IN THIS ISSUE

- Teaching & Learning to See & Change
- From Theory to Practice
- Peer Mentors In & Out of Class
In this issue, we reveal and honor the continuing commitment to excellence in teaching & learning, which is a hallmark of our culture at Connecticut College. Curricular ReVision led to conversations that helped define what we share as teacher-scholars in the liberal arts, uncovering the consistencies that inform the complexities of our curriculum. The pages of this publication do the same. The articles that explore how we teach & learn by inspiring, challenging, and mentoring our students, by sharing wisdom, building community, and listening to one another were all written independently. Yet they harmonize well and testify to the commitments we share.

Contributing to ReVision’s spirit of innovation, this issue also offers several new elements. Most notably, Featured Assignments presents course assignments that the CTL Advisory Board found distinctively elegant in their execution of effective practices, after inviting and carefully reviewing submissions from the faculty at large. In addition, there are two articles contributed by students, one drawn from an honors thesis investigating student persistence (i.e., retention) and a second by Writing Center tutors describing their experiences as peer mentors. The book review section also has been overhauled. It now offers commentaries that directly connect the books to teaching & learning at the College. This format is more conversational and more challenging, inviting readers to reflect and innovate. So...browse and read, study the data and enjoy the ideas, hunt through the pictures for familiar faces. Above all, relax into the teaching & learning that our authors are experiencing, describing, analyzing, and sharing. I hope that you will find affirmations for your own teaching & learning, critiques of your most basic scholarly presumptions, controversies that will challenge your thinking, and intriguing possibilities to rouse your scholarly imagination. We’ll look forward to seeing you and hearing from you at the CTL events!

Best,
Michael Reder
Director, The Joy Schectman Mankoff Center for Teaching & Learning

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The Joy Shechtman Mankoff Center for Teaching & Learning at Connecticut College promotes effective teaching that cultivates engaged student learning. The Center fosters a campus culture that values a diversity of learning, teaching, and disciplinary styles; encourages honest discussion of teaching and learning; and cultivates intentional, evidence-informed teaching.
Learning Life Through Japanese Language Classes

Hiase Kobayashi, senior lecturer in Japanese, is the 2014 Connecticut Teacher of the Year, an award granted by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education. She is also the recipient of the 2008 John King Award for Excellence in Teaching at Connecticut College. With her permission, we have excerpted passages from the teaching statement that she prepared for the Carnegie — CASE award committee.

The Japanese Ten Commandments:

1. I, Hiase Kobayashi, am the only teacher of Japanese 101-102. You shall have no other teacher.

2. You shall not make yourself be a teacher to teach Japanese or provide any answers to your fellow classmates.

3. You shall not miss any class or be late to class.

4. Remember that you must memorize all of your work.

5. You shall not laugh at your classmates. You may feel about your behavior. You may laugh with them.

6. You shall not make yourself be a teacher to teach Japanese or provide any answers to your fellow classmates.

7. You shall not miss any class or be late to class.

8. You shall not cheat.

9. You shall not make yourself be a teacher to teach Japanese or provide any answers to your fellow classmates.

10. You shall have no other teacher.

Commandment 5, Honor your classmates

My students respond to the effort I put into their education — and they are rewarded for their efforts in ways that surprise them. They learn they can accomplish more than they ever knew was possible. I would like my students to be “independent” learners. Learning a foreign language or learning itself is a life-long process. I hope that they will be able to fly from the nest to the real world. — Hiase Kobayashi

Teaching & Learning to See & Change

Perhaps even above, other humans. The scholar seems to be interested in knowledge for the sake of knowledge. No I will I tell my first-year students at the beginning of every year. And because I understand I am asking for a commitment (and because they don’t know me yet), I always bring upperclassmen that first day. I want them to tell the new students that it is hard. That they will be required to put in 100 percent effort. But also that if they do, they will accomplish things they never thought they could.

Students cannot just learn about a language, they must learn to perform in a conversational setting. So in my classes, students must act. Each day they are required to memorize and then perform a real-life scenario — they are lost, they are complimenting a stranger on her attire; they are inviting friends to dinner — as if they are in Japan. They receive a daily score based on their performances and this accounts for a third of their grade.

Japanese is not spoken regularly in Connecticut, so I must create situations in which my students can practice. I regularly eat lunch at the Japanese table. These lunches are not mandatory, but students come, because they know I expect them to, and because they enjoy having the opportunity to speak Japanese outside of class. I also encourage them to let Japanese become part of their lives — to answer the phone in Japanese, talk to themselves in Japanese and, if at all possible, to train themselves to dream in Japanese. And I take as many of my classes as possible to Japan, where they are frequently surprised by how often a real-life experience will mimic one we have practiced in class. These experiences inspire them in a way that only being fully immersed in the culture and language can.

How do you change cultures? One small, but significant, way is to re-think your identities as activists. There will be many who will discourage you from activism and from adopting the label of activist. We use words like scholar-activists to describe students like you. Scholar-activists. The two words together, this hyphenated identity, makes me uncomfortable. You see, while it’s supposed to be a positive phrase, one that captures the various aspects of our lives, it signals something limiting and mutually exclusive about the two categories.

If I asked you to envision a scholar, here are some things I can guess would come to your mind: A solitary figure, working by the light of a lamp (or a candle because scholars apparently forgot to pay their electric bills), somebody who is surrounded by books, and churning out even more books; somebody who seems removed from and perhaps even above, other humans.

The scholar seems to be interested in knowledge for the sake of knowledge. Not if I will I tell my first-year students at the beginning of every year. And because I understand I am asking for a commitment (and because they don’t know me yet), I always bring upperclassmen that first day. I want them to tell the new students that it is hard. That they will be required to put in 100 percent effort. But also that if they do, they will accomplish things they never thought they could.

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My students respond to the effort I put into their education — and they are rewarded for their efforts in ways that surprise them. They learn they can accomplish more than they ever knew was possible. I would like my students to be “independent” learners. Learning a foreign language or learning itself is a life-long process. I hope that they will be able to fly from the nest to the real world. — Hiase Kobayashi

The University of Chicago study referenced by Professor Jafar was authored by Keith J. Yoder and Jean Decuyt. “‘The Good, the Bad, and the Just: Justice Sensitivity Predicts Neutral Response during Moral Evaluation of Actions Performed by Others,” The Journal of Neuroscience, 12 no. 12 (March 2014): 4161-4166. For the Arundhati Roy quote, see “The Ladies Have Feelings, So ... Shall We Leave it to the Experts?” in Power Politics (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2001), 1-33.

Afsan Jafar is an associate professor of sociology whose teaching and research focuses on gender, globalization, religion, and the body. She is the 2014 recipient of the Helen Mulvey Faculty Award, presented to an assistant professor who recognizes a significant contribution to challenging students to work harder than they thought they could and to reach unanticipated levels of academic achievement.
To enrich and widen our students’ learning experience and to build a strong sense of community, I have been working with my colleagues in the Classics Department and the Latin/Classics Language Fellows to plan a number of Classics-related events throughout the year. Our goal is two-fold: first, to foster learning through fun experience and, second, to expose students to the vast number of ways in which the civilizations of Greece and Rome have influenced and are still part of our world today. In addition to hosting guest speakers whose topics range from the gladiators to Roman conceptions of sex and ancient approaches to reading, we organize events that stretch learning beyond classroom walls.

