members that students learn better in an environment that is respectful, non-disruptive, and civil. Although truly disruptive behavior by students is rare, uncivil behavior certainly has a negative affect on the rest of the students in a class.

A 2005 study that examined student learning in the college classroom found that disruptive student behavior is a major barrier to student learning. The article (Seidman, 2005) identifies various types of disruptive behavior that college faculty are likely to find, including covert behavior like sleeping, and overt behavior, like talking on a cell phone. Additionally, there is some indication that disruptive behavior in the classroom may result in lower retention for students in that class.

Boice (1996, 2000) examined disruption in the classroom and came to some interesting conclusions. In his qualitative study, he reported that conflict results from an escalating interplay between instructors' and students' misbehaviors. Faculty members and students tended to blame each other for disruption or hostility in the classroom. Boice wrote that students fueled classroom incivility by using sarcasm in their classroom interactions, talking loudly in class, taunting their classmates, and arriving late to class or leaving early—especially in a disruptive manner. Boice noted that faculty members also contributed to classroom conflict through behaviors including seeming cold and uncaring, surprising students in their testing or grading practices, disparaging students, presenting material too rapidly, and coming to class late.

Instead of continuing to discuss and enumerate disruptive behavior, however, let's look at how positive classroom environments can increase student learning. Debate and disagreement are an integral part of higher education in America, and faculty members can serve their students well by creating an opportunity for teaching and learning—and not disrespect. Indeed, much of the literature on conflict in the classroom presents information and strategies on how to build a positive classroom environment.

Meyers, for example (2003), suggests that faculty members can create positive environments through a few distinct actions, including communicating warmth and sensitivity toward students by remaining enthusiastic and available. "Enthusiasm" is a difficult word to define, and is specific to each individual teacher, but definitely entails showing a sincere interest in your topic material and trying to make your teaching exciting. Meyers also writes that faculty members should try to determine course objectives, in part, by seeking students' input. The author also offers what might be the least surprising of his suggestions: help students develop relationships in class through interactive teaching.

Morrisette (2001) offers many practical strategies for creating a positive classroom climate that may deter disruptive behavior. He writes: "faculty can be instrumental in establishing boundaries, influencing student behaviors, and promoting civil learning environments" (n.p.). He suggests, as does Meyers, that faculty members should always communicate with respect, but Morrisette adds that this amounts to speaking with, rather than speaking at students. Students who feel included and respected in the classroom are more likely to have positive learning experiences. *(Continued on Page 2)*

## Teaching Tip of the Month

### Setting the Expectations Upfront

Setting and understanding expectations is the successful key in establishing respectful classroom environments. This is not a top-down proposition only, however.

Yes, it is vital that as the instructor, you clearly lay out your expectations for classroom behavior, assignment and testing completion, discussion etiquette, etc. Many instructors do so effectively in the course syllabus. But what more can you do to allow your students to understand you? I refer you to the tips which I discussed in part 3 of this topic last year ([10-09-06](#)).

As the classroom leader, it is vital that you know where your students stand as well. Just as you get tired of the repetitive ways in which students push the rules, I am sorry to say that the students have seen faculty be inconsistent in how they both follow and enforce them themselves.

It is important to discuss the reasons behind your expectations. By building a relationship and showing them that you are working to be on the same page with them, you can help students to see the importance of the expectations. By discussing the differences within the class students will know you are willing to listen. There still may be disagreement, but they can understand the purpose.

One effective tip is to have the instructor and students develop a list of expectations seen as important for both to follow, for example turning in work on time and getting timely feedback once it is turned in.

By having the students work together in class on the list with you, they can also understand the expectations of other students. This list development is a terrific critical-thinking exercise, and can be done in an online environment, taking less class time to come to some conclusions. Some instructors have the students sign, and post it in the classroom or an online folder.

