



Minnesota  
STATE COLLEGES  
& UNIVERSITIES

# WEEKLY UPDATE

A WEEKLY COMMUNICATION FROM THE CENTER FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

March 19, 2007

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

### Mid-Semester Evaluations Make the Rest of the Semester Better

Faculty members often find that mid-semester evaluations are a valuable resource for their teaching. CTL invites you to try this practice if you're not already doing it. Unlike evaluations that are done after a course ends, feedback from students midway through the semester provides information that can lead to mid-course adjustments. When adjustments or improvements are made to a class, they often result in a better experience for both instructors and students. In addition to improvements in the course, mid-semester evaluations can be an important learning tool for the students. According to Carey Sargent from the University of Virginia, by conducting mid-semester evaluations "instructors can provide students with the tools to reflect on their own contributions, their peers' contributions, and the pedagogical values of the instructor" (Sargent, 2007, n.p.). Barbara Gross Davis agrees, writing that the problem with end-of-the-semester assessments is that they "arrive too late . . . to benefit the students during the evaluation" (Davis, 2001, p. 345).

There are a number of ways to solicit feedback, but many scholars of teaching and learning agree that the simplest is to administer a short questionnaire during class. Questions should be short and to the point, and should ask only about those issues that can be responded to during the term, so that students don't gather false expectations of the rest of the semester (Davis, 2001, p. 346). One quick and fruitful method is the "stop; start; keep on" questionnaire. Simply ask students to take a piece of paper, and list one or more things that they would like to see stopped in the class, which things should be started and what should not be changed. Cross and Angelo (1993) offer other suggestions, including the "minute paper," problem posting, and the two-column method. Lenze (1997), Desrochers (2001), and others describe the effective process of Small Group Instructional Diagnosis first developed and tested by D. Joseph Clark at the University of Washington in 1976. In a SGID session of about 20 minutes, a trusted colleague visits the class and asks students what is helping them learn, what is not helpful, and what they think the instructor can do to improve the course.

Regardless of the form that a mid-semester evaluation takes, it's generally most helpful to collect formative information and then review the feedback with students so that they know what you're doing to improve the class, and what they can do to improve the class.

Distinguished from any centrally administered course evaluation from the college or university, these mid-semester assessments are designed solely for use by the faculty members," to provide an additional channel of communication with your students" Sargent, 2007, n.p.). And any added channels of communication result in better teaching—and increased student learning.

-Thomas Wortman and Lynda Milne

#### References:

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## Teaching Tip of the Week

### Teaching Aggressive, Challenging Students

McKeachie discusses the following reasons as to why a student is aggressive or challenging in class. The most desirable reason is that the student is very interested in the topic or has had a great deal of experience with a topic. This is desirable since it can be a teachable moment which allows the instructor an opportunity "to delve more deeply into the logic behind the facts and principles."

A student who engages in disagreement in a negative way may be flexing their academic muscle against an expert, working out some hostility in the challenge to your authority. This is an opportunity for you to invite a private debate which includes "careful listening, thoughtful reflection, respectful disagreement, and reasonable compromise where appropriate."

-Zala Fashant

Source: McKeachie, W. (2006). McKeachie's Teaching Tips. Houghton Mifflin

## CTL Report

### Distance Counseling Discipline Workshop

On September 14 and 15, 2006, system counselors met at Century College for a training session in Distance Counseling. This two-day intensive training for our system's counselors was conducted by Ready Minds, a provider of continuing education approved by the National Board for Certified Counselors.

Planners Maryann Bush from Riverland College and Tim Hatfield and Nick Ruiz from Winona State University reported that 28 of our system's counselors representing from two-year colleges and universities participated in the training. Most participants voiced in their  
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Committed to Improving Student Learning

## Dates to Remember!

### Spring Discipline Workshops

**MAR 25-26:** CHINA SYMPOSIUM 2007

St. Cloud State University. [Discipline Workshop Information](#)

**APR 2:** PROMOTING HEALTHY BEHAVIORS

Inver Hills Community College. [Discipline Workshop Information](#)

**APR 18-20:** HEALTH EDUCATORS – GROWING TOGETHER: EDUCATING, ENRICHING, AND EMPOWERING

Arrowwood Resort & Conference Center, Alexandria.

[Discipline Workshop Information](#)

**APR 21:** WHAT NEW SIGN LANGUAGES CAN TEACH US ABOUT ASL

Location: North Star Academy, St. Paul. [Discipline Workshop Information](#)

**APR 27-28:** MATHEMATICS: SHARPEN THE FOCUS

Duluth Entertainment Convention Center. [Discipline Workshop Information](#)

**MAY 1:** LIBRARY REFERENCE AND INFORMATION LITERACY SERVICES IN THE DIGITAL AGE

North Hennepin Community College. [Discipline Workshop Information](#)

### Regional Conference

**APR 12-13:** KEEPING OUR FACULTIES IV: RECRUITING, RETAINING, AND ADVANCING FACULTY OF COLOR

Radisson University Hotel, Minneapolis. [Conference Information](#)

## CTL Resources for Faculty

### Faculty Development Centers Around the World (Part 1)

“Most ideas about teaching are not new, but not everyone knows the old ideas.” That quote is attributed to Euclid, from about 300 B.C. There is much to be learned from our colleagues elsewhere in the state system, from outside of the system, or outside of the state. Toward that end, CTL has gathered many resources from all over the world into our ITeach Center. To visit any of these resources, simply point to [www.ctl.mnscu.edu/iteach/resources/ni\\_itrfdc.php](http://www.ctl.mnscu.edu/iteach/resources/ni_itrfdc.php) and choose from the nearly 50 links on that page. Here are some especially interesting highlights from that page.

**THE ACTIVE LEARNING SITE.** This series of Web pages comprises hundreds of resources about active learning, including an incredible starter kit for learning about learning styles. There is also a repository of active learning Web sites and a series of interactive Web-based workshops about active learning. (This site is from where I took the Euclid quote!)

**CENTER FOR TEACHING, LEARNING, AND TECHNOLOGY.** This Illinois State University Web site has many resources for faculty members interested in teaching and learning. Among the remarkable content is a nearly exhaustive list of teaching topics, tips, and other information: [www.cat.ilstu.edu/resources/teachTopics](http://www.cat.ilstu.edu/resources/teachTopics)

-Thomas Wortman

## Featured Events

### Should We Know More About China?

Should our college students and faculty know basic information about China's history, economy and culture? Many people agree they should, and the Chinese clearly are interested in us. Chinese students are learning English at a phenomenal rate. Gordon Brown, the U.K. finance minister, stated during a recent trip to China, "[By 2025 the number of English-speaking Chinese is likely to exceed the number of native English speakers in the rest of the world.](#)" Here's a great opportunity for you to learn more about China and to talk with other about how China might be better understood on your campus, in many curricula and in your courses.

### [SCSU China Symposium](#)

Discipline Workshop  
Location: Atwood Center  
**March 25 - March 27, 2007**

St. Cloud State University

Keynote Speaker: [Zhou Wenzhong](#),  
China's Ambassador to the U.S.

### [China Symposium Program](#)

-Yvonne L. Shafer

## CTL Report continued

evaluations that the training effectively addressed how to deliver Distance Counseling to clients via a variety of technology-assisted methods, such as telecounseling and synchronous / asynchronous communication strategies.

This [Discipline Workshop](#) was co-sponsored by CTL, [Minnesota Online](#), and 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