For two years now, Latin students have come together in early fall for a Botanical Latin Arboretum tour led by Arboretum curators. This is an opportunity to learn about the trees on campus, and the Latin and Greek etymological roots of their scientific names, while making reference to plants in Vergil’s pastoral poetry and other texts. Latin was the shared language of European scholars until the 17th century, and Odysseus’ odyssey of much of much in the European intellectual tradition, so scientists turned to Latin as well as Greek for scientific terminologies.

An annual department open house at Halloween gives students an opportunity to come as their choice of a historical or mythical figure. Examples of this year’s costumes include the goddesses Athena and Aphrodite, the writer Anais Nin, Greek and Medusa. Meanwhile, the Classics team emerged as the champs of the Languages Soccer World Cup competition. Compe- tition also surfaces at a Jeopardy game, featuring Classical Mythology, Greek and Latin literature, Greek and Roman history, philosophy, and art. Last year, students got so excited, competing about their knowledge of Platonic dialogues and Roman emperors, that they were the ones to request a rematch in the spring. Many think of Latin as a dead language but Latin enthusiasts around the world desire to change that view. Two of those enthusiasts, Charley McNamara and Caleb Dance, PhD candidates in Classics at Columbia University, visited our campus in 2014 and taught students how to have a simple conversation in Latin. (Spoken Latin is rarely taught, as Latin classes focus on reading and writing.) We then had a fascinating discussion in Latin about Catullus’ famous poem “noli me tangere” expressing his paradoxical feelings of love and hatred. One student said that speaking Latin “made Rome a culture more palpable” while another said that she gained “a new appreciation for what I was learning in the classroom.”

The highlight of the 2013-2014 year, which we are repeating in the current academic year, was our day-trip to New York City, where 21 students and Classics faculty attended a guided tour of the Greek and Roman galleries at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, followed by a performance of Aeschylus’ Libation Bearers, in the original Greek with English surtitles. Ancient Comedy (Classics/ Theater 222) students were able to develop their own critiques of Aeschylus, before engaging with Aristophanes’ critique of Aeschylus in the Frogs, often considered the first work of literary criticism in the West. One student noted that the performance made her see the plays “as drama rather than literature” enabling her “to think more analytically about choices that could be made by actors and directors,” and another added that watching the chorus made her appreciate “the musical quality of the language.”

Teaching Classics means teaching language, literature, history, art history, philosophy, and theater, among other disciplines. In the years to come we hope to strengthen relationships with other departments and create more co-sponsored events. We teach inside classrooms, but building relationships and creating learning environments outside the classroom is vital for enhancing our students’ academic experience. — Nina Papathanasopoulou

Nina Papathanasopoulou is a visiting assistant professor of Classics, teaching Latin, Greek, mythology, and ancient drama courses. Nominated for Columbia University Teaching Awards in 2009 and 2013, she was the chorus director and Choreographer of Greek drama productions performed in ancient Greek at the University; her research centers on Greek drama and classical mythology.

To foster learning through fun experiences and to expose students to the vast number of ways in which the civilizations of Greece and Rome have influenced and are still part of our world today, we teach inside classrooms, but building relationships and creating learning environments outside the classroom is vital for enhancing our students’ academic experience. — Nina Papathanasopoulou

The interdisciplinary topic attracted students from diverse backgrounds, from studio art to biology. As students confronted their differences in disciplinary approaches and worked through misunderstandings and confusion, they facilitated connections among multiple disciplines and fostered vigorous debates about the stakes and consequences of environmental art. At the end of the class, first year and upper division students remarked on the value of these open-ended discussions. One first year student noted, “Although there were many times that I disagreed with my peers, I learned to respect and appreciate their perspectives.” A senior observed that the interdisciplinary content of the course promoted active dialogue: “This class was especially important for listening just as much as discussing because of the differences in choice that made up the course; therefore there was always really meaningful discussion and insight based on views from both groups of students.”

Drawing on my interactions with colleagues during the Global Environmental Justice seminar, I invited several faculty members to share their expertise with students in each of the courses. Their diverse conversations supported the interdisciplinary tone of the course by inserting distinct disciplinary perspectives, from Geology (Doug Thompson) and Studio Art (Andrea Wellman) to German Studies (Geoffrey Atherton). Some topics integrated more seamlessly than others into the dialogue of the course, but I think the most important benefit of these guest lectures was the opportunity to model collaboration, active listening, and thoughtful dialogue among various disciplines. By inviting other professors into the classroom and engaging them in conversation, I allowed my own willingness to encounter unfamiliar approaches and to grapple with new and challenging points of view. At the end of the semester, students had the opportunity to extend their interdisciplinary dialogues beyond the classroom. At a joint mini-conference, students from both classes presented their research in the form of 60-second videos created with the free software Jing. Students worked hard throughout the last weeks of the semester to create concise, focused videos that accurately reflected their research. In lively Q&A sessions following each panel, students debated the central questions raised by environmental art. In this way, the conference allowed students to practice one of the greatest challenges of interdisciplinary work: speaking across disciplines and fielding unexpected questions from a diverse audience. Several students across classes noted that the conference raised questions that they would like to address in future projects — projects which I hope will continue the interdisciplinary conversation of the course far beyond the semester. — Karen Gonzalez Rice

Karen Gonzalez Rice is the Sue and Eugene Mercy Assistant Professor of Art History. Her teaching and research is multidisciplinary, drawing on methodologies of contemporary art history, religious studies, American studies and trauma studies.

Interdisciplinary Approaches to Teaching Environmental Art

Interdisciplinary inquiry was at the heart of my fall semester courses, FYS 178B (The Art & Ethics of Garbage) and AHUES 361 (Environmental Art & its Ethics), which focused on the emerging genre of environmental art. Both were developed in response to my participation in the Global Environmental Justice Curriculum Development Seminar from Fall 2011 to Spring 2013, which was supported by a grant from the Christian A. Johnson Endeavor Foundation. Cross-disciplinary dialogue and exploration was crucial to the success of the course.

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Classes, TRIPs & Poster Presentations
Professors & Students Reflect on Their Experiences in Okinawa & Taiwan

In Spring 2014, Professors Tek-wah King and Takeshi Watanabe each taught TRIP classes, a second-year Chinese language class (Chinese 201-202) and the Legacy of World War II, “Post-War” Japan (History 322). In this interview, they reflect on their experiences in campus classrooms, in Taiwan, and Okinawa, and at the poster session their class jointly hosted at the Academic Resource Center.

Why did you decide to do a TRIP and a poster conference?

Professor Takeshi Watanabe: I had always wanted to do a TRIP to Okinawa, and I had applied for TRIP funding a few years ago and did not get it. Over the summer, I noticed a Japan Foundation grant to take classes to Japan. I applied, and was fortunate to obtain $30,000. Of course, the College also gave me additional support that in total allowed me to take thirteen students.

Professor Tek-wah King: Between 2001 and 2006, three groups of first- and second-year Chinese language students went on the then-Freeman TRIPs to contextualize and optimize their learning of the Chinese language and culture at the pre-Study Away stage. The TRIP undertaken by the year-long CHI 201-202 was built on this tradition, with the alteration that for the first time we picked Taiwan to be our field of investigation. During our grant application stage, students and I recognized the educational value of targeting a Mandarin-speaking region where the traditional Chinese writing system was officially used so that our students’ hard work learning non-simplified characters at CC would be rewarded. On the socio-economic basis, our students' hard work learning non-simplified characters at CC would be rewarded. On the socio-economic basis, and the socio-economic basis, Taiwan’s unique status as a non-communist Chinese nation provided a diversified, comparative if not confrontive perspective on Chinese studies before most of our students went to China to study away or intern in their junior year.