-Zala Fashant

Committed to Improving Student Learning

## SoCTL *continued*

### Faculty Strategies: Student Behavior in the Classroom

Morrisette adds that both cooperative and active learning can contribute to improved student learning outcomes. To that pair he also adds collaborative learning: “faculty members can be creative in designing classroom experiences that focus on student success by fostering a collaborative versus competitive learning environment” (n.p.).

Interestingly, much of the literature on this topic mentions mid-semester course evaluations as contributing to a positive classroom environment, because participating in “shaping” a course structure, content, or delivery makes students more involved and more connected to the class. An excellent source for creating such assessments is Angelo and Cross’s seminal work *Classroom Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Teachers* (1993). Morrisette and others also suggest that faculty members consult their peers to observe their classes and comment on the inclusiveness of their teaching style.

Finally, faculty members responding to a recent qualitative study by Meyers, Bender, Hill, & Thomas (2006), identified the 15 tactics that faculty members report are most likely to use successfully to create a positive classroom environment and reduce conflict. The faculty members in this study tended to place little emphasis on administrative responses to student behavior, such as dropping a student from the class or reporting a student to the campus discipline system. Among the teaching-related techniques were:

- Addressed the student(s) outside of class
- Focused on feelings and empathized
- Considered how your behavior contributed to the problem
- Encouraged classroom community
- Involved students in solving the problem
- Changed your teaching style

In spite of a faculty member’s best efforts to communicate effectively and behave respectfully, there undoubtedly will be instances and circumstances when there is conflict in the classroom or student behavior is disruptive to the learning atmosphere. “Knowing this in advance, faculty can remain cognizant of their interactions with such students” (Morrisette, 2001, n.p.) and develop and practice teaching and interaction techniques to make the classroom the best learning environment possible.

—Thomas Wortman

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## CTL News

### CTL Web Workshops Well-Received by Faculty

Through the Web conferencing application Elluminate, CTL staff members presented two Web workshops this fall for over 50 faculty. Evaluations of the workshops show that faculty appreciated the content and interactivity. Plans to present additional workshops for the spring semester are taking shape and will be distributed on the Spring Semester Events Calendar sent to you in early January. Due to the popularity of the Rubrics workshop, it will be presented a second time this fall (details below). Please join the CTL staff and your colleagues in these learning and networking opportunities!

[Rubrics: Measuring Student Success](#) - Back by Popular Demand!

November 19, 2007 12:00 – 1:00 p.m.

Presenter/Facilitator: Zala Fashant

This workshop is designed for faculty who are new to the concepts of competencies to define student achievement and using rubrics to measure assessment. Rubrics helps to clarify what an instructor is looking for in an assignment, as well as helping to increase consistency in grading subjective work while providing effective feedback.

- Zala Fashant

## RSP • ITeach Conference 2008 Proposals Due November 16!

## CTL Resources for Faculty

### Student Behavior in the Classroom

There are myriad articles and other resources available that address student behavior in the classroom and how good teaching addresses behavioral issues. Here are a few available from CTL.

#### **Civility in the Classroom**

This [online tutorial](#) presents information about civility and incivility in the classroom. Methods for encouraging students (even resistant ones!) to be active partners in the learning process, to share the responsibility in the classroom and to reinforce the partnership throughout the term are presented in this online tutorial. This session can help the faculty member who is concerned about the increase of incivility in her classrooms; may have noted an increase in rude behaviors in the classroom, in interactions with students, or in student interactions with other students; or who is looking for effective teaching strategies to address student misbehaviors in your classroom? (<http://ctlclassmgmt.project.mnscu.edu/>)

#### **Building Respect for Diversity in the Classroom**

Understanding one's own attitudes and values about diversity is essential to understanding, appreciating, and responding to differences in others. [This tutorial](#) focuses on measures to enhance faculty members' and students' level of diversity awareness as a means for meeting the challenges and difficulties of difference in the classroom. The information in this tutorial comes from a weekend seminar presented by Suzanne Bunkers and Sheryl Dowlin.