What was your itinerary? How did you select the sites that you chose to visit?

King: We conducted a series of guided on-site explorations and language practices, at Novice-High to Intermediate-Mid proficiency levels, in Taipei and Hualien. We visited the National Palace Museum, the Taipei 101 skyscraper, the Taipei Zoo, and the Taroko Gorge National Park; Buddhist, Taoist, and Confucian temples; and university campuses, markets and stores, restaurants and tea houses.

Watanabe: Our itinerary took us around the main island of Okinawa, as well as Kadaka Island, which is the site of Okinawan mythology. We visited a number of sites associated with WWII. The caves where many people took refuge were powerful in conveying the horror of the Battle of Okinawa. To meet with college students and professors, we visited the Okinawa Prefectural University of the Arts and Ryukyus University. Consul General Magleby was gracious to host a party for us and high school at his residence. He also spoke to us about the American policy in East Asia and the controversies surrounding the American military bases. We were then able to visit Kadena Air Base, the largest American base in Okinawa, and received a briefing about the base’s strategic importance. To get another perspective, we spoke with activists opposed to the construction of a base on Henoko. For lodging, we mostly stayed at small inns or even people’s homes, so students got to interact with local residents.

Maggie Nelson ’14 (Government major, History and Sociology-based Human Relations minor): Visiting a foreign country with our professor was an unparalleled opportunity because as students we could constantly consult with Professor Watanabe and hold group discussions about what we were learning and experiencing. First-hand encounters with historical sites and various Japanese individuals allowed Okinawan history and culture to come alive for us in a way that it never could in a classroom. Many of our experiences were deeply moving. As a result, the class could more intensely engage the historical and cultural identity of Okinawans.

What were the biggest rewards of incorporating the TRIP and conference into your courses?

Watanabe: For my class, I had three students who spoke Japanese, and they could handle practical interactions. So the biggest challenge in organizing the TRIP was logistical. The monetary side presented one hurdle; another was the itinerary. I wished to take my class to an American-style base in Okinawa, but lacking a contact, I initially had no response. However, one of the rewards was indeed how eventually I met so many people who were willing to help and to make this TRIP a success.

King: The fact that students could overcome many difficulties in their hands-on research experiences and succeed in assembling their posters was the biggest reward for their sacrifice. This was a groundbreaking work for the students, made possible by the TRIP component.

What were the biggest rewards of the TRIP and conference into your courses?

Watanabe: One of my aims was to introduce Japan to students who have had little previous contact with that region. Opening this critical area to their attention as a site of serious intellectual inquiry was rewarding to me. Also, in taking students to Okinawa, I did things that I would never do on my own, and I got to experience special moments. For example, by myself, I would have been difficult to meet with survivors of the Battle of Okinawa as they are in frail health, but because a visit by American college students was deemed a special occasion, I was able to arrange a meeting that was truly moving. Speaking for the students, I think that they all were truly inspired by the sites and people we visited.

King: The fact that students could overcome many difficulties in their hands-on research experiences and succeed in assembling their posters was the biggest reward for their sacrifice. This was a groundbreaking work for the students, made possible by the TRIP component.

What was the relationship between the classroom, the field studies, and the conference?

King: The fact that students could overcome many difficulties in their hands-on research experiences and succeed in assembling their posters was the biggest reward for their sacrifice. This was a groundbreaking work for the students, made possible by the TRIP component. The students prepared individual PowerPoint presentations for their research papers. Although students still conducted individual PowerPoint presentations for their final oral examinations, as in the past, the poster session supported by the Academic Resource Center supplied them with an invaluable opportunity to test-run their work in a free weekly forum.

Continued on page 19
we teach by challenging our students

CTL Research Scholars
Curricular ReVision: First & Second Year Experiences

For a third year, CTL Research Scholars, supervised by Michael Reder and Stuart Vyse, conducted small focus group conversations with Connecticut College students. Building on the findings of the Webcast National Study of Liberal Arts Education, in which Connecticut College was a participant, the Scholars’ questions were centered on students’ perceptions of intellectual challenge at the College, their academic expectations, and the frequency of student-faculty interactions. The first year experience was also studied in depth.

Laura Garcia-Duenas ’14 and Gabe Plummer ’14 presented their findings to over 50 faculty at a meeting hosted by the CTL. The acknowledged limitations of the study were the comparatively small number, and the self-selection, of the student participants.

Forty-one students, from the classes of 2013, 2014, and 2015, participated in focus groups of two to five. These included 24 women and 17 men; students racially identified as white (24), Latina/o (17), black or African American (5), Asian (2). The students’ responses to the researchers’ opened-ended questions were diverse, reflecting their experiences before and during their years at the College, their responses to introductory and general education courses, and their disciplinary and intellectual priorities.

Even so, Garcia-Duenas and Plummer identified a series of themes that surfaced repeatedly and consistently throughout their focus group conversations. These are identified below, with illustrative student statements.

Students like courses that go into depth. Going into it I knew it would be like, survey, but I would have liked it to be more in depth ... it was a bit too much. One day it was one whole thing and the next it was another big topic ... I thought, “Can we go back to that? I didn’t get it!” It was going by so quick — we should’ve cut some stuff out in make room for smaller centered topics.

Professors are one of the most influential aspects of students’ experiences at the College. Anthropology 101 — The professor did field work in southern Sudan ... there is more in depth material here at Conn (than there was at high school). There are more personal connections. The personal experiences help me to learn better, because when it’s out of the textbook it’s not as interesting. But when you hear stories of him being in southern Sudan it’s awesome!

The experiments were demanding and time-consuming, and students learned the challenge and complexity of field research. Our primary goal was, as the authors recommended, to see if replacing lectures with active learning would help students better retain their knowledge. Student teaching evaluations indicate that this goal was achieved. As one student stated in the course evaluation, “Hands-on experiments helped me to fully understand the process of collecting scientific data.” Building on our teaching and learning experience in Experimental Archaeology, the next step will be focus more on the nuances of writing a report for the experiments, and have the course in the fall instead of a very spring. Going into most of the work was done outdoors. — Manuel Lizarralde

Manual Lizarralde is an associate professor of anthropology. His teaching and research focus on the relationships between Latin American indigenous peoples and the environment, working to record and save indigenous knowledge of plants before it is lost through rapid environmental change. His numerous journal articles and book chapters, which rely on field studies, advocate for environmental protection and social justice.

What do you think about the 100-level courses at CC? *

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Did you find any classes particularly stimulating or rewarding? *

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<td>Classes in depth (50%)</td>
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<td>Classes with an interesting professor (30%)</td>
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* Asked of first years and sophomores only.

From Theory to Practice
Experimental Archaeology

Following his participation in Camp Teach & Learn book conversations, and after additional study of teaching & learning scholarship, Professor Manuel Lizarralde provided this reflection on the connections between the theories advanced by three well-known authors and one of his courses, Experimental Archaeology.