(<http://vfc14.project.mnscu.edu/index.asp?Type=NONE&SEC={5C92CA44-118C-4529-B173-E190ADF0F1D9}>)

#### **Conduct Becoming a College Student**

[This article](#) is a review of the scholarship of teaching and learning related to civility, includes links to supporting resources. Incivility, no matter how historically continuous, is a pressing and immediate issue for someone with students "in your face," and because the particular forms of incivility are ever-changing and seemingly ever-worsening.

#### **Teaching Tip: Dealing with Incivility in the College Classroom**

This is a series of tips for faculty members from CTL's monthly newsletter for faculty members. To access these tips, go to <http://www.ctl.mnscu.edu/about/newsletter/> and select the 9/25/06, 10/2/06, and 10/9/06.

- Thomas Wortman

## Teaching in the Disciplines

### **Studio Arts Mentorship Grant – Martin Springborg, CTL**

Although students learn primarily from their instructors, they also learn a great deal from each other. Case in point: the photography open lab—wherein the instructor evaluates work while students busily develop film and print in the darkroom. Behind the revolving door, students are helping one-another; more advanced students are taking on the role of teacher as they guide their classmates through series of complicated steps.

While a faculty member in the Art Department at Inver Hills Community College, I observed my students helping one-another in the lab. Their willingness to help, and their attention to one-another's learning prompted me to write a proposal for a Minnesota State Colleges and Universities Center for Teaching and Learning Instructional Development grant. The proposed project was to strengthen existing curriculum through formal student peer mentorship and student teaching opportunities.

First, students learned some specialized photographic techniques from a series of visiting artists. After the artist workshops, they were excited about both extending what they had learned, as well as discovering new ways to include the processes into their work. Over the course of one semester, I helped them along in their pursuits by providing feedback and aiding in problem solving. Most of my advanced photography students worked the new processes into their final portfolios in some way, as well as introduced beginning photography students to the processes informally during open lab times.

(Continued on Page 4)

## CTL Report

### **Emerging Technologies Symposium 2007—BioInformatics and Entertainment Computing**

Discipline Workshop

On October 12, 2007, computing educators met at the Founders Hall Auditorium at Metropolitan State University in St. Paul for a discipline workshop about the emerging technologies of BioInformatics and Entertainment Computing. About 85 educators from institutions within the Minnesota State Colleges & Universities system participated in the workshop, and were joined by several attendees from private higher education systems.

The following were key presenters:

Prof. Paul Tymann – BioInformatics: Curriculum Design and Implementation Chair, Computer Science Department, Rochester Institute of Technology

Dr. Eric D. Wieben – BioSciences: Current Status and Future Challenge

Professor and Director, Mayo Genomics Research Center, Mayo Clinic

Dr. Robin Burke - Computer Art and Game: Curriculum Design and Implementation

Associate professor, School of Computer Science, Telecommunications and Information Systems, Depaul University, Chicago

Chris Melissinos – Gaming and Virtual Environment Development and Challenge  
Chief gaming officer, SUN Microsystems, Inc.

Good, and often lively, discussions were held about these developing technologies. The workshop was sponsored by the Minnesota State Colleges & Universities Center for Teaching and Learning; SUN Microsystems, Inc.; Center for Strategic Information Technology and Security; and Metropolitan State University. Organizers were Symposium Chair Jigang Liu, Metropolitan State University; Warren Sheaffer, Saint Paul College; Larry Gottschalk, Metropolitan State University; Timothy Wrenn, Anoka-Ramsey Community College; and Kuodi Jian, Metropolitan State University.