J.A. Bowen (Teaching Naked, How Moving Technology Out of Your College Classroom Will Improve Student Learning), D.F. Chambliss and C.G. Takaas, (How College Works), and L.D. Fink (Creating Significant Learning Experiences, An Integrated Approach to Designing College Courses) all emphasize that students value relationships with their teachers and prefer a hands-on approach to their learning. And college professors are responding, sometimes slowly, shifting from lecturing to designing new “learning methods and environments” (Fink 2013, 13). Experimental Archaeology (Anthropology 396), which I co-taught with Professor Anthony Graech, provided this kind of a teaching and learning experience, and allowed us to test the authors’ conclusions and recommendations.

Experimental Archaeology required students to design and conduct field experiments, in addition to library research, writing, and reviewing their peers’ work. Students designed and conducted three experiments. Two focused on cooking stones in water and earth ovens. Fractured stones are very common at archaeological sites, but the fracture patterns have not been widely studied. Students collected appropriate stones and cooked food with them (potatoes or venison), both dry (in an earth oven) or by boiling (by adding rocks to a wooden container with two gallons of water), in order to measured patterns of change in those rocks (cracks, breaks, color, and weight). Students noticed that the stone in the earth oven needed to be larger than those in the boiling experiment. In the boiling experiment, rocks did crack and fracture more often than those used in the earth oven.

The third experiment assessed the accuracy and penetrating force of Ötzi/Iceman arrows. Students made three yew long bows and eighteen arrows, with shafts that were 72, 84 and 87 cm in length. Then, they cast the arrows over 600 times, measuring accuracy (by shooting on a competition score target at 15 meters, which is the standard range for a hunter with medium to large game), penetration on the target (on 19 layers of cardboard), and kinetic force (translating the speed and weight of the arrow into joules). The Ötzi/Iceman arrows did not show much significant difference in accuracy, penetration, or kinetic force. These three experiments provided new insight for the literature with data that the students themselves produced.

The experiments were demanding and time-consuming, and students learned the challenge and complexity of field research. Our primary goal was, as the authors recommended, to see if replacing lectures with active learning would help students better retain their knowledge. Student teaching evaluations indicate that this goal was achieved. As one student stated in the course evaluation, “Hands-on experiments helped me to fully understand the process of collecting scientific data.” Building on our teaching and learning experience in Experimental Archaeology, the next step will be focus more on the nuances of writing a report for the experiments, and have the course in the fall instead of a very spring. Going into most of the work was done outdoors. — Manuel Lizarralde

Manuel Lizarralde is an associate professor of anthropology. His teaching and research focus on the relationships between Latin American indigenous peoples and the environment, working to record and save indigenous knowledge of plants before it is lost through rapid environmental change. His numerous journal articles and book chapters, which rely on field studies, advocate for environmental protection and social justice.
Consider some claims related to grading outcomes, i.e., in the future.

a) Grades should aim to provide objective assessment of students' work.

b) It is appropriate to use grades to motivate students to do their best work.

c) If a student bombs a test because she had a migraine, it is reasonable to allow the student to retake the test.

d) Students with various kinds of disabilities sometimes ought to be given different kinds of assignments or different parameters for the completion of assignments.

e) It is unfair/unfair to give better/worse grades to students whose backgrounds did/did not prepare them (as) well for college work.

In a recent Talking Teaching, participants shared strategies for handling some of the tensions implicit in the ideas above. I want to share some reflections on the implications of this discussion for full participation.

Claim (a) suggests that an important dimension of our grading pedagogy is, in the language of ethical theory, backward-looking. This means that the point of assessment is to provide a measure of accomplishment up to the point of the assessment, i.e., in the past. This is often construed as meritocratic. By contrast, (b) suggests a forward-looking value. It views grades as a tool, appropriate use to promote educational value. It sees grades as a tool, appropriate use to promote educational value.

The A’s two students receive mean different things in virtue of the kinds of preparation and support the students have (or haven’t) had and what kinds of obstacles were overcome to get those A’s. Claims (c), (d) and (e) help to elucidate this point.

Claim (c) suggests that work-produced is insufficient to capture our concept of merit because the test-taker’s failure is not attributable to her knowledge or intellectual ability. Claim (d) tells us that the work we ask students to do should be sensitive to students’ differences because students often succeed by doing things differently. And (e) is structured to raise a larger question about how our educational practices implicate social justice: what grades students get should reasonably be determined by the quality of their work-product; but because what grades students get should plausibly be determined by the quality of their work-product; but because what grades students get should plausibly be determined by the quality of their work-product; but because what grades students get should plausibly be determined by the quality of their work-product; but because what grades students get should plausibly be determined by the quality of their work-product; but because what grades students get should plausibly be determined by the quality of their work-product; but because what grades students get should plausibly be determined by the quality of their work-product;

This graph shows grade-distribution data going back to the earliest days of the College; because there are numerous gaps, dotted lines span the periods where there are missing data points so trends are easier to see. They show that our campus reflects national patterns, with A’s and A’s becoming the most common grades, B’s remaining pretty steady in their frequency, and C’s waning. Beyond confirming assumptions that grades are trending upward, however, this graph shows when the trend began in more detail than has previously been available. But what explains the trend? Is it a problem or not? Should we try to reverse the trend?

Various observers of higher education have offered a variety of possible explanations for this national trend. These include the move towards more flexible add/drop policies that allow students to drop courses in which they’re underperforming — both possibly relevant to the trend. For faculty members by centers changing pedagogical practices and also engaging ourselves and our students in discussions of what inclusion means in different contexts. — Simon Feldman

Simon Feldman is an associate professor of philosophy and was one of the Talking Teaching coordinators in 2013-2014. A recipient of the John S. King Award for excellence in teaching, his teaching and research explore questions about the relationship between the self and the larger community of persons. His courses include Ethics, Feminist Philosophy, and Philosophy of Law; most recently, he is the author of Against Authenticity: Why You Shouldn’t Be Yourself (Lexington Books, 2014).

College or departmental policies and student services may explain some of the upward grade trend, such as a move away from grading on a curve (which raises higher grades) and a move towards more flexible add/drop policies that allow students to drop courses in which they’re underperforming — both possibly relevant to the trend on our own campus. Looser general education requirements may allow students to self-select into courses in which they expect to do well, skipping formerly required core courses that they might have found more challenging. Increased services for students in the form of tutoring, math and writing centers may also have the effect of raising the quality of student work. Changing pedagogical practices may also explain some of the increase, such as better teaching of writing.
Leading a Division III men’s ice hockey program, Coach James Ward recruits widely, with many first-year players—twenty-or twenty-one-year-olds coming from semi-professional hockey leagues. These are highly motivated students. Still, their transition can be difficult, having been away from school for one or two years. More, the hockey season starts shortly after fall semester midterms and ends shortly before spring break, so players have to manage their academic commitments carefully.

The advising provided by the team’s faculty fellow is correspondingly valuable. Professor Catherine Stock meets with players when they are prospective and admits, and during their pre-major and major years. Every player is treated the same, regardless of their playing time. She ensures that all players are challenging themselves and working outside their comfort zone in the classroom and in co-curricular activities.

The advising syllabus for the men’s ice hockey team has the following elements:

1. Contact incoming players in late May to discuss the upcoming season and pre-registration period in June.
2. Meet with new players in September (pre-registration), October (midterms), and November (pre-registration for spring and impending end-of-term issues).
3. Work, as needed, with upperclassmen on choosing majors, challenging themselves academically, and managing rough spots.
4. Contact faculty who have a large number (3+) of men’s hockey players (especially first and second years) to check on their progress.
5. Attend games; meet parents after-season starts shortly after fall semester midterms and ends shortly before spring break, so players have to manage their academic commitments carefully.
6. Contact incoming players in late May to discuss the upcoming season and pre-registration period in June.
7. Meet with new players in September (pre-registration), October (midterms), and November (pre-registration for spring and impending end-of-term issues).
8. Encourage all players to take advantage of academic opportunities and programs at the College, including non-scholarship seminars, leadership seminars, study-abroad programs, internships, mentoring programs, and community service.
9. Attend games; meet parents after-season starts shortly after fall semester midterms and ends shortly before spring break, so players have to manage their academic commitments carefully.
10. Contact incoming players in late May to discuss the upcoming season and pre-registration period in June.
11. Meet with new players in September (pre-registration), October (midterms), and November (pre-registration for spring and impending end-of-term issues).
12. Work, as needed, with upperclassmen on choosing majors, challenging themselves academically, and managing rough spots.
13. Contact faculty who have a large number (3+) of men’s hockey players (especially first and second years) to check on their progress.
14. Attend games; meet parents after-season starts shortly after fall semester midterms and ends shortly before spring break, so players have to manage their academic commitments carefully.

The Center for Teaching & Learning has a variety of resources about trends in grading. Some of these trends that directly address the trend in increasing grades include:

4. Visit the CTL website for a bibliography of materials related to grading.

Across the United States, there is increasing discussion of course content, especially in areas involving sexual assault, trigger warnings, and Title IX. Title IX’s expansive coverage of “students’ access to higher education” and “his or her education” is defined and enforced, as evidenced by the large number of Title IX complaints filed against schools failing to address sexual violence.

“Trigger warnings” are central to current discussions as they are a common internet-based method of warning audiences about content prior to their exposure to material that may be triggering (e.g. depictions of sexual violence flagged for sexual assault survivors). As Washington Post blogger Alyssa Rosenberg observed after the Santa Barbara shooting rampage, “Calls for trigger warnings are based less on a worry that political correctness has taken over the academy than a sign that colleges and universities are failing to live up to their basic obligations to keep their students safe.” This is the core of Title IX—problems on our campuses and in the world more broadly cannot be disentangled from course content or challenges to our students’ abilities to learn.

While critics attribute calls for trigger warnings in feminists, misogynists, or other groups to genuine concern, content notes can be coupled with information regarding campus services (as suggested by Freeman et al) or better yet, collaborations in courses with service providers. Thus, faculty can acknowledge potential challenges while supporting students’ ability to anticipate their own needs and access services.

This approach underscores the impact of content for students, particularly for women. Continued on page 38

### Content Notes & Trauma in the Classroom

**John Nagent** is the Director of the Institutional Research and has contributed extensively to the College’s self-studies and analyses. His disciplinary expertise in political science focuses on questions of public policy at the intersection of state and national politics; he is the author of Safeguarding Federalism: How States Protect Their Interests in National Policymaking (University of Oklahoma Press, 2009).

**Ariella Barra** is an assisting professor in the Gender and Women’s Studies Department. Her courses include Introduction to Queer Studies, Feminist Approachs to Disability Studies, Transnational Women’s Movements, and Public Policy and Social Ethics. Her research includes women’s leadership in transnational communities of color, anti-LGBT hate crimes, and gendered labor forms.

### What is Title IX?

Part of the Education Amendments of 1972, Title IX is an unqualified assertion of equality. It states: “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.”

Title IX has long been associated with athletics, where it requires the effective accommodation of students’ interests and abilities, and equality in the benefits, opportunities and treatment of student-athletes. The desired standard is achieved when men’s and women’s sports programs are each willing to accept the other’s participation, opportuni- ties, and resources as their own. Increasingly, Title IX has been the basis for requiring institutions to address issues related to sexual harassment, race, sex, and most recently, discrimination based on gender identity, gender expression, and non-binary expressions of gender. The Title IX Team will be offering workshops to inform all members of the campus community about Title IX regulations, particularly its protections and mandatory reporting requirements, and its role in eradicating gender-based violence on campus. — Eva Kenosh

Eva Kenosh is an adjunct associate professor of physical education, senior women administrator, and associate director of athletics. Her teaching focuses on leadership and sport; she has coached the women’s varsity crew to two New England Varsity Four Championships, in addition to medalling at numerous New England Championship and ECAC events. Professor Kenosh has held leadership positions with the World Cup Regattas and the 2004 and 2012 Olympic Games, and is the U.S. Liaison to the Henley Women’s Regatta.

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### Advising Varsity Athletes: The Faculty Fellows Program

Catherine M. Stock is the Barbara Zachers Kohm ’72 Professor of History and the Director of American Studies. Her research interests are focused on the American West of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. A recipient of the John S. King Memorial Award for Excellence in Teaching, her classes include Introduction to American Studies, “The American West,” “Globalization and American Culture Since 1945.”

James Ward is an adjunct associate professor of physical education. He has coached at the Division I and Division III levels, and taught a range of class- room-centered courses. Coach Ward has taken the College men’s ice hockey team to the NESCAC championships three times, and has also fostered partnerships between the varsity team and community organizations, including the Green Dot violence prevention program.

### We teach by advising
Peers, Academic Performance & Persistence Beyond the First Year

From 2005 to 2009, 91% of incoming first-year students persisted into their sophomore year at Connecticut College, while 9% transferred or withdrew. I was interested in investigating the factors that affected this outcome, because I knew that students’ decisions to persist were complicated and could be related to academic, social, and other factors. Although it is impossible to fully explain student decisions, it is possible to identify factors that may influence a student’s decision or may otherwise be predictive of a student not persisting. I learned that strikingly different factors affect the persistence of females and males; among the most important contrasts are the effects that a student’s peers have on the likelihood of his or her persistence.

For females, financial aid has a positive effect on the likelihood of persistence and the distance that Connecticut College is from a student’s home has a negative effect. A composite of high school academic performance (such as high school GPA and SAT scores) does not have a significant effect on a female student’s likelihood of persistence. The first-year fall GPA does not have a significant effect on persistence, a male’s classroom performance relative to his peers does have a quadratic effect on his likelihood of persistence: a male who performs greatly above or greatly below the median in each of his classes is less likely to persist. So, a male who earns a 3.8 would be less likely to persist if the median grades in his classes were 3.2’s than if they were 3.6’s. Likewise, a male who receives low grades in classes would be less likely to persist if his classmates received high grades than if they received low grades. While I can only speculate on the reasons for this effect, it is possible that males who perform much differently than their classmates feel out of place, which could lead to a decreased likelihood of persistence.

In contrast to females, the greatest difference in academic preparation among female roommates, the less likely they are to persist. So, a female who is housed with a student who had a similar high school GPA and similar SAT scores is more likely to persist than one who is housed with someone with a different background. If a female has substantially different academic preparation from Connecticut College, this should be considered, both she and her roommate are less likely to persist. While females with roommates with different academic backgrounds can and frequently do succeed, large differences can still be an important factor in the decision to persist.

I found that neither the financial aid a male receives nor the distance that a male lives from Connecticut College has a significant impact on the likelihood of his persistence. Similar to females, a male’s high school performance does not significantly affect his likelihood of persistence. While the first-year fall GPA does not have a significant effect on persistence, a male’s classroom performance relative to his peers does have a quadratic effect on his likelihood of persistence: a male who performs greatly above or greatly below the median in each of his classes is less likely to persist. So, a male who earns a 3.8 would be less likely to persist if the median grades in his classes were 3.2’s than if they were 3.6’s. Likewise, a male who receives low grades in classes would be less likely to persist if his classmates received high grades than if they received low grades. While I can only speculate on the reasons for this effect, it is possible that males who perform much differently than their classmates feel out of place, which could lead to a decreased likelihood of persistence.

A double major in Economics and Mathematics, Patrick Russo ’14 received the Chain’s Prize in Economics and the Walter F. Brady, Jr. Prize in Mathematics; and graduated cum laude with Honors and Distinction in Economics. He is a research analyst in the Research and Statistics Group at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. His thesis, Determinants of Undergraduate GPA and Persistence at Connecticut College, was advised by Terry-Ann Craigie, assistant professor of economics, and John D. Nugent, director of institutional research.

Peers, Academic Performance & Persistence Beyond the First Year

ReVision: Piloting Change

Throughout the 2014-2015 academic year, faculty have led and contributed to four pilot projects, each designed to fine-tune proposed curricular innovations. Carefully coordinated, the pilots are part of continuing College-wide effort to strengthen teaching and learning in the liberal arts. Early responses from faculty and staff, student leaders and participants have been positive; assessment and development are continuing throughout the spring and fall to inform the next steps.

First-Year Seminars (FYS)
The first-year seminar pilot sought to meaningfully connect students to the mission and core values of the College, while placing the liberal arts in a larger context. In order to give students more opportunities to engage with the subject matter of their seminars and to build community, faculty supplemented classroom studies with meetings during fall orientation, and connections with other courses and co-curriculars. Writing, always stressed in the FYS program, is now joined with oral proficiency and library research skills. Faculty members are identified as mentors supporting student-driven learning, encouraging students to take ownership of their educations.

Residential Clusters
Several residence halls are hosting multiple first-year seminars, with the intent of connecting classes and residences so that students can more readily create their own learning communities. Because students live together, it is easier to share learning, to arrange meetings with student advisors (who might or might not live in the same residence hall), and to accomplish group assignments. In addition to intellectual rewards, students see one another heading out the door, remind one another to bring the readings, and walk to class together. This pilot was designed to foster students’ engagement in the College community, giving them a richer sense of place.

Team Advising
This pilot worked to increase the intentionality of the advising provided to each student, bringing together the faculty advisor (the leader of the student’s first-year seminar), a staff advisor (perhaps from CELS), and two student advisors (recruited, educated and, perhaps through the Academic Support Center). The team can also be expanded for a student, depending upon their curricular and co-curricular commitments. Though the individual teams have taken different approaches, every one has a common advising syllabus and at least one team event in every semester, not including pre-registration. This pilot is dedicated to enhancing outreach and responsiveness to the students, by strengthening coordination and collaboration among advisors.

Conn Courses
Conn Courses, now in planning, will be integrative courses that help students make connections among their coursework, co-curricular activities, and collaboration among advisors.

Conn Courses
Conn Courses, now in planning, will be integrative courses that help students make connections among their coursework, co-curricular activities, and collaboration among advisors.

Universal Design for Instruction
While nearly one in four students see themselves as differing in abilities, experiences, and knowledge into the classroom — and that students learn in different ways on different pages — UDI is a framework for creating a teaching and learning environment that is both interactive and welcoming. Further information about UDI is available from Joel Garrett, Dean of Academic Resources, and Barb McLarty, Director of Student Accessibility Services. Helpful online resources are also posted by the University of Connecticut (at http://udi.uconn.edu/index.php?p=print12) and the Center for Applied Special Technology (at http://www.cast.org/udi/).

We teach by knowing our students
### Sharing Our Best Assignments

#### A New CTL Initiative

**FEATURED ASSIGNMENT: Core Values and Critical Thinking**

The assignment is a great example of effectively connecting critical thinking and creative thinking. It asks students to reflect on how their own experiences shape their understanding of critical thinking. The assignment encourages students to engage in meaningful dialogue about the concept of critical thinking.

**FEATURED ASSIGNMENT: Campus Tour**

This assignment is highly transferable to other courses. It provides students with the opportunity to develop their communicative skills and learn about different perspectives on critical thinking.

**FEATURED ASSIGNMENT: Peer Review**

This assignment is a great example of how to facilitate constructive feedback. It provides students with the opportunity to learn from each other and improve their own work.

**FEATURED ASSIGNMENT: Established & Alternative Treatments**

This assignment helps students develop specific skills, such as craftsmanship and effective communication. It also encourages students to think critically about their own experiences.

### Talking Teaching ... what did we say?

Samples of Feedback from the 2013-2014 Talking Teaching Conversations

#### Approaches to Advising: Fostering Intentional & Integrative Learning

Advising is an art — not a science — so the boundaries between academic and non-academic need to be blurred.

I'm thinking more concretely about how to connect CELS to my first-year seminar and how to begin using the CELS portfolio in my advising.

The inclusiveness of the conversation was most helpful. Ideas were shared in a respectful environment. Appreciated the openness to CELS by faculty. Very helpful, learning the faculty perspective.

Most helpful ... introducing people from different areas with the same goal.

### Creating Connected Courses: How Linking Courses Can Facilitate Integrated & Intentional Learning

Most helpful ... the conversation about connections between academics and athletics.

We need to talk about advising ideas — how to facilitate access to what other faculty are teaching in intersections can be found.

Great ideas about connecting, women, athletics, & academics. Need a catalogue of topics.

### Critical Thinking in the Liberal Arts

This reminded me that there are multiple ways to "see" the world.

This was a good opportunity to really think about "thinking" by myself.

Most helpful ... All the critical thinking and creative thinking, how is critical thinking different from just thinking? What is the connection of creativity & critical thinking?

Most interesting ... considering how "critical thinking" functions in different disciplines, the range of things that "critical thinking" can mean.

For my teaching, encouraging students to define "critical thinking" for themselves — the why of what they’re learning. I’m thinking about the value of critical thinking and how to leverage it.

### Curricular Models: Implications for Teaching & Learning

Most interesting ... Discussion of Conn courses — the love of team-taught courses blending two disciplines that would fulfill "requirements" of breadth.

It’s a challenge to determine how my department will be affected by this change. I would love to participate, but I’m not sure of resources will allow it.

I want to teach more.

### Do Grades Facilitate Learning? Managing the Competing Pedagogical Purposes of Grading

Most interesting ... subjectivity of the "grading" process.

I would to see a campus-wide grading philosophy — something ultimate linked to Conn’s reputation.

For my teaching, I will continue thinking critically about how I grade my students & alternative ways to evaluate. I would love to try teaching a non-graded course.

For my teaching ... breaking down the domains of grading, objective, subjective, effort, outcome, etc.

### The First Year: What Are We Doing In Our 100-Level Courses

Most interesting ... Creative ideas in possibly linking or cross-listing courses — making connections between courses.

Most helpful ... Hearing different perspectives, learning about different objectives and constraints across departments.

#### First Year Seminars as a Cornerstone of General Education

Bringing a group of faculty together creates a faculty community which is very important. It makes faculty feel they are working together towards common goals.

For my teaching ... Integrating work with ARC fully — like the pilot group did.

The Honor Code in the Classroom and Beyond

I was very interested in the amount of people who do not think the Honor Code works. I learned a great deal from other faculty members, who have had varied experiences.

Most interesting ... the suggestion of a Green Dot for academics. Thinking about how to create student and faculty buy-in for the Honor Code.

Maybe vigilant reporting of even small infractions would be the best approach to take.

For my teaching ... at the start of each class, have a discussion about the meaning of our honor code.

#### Inclusive Excellence Across the Disciplines

Ideas for my teaching ... To bring more of my personal story to the classroom.

Do more to paint a picture of my discipline that is diverse, showing how it is inhabited by all kinds of people.

Ideas for my teaching ... Ideas about how to present my own whiteness as a topic for class discussion, within the limits of discussion, not above or beyond the discourse of the field.

I like the idea of having an Inclusive Excellence representative in departments or in divisions who can...
The Friendship Model of Thesis Advising: Is It Relicable?

The 2014 Oakes and Louise Ames Prize for the most outstanding honors thesis was presented to Petko Ivanov, a lecturer in the Slavic Studies Department, for Gender in the Everyday Life of the Russian home. Her thesis is an ethnographic exploration of what it means to be a woman “the Russian way,” as revealed in the gendered daily practices of several families in Ufa, Russia. Having conducted four months of participatory observation and hours of interviews, Jyoti painted a vivid and nuanced picture of contemporary Russian life in the domestic sphere. As Jyoti’s advisor, I provided guiding hypotheses while letting the voices of her informants surprise us. Among the recurring topics most relevant to the identity constructions of domesticity is permanentnyi remont (ongoing home remodeling), which became an epistemological key to the gender dynamics of the Russian home.

Specifics of the topic aside, advising Jyoti in her thesis work was in and of itself a process worthy of reflection. Whatever else it is, “thesising,” a verb Sylvia Serio (‘14, ‘14 coined, is always collaborative. It involves so many parties that it is difficult to pay homage to all of them. An honors thesis is not accomplished in a year—it takes much longer and, in my experience, the crucial factor is building a network for mutual learning and support across students and faculty, in which advising is not a hierarchical practice but part of developing an intellectual partnership and, eventually, friendship.

In my case, it all started with Hegel. Some 2½ years ago, I read Hegel’s Philosophy of History with a group of highly motivated students, as part of their self-designed course on philosophies of modernity (other faculty members taught in the seminar as well). Some members of this group later resided in or frequented Earth House, which provided an emotional and intellectual atmosphere supportive for thesis projects; I was the primary advisor of two and a reader for a third. In many respects, the “earthlings” became a family and were regarded as such by its members—both faculty and students.

Arguably, the success of these students (their names were all over the Awards Ceremony list) was the result of circumstances deliberately nurtured by students and faculty alike: “Thesising” included topically relevant art-projects like Juanpa’s (Juan Pablo Pacheco ‘14) short-film making and screening (in Film Studies), or Jyoti’s multimedia installation (in Art Department). We learned that thesis writing is not only about the product (i.e., the thesis itself), but also about the process in which the writers acquire intellectual tools that they can continue using long after the writing itself is finished, hopefully throughout their careers.

Advising, of course, has its “techni- cal” challenges: narrowing down the thesis topic (students usually start with mega-ideas); adopting a theoretical framework and the readings that go with it; learning to do the writing in small, manageable steps while bearing in mind the overall composition of the thesis; and setting weekly priorities and small-portion deadlines. Last but not least, there is a lot to be said about co-operating with faculty readers (Andrea Lanox of Slavic Studies and Eileen Kane of the History Department in Jyoti’s case) whose fresh critical lenses de-familiarize the project and help to negotiate its completion. It takes a department (or two) to produce a successful honors thesis.

All of this said, the question remains whether “the friendship model” of thesis advising as described above is replicable, including for me. As Jyota put it, “So what are you going to do now—replace us with another group of students?” While replacing this particular circle of friends is impossible, the model of close intellectual relationships with and among thesis-writers could be sustained if students are more integrated cross-generationally (with “younger” students gravitating around the seniors) and residually (around housing that cultivates intellectual relationship with and among students and faculty). In many respects, the Residential Education Fellows (REF) program encourages the seamlessness of a learning-life environment, extending learning beyond the classroom. Since 2009, eleven professors each year, in partnership with the staff of the Residential Education and Living (REAL) office, have provided more than 325 opportunities to students and the Connecticut College community. These events range from the traditionally academic to the more informal. The students appreciate a setting to engage with their professors outside of their classrooms, and use the REF program as a way to make connections between what is happening inside and outside of the classroom. Some of the most popular programs have been topically relevant to the here and now of our campus.

If you are a post-tenure faculty member interested in the REF Program, please contact Professor Catherine Stock (History and American Studies). There are also opportunities for pre-tenure faculty to participate informally. — Sara Rothenberger, Director of Residential Education and Living
we teach by mentoring

Mentoring Writing: Peer Mentors at the Writing Center

Peer mentors at the Writing Center are upperclassmen who have a solid repertoire of good tutoring strategies. Each year, approximately twenty-four students work at the Writing Center as peer mentors, conducting about 1,000 consultations. The students who contributed to this interview—article exemplify our peer mentors’ dedication to teaching and learning. — Steve Shoemaker, Director, The Writing Center

Why Students Come to the Writing Center

It is important to know that all kinds of students come to the Writing Center — tutors help with lab reports, papers, theses, everything. And not all the writing tutors are English majors. Of the three peer mentors contributing to this article, one is an English major, another is majoring in Biochemistry, Cellular & Molecular Biology and minoring in Math, and the third is a Human Development major and Psych minor.

Most often, students come in because they are having a difficult time starting the assignment or because they find the assignment itself convoluted — they need help interpreting it and finding a path to completing it. When students come in with a draft of their paper, they want another pair of eyes to look at it, to see if it is cohesive and makes sense. You can’t see everything on your own and it’s also reassuring to have positive feedback.

In the fall, there are lots of first-year students, especially since a major goal of the first-year seminars is to introduce students to college-level writing. In the spring, upperclassmen have theses and seminar papers; they will sometimes have weekly appointments for their big assignments. Students who are doing well and feeling confident about their writing come to the Writing Center, as well as those who are concerned or having difficulties.

People come in at all stages and we structure our tutoring around where they are in the writing process, what they want to get done, what blocks or difficulties they want to overcome. Sometimes, students will come back because they have similar problems with multiple papers. Or they will bring the same paper several times, especially if they have partial drafts. Rewriters can be especially difficult — a student may think the paper is finished and then discover that there is more work to be done.

The Goals of Peer Mentoring

Writing tutors support a student’s writing process. We don’t give answers and we don’t tell students what to write. We don’t edit, we don’t judge what is right or what is wrong. Even when students want to work on their grammar, when there is a right and a wrong, we want to help them learn to edit for themselves. So, we try to look for patterns of error and to provide more general rules, so that a student can apply these rules to many sentences and in many different situations. Our goal is to give students confidence in their abilities, so they have a sense of agency around their writing. We only pick up a pen when I want to write down something a student has said — sometimes it is easier for a student to talk through their ideas than to get those ideas down on paper. I give the student what I have recorded and encourage her or him to incorporate what she or he has said in the session into the essay itself, and to develop those ideas further. That way, the student has something solid to turn to when she or he is feeling “blocked.”

We’re successful when we help students come to their own conclusions, when students leave the Writing Center with good questions and solid goals, which they have arrived at themselves. Our contribution is to ask guiding questions and to allow long pauses, even if that feels awkward at first, so that students have a chance to think.

Continued on page 40

The Connecticut College peer mentor program in the biological sciences is in its 20th year, as a response to the differences in preparation among students in our large introductory classes. With support and encouragement from the new Academic Resource Center and its director, Noel Garrett, the program has been revised. Peer mentors may attend every class and work together with faculty and students in active learning exercises during class-time or they may offer evening sessions where they work with students to solve problems, answer questions and clarify confusing concepts. In some courses they do both. As peer mentor Natasha Zeid ’14 remarked, “By the end of the semester, we knew people, so it was like tutoring friends. And some of the people, we had tutored in the past or had been on an athletic team with or in the dorm, and we knew with, so we knew we could help.” The program promotes a culture in which asking for help is a mark of friendship rather than cause for stigmaizing.

In the Spring 2014 semester Kris Handerman, Lecturer in Biology and Botany, and I worked together with Noel Garrett to implement the peer mentors into our Genetics course. As a mid-level, core course for several majors, with approximately 70 students, Genetics is a particularly appropriate course for in-class peer mentoring. Substantively intricate, genetics requires students to learn facts, integrate abstract concepts, and think critically—often simultaneously. From my perspective as the professor, incorporating active learning has profoundly changed the course. I divided each 50-minute class into 15-minute blocks, mixing lecture and active learning. However, it was difficult to implement the active learning component in each class meeting while addressing the content needs for the course. The in-class peer mentor program helped to counteract the pressure to prioritize content—it made conversation, collaboration, and active learning constraints in 200th, a course that had previously served as a tutor for two other biology courses. Natasha Zeid ’14 loved genetics and was enthusiastic about sharing her passion, but she knew some found the material frustrating. During each active learning exercise, Blake, Natasha, Kris and I circulated throughout the class-room. We talked with students, offered encouragement and inspiration, and pushed for them to think critically, apply, synthesize and create. These interactions set a high standard for the students, with the peer mentors serving as role models.

An important factor for the success of the program is faculty-peer mentor communication. This is an area that we all agreed needs to be improved for the next go-round. The mentors knew that they had to prove themselves — at the beginning of the semester, students would only ask Kris and me questions. Gradually, students began to flag the mentors down. As the mentors acknowledged, knowing the problems and active learning modules in advance allowed them to plan their classroom conversations and their tutoring sessions. As with team teaching, the faculty-peer mentor partnership requires a balance between structure and spontaneity, coverage and assimilation.

In-class peer mentoring has now caught on at Connecticut College. Last semester Martha Grossel had mentors in her 100-level Cells course and Anne Bernhard had mentors in her 200-level Ecology course. As part of Spring 2014 Camp Teach and Learn, Michele Bluster and Ralph W. Preszler in “Introductory Biology Course Reform: A Tale of Two Courses” (International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching & Learning, July 2014).

References and Further Resources:

For additional information, see the scholarly writings of Michele Bluster and Ralph W. Preszler. Michele Bluster and Ralph W. Preszler in “Introductory Biology Course Reform: A Tale of Two Courses.” For an introduction, see “Teaching & Learning in Genetics: Peer Mentors In & Out of Class.”
Moy: There were so many thoughts going through my mind. What will my students be like? Will the syllabus that I wrote fit the needs of my course? I, too, went to a small liberal arts college but I wasn’t sure what to be prepared for after teaching at a R-1 university with classes that had hundreds of students.

Anderson: Being a student at a liberal arts college is one thing, teaching at one is an entirely different experience. That was one of the greatest things that I learned about the CTL. There was a sense of … beginning … not just the semester but our careers at Conn … and, most importantly, our friendships.

Moy: What I appreciated about the CTL seminar was the philosophy that excellence in teaching was a life-long process. At the same time, there were practices that could be easily implemented, which could improve the educational experience not only for the students but ourselves. I always left feeling inspired to try something new. Thinking back, what were your some of your favorite sessions this year?

Anderson: It’s funny — the specific theme or content of any particular meeting always took second place to just coming together and reflecting on all that was happening around us. The year moved so quickly and there was so much to learn, especially as we found ourselves in the midst of curricular ReVision. But I remember how helpful it was to exchange syllabi with one another, to develop mid-term course evaluations and techniques for creating challenging assignments. I think one of the most informative sessions was when we met with current students to hear about the most (and least) meaningful experiences they had shared with professors.

Moy: The most helpful session for me was the syllabus workshop. I learned so much from reading syllabi from the Biology and Economics departments. In addition, it was wonderful to not only receive feedback but also to share what I teach on a daily basis.

Anderson: That is one of the true pleasures of teaching at a liberal arts college, isn’t it? Learning about what colleagues are doing in other departments and finding those points of connection. The emphasis on pedagogy made the CTL a great common denominator — it provided a place for exploration and experimentation. — Ginny Anderson and Wendy Moy

Wendy Moy is Assistant Professor of Music at Connecticut College and Ginny Anderson is Assistant Professor of Theater. Their collaboration continued beyond the CTL in the spring of 2014 when Professor Moy served as vocal director for Professor Anderson’s production of The Taming of the Shrew. They serve on the organizing committee for the Class of ’57 Seminar for 2014-2015.

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Approaches to Interdisciplinary Concentrations

How can faculty, staff, and students identify a serious question? Then, how can we use different perspectives, through a breadth of classes with different ways of learning and thinking, to explore that question?

It was interesting to learn that faculty have already collaborated across disciplines to create theme-based “concentrations.” Concentrations are a way of thinking about a common theme from different perspectives — different ways of thinking through a problem.

The discussion of how to balance an interdisciplinary theme & the needs for educational breadth was particularly helpful.

We need department support for developing courses we shouldn’t just rely on existing faculty networks to help facilitate the collaboration.

The most compelling thing was the passion that people had to give up the system. There were good ideas about co-teaching, curricular development, and integration.

Difficult Dialogues in the Classroom

Difficulties in dialogue arise from a variety of sources including …uanticipated student comments, the surprise factor; the desire to avoid uncomfortable issues associated with inequalities; student resistance to alternative views, especially when faculty are perceived as having a liberal bias; discussing difference generates anxiety, especially if a discussion leader feels unprepared for the conversation.

In considering how to respond to student comments that challenge the “safe space” of the classroom, remember that not all students feel equally safe. Think about how to navigate and manage this space. Think about whether “protect vs. engage” is a false dichotomy — and how to do both with skill. Because the classroom is about preparing students to make contributions to the world. To do this, faculty need to engage, not avoid.

Put the dialogues in the context of student norms, which include … increasing polarization of political views; faith is seen in opposition to reason, belief in opposition to science. Dialogue is a way to bridge these differences, to lessen the enmity.

To set the stage for difficult dialogues, … make contributions to the world. To do this, faculty need to engage, not avoid.

Most compelling: … thinking about pedagogy & the use of statistical data in the humanities. What is “information”? Our most helpful: … thinking about pedagogy & the use of statistical data in the humanities. What is “information”?

Everything You Always Wanted to