-Yvonne L. Shafer

## Dates to Remember!

### CALL FOR PROPOSALS

**The First-Year Student in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Realizing Student Potential • ITeach 2008**

Deadline: November 16

### CTL DISCIPLINE AND PROGRAM WORKSHOPS

#### Interdisciplinary

***In-Depth Understanding of China: Mini-Workshops Part 2 of 4: Education in China: Current Issues, Challenges and Goals for the Future***

November 16, 2007 • St. Cloud State University, St. Cloud, MN

Contact: Kathy Johnson, St. Cloud State University

### CTL WEB WORKSHOPS

**Rubrics: Measuring Student Success – Back by Popular Demand!**

Take the guess-work out of assessment and convey effective feedback!

November 19, 2007 12:00 - 1:00 p.m.

## Teaching in the Disciplines *continued*

### Studio Arts Mentorship Grant

During that same semester, I also provided some formal mentoring in the area of teaching to my advanced students. I met with most students twice to go over what would be a one-hour presentation. During the first meeting, we revisited the visiting artist's original presentation and discussed ways in which the presentation could be better. During the second meeting, we addressed materials, handouts, and other teaching aids that may be incorporated into their presentation.

Finally, I scheduled these students to come back and present their newly-acquired techniques to photography students in the following semester. This proved to be the most difficult part of the project. Despite some initial difficulties, I was able to schedule their teaching opportunities in Beginning Photography, as well as schedule to meet with them one more time to discuss their teaching approach.

The student presentations went extremely well, as they proved to be good speakers and presented the core information clearly. Watching and recording their presentations, I could see much of my own instruction. Occasionally, I would recognize something that I know I always say, and it made me evaluate my own teaching style.

Although it got off to a strong start, this curriculum and type of instruction lasted within the photo area of the Art Department in a limited capacity. I was always willing to keep the program going, as long as I had interested students. Many students could not return to teach due to scheduling conflicts, financial problems and other barriers typical to community college students. Some of the students from the original group persisted, however. In fact, one of the advanced photography students from the original group came in the following year to teach book making to my beginning photo students. These students were some of the most dedicated students that I have seen in terms of attention to the craft of photography. They also had a bond with one another and a closer relationship with me because of the necessary meetings outside of the classroom.

This group of advanced photography students was the most impressive I have seen insofar as their post-coursework dedication to the art, craft, and community of photography. In order to fully understand the impact that mentorship had on this group of students, one need look at their actions post-grant experience. Not wanting to stop helping each other with their work, they started a photography group that meets once a month. In this group, they discuss theoretical and technical problems within their photographic work. In doing so, they help one-another to improve their art and they maintain a small community of photographic artists.

Share your essays on Teaching in the Disciplines! Send submissions to [martin.springborg@so.mnscu.edu](mailto:martin.springborg@so.mnscu.edu)

-Martin Springborg

## Featured Events

### Information Assurance, Network, Database and Software Security '07

Discipline Workshop

Location: St. Cloud State University,

St. Cloud, MN

November 2, 2007

Presenters: Drs Dawn Haynes, Brajendra Panda, Jennifer Davidson and Jun Li

Faculty Planners: Susantha Herath, St. Cloud State University; Kristina Keller, St. Cloud Technical College; and Rachna Sood, North Hennepin Community College

The objectives of this CTL Discipline Workshop were to advance knowledge about network and software security, protect the national information infrastructure against threats and prepare future computer security professionals.

This symposium provided an opportunity for faculty from many disciplines to meet, network and discuss common interests in research, teaching and learning computer security in colleges and universities. Academia, businesses, government and industry professionals interested in information assurance and network and software security benefited by attending this workshop. Finally, the planners of this workshop aimed to help stimulate our undergraduate and graduate programs and spark interdisciplinary activities among Information Systems, Computer Science, Criminal Justice, Learning Resources and Engineering faculty at SCSU, MN and our neighboring states.

This Discipline Workshop was co-sponsored by CTL, with funds from the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act of 1998.

Interested in applying for funds for your own discipline or program workshop? Visit the Discipline Workshop section of the CTL website for a description of the grant program, an application for funds, planner's management guidelines, and for information on upcoming workshops.

-Martin Springborg

**CTL Monthly Update**  
**Next edition: December 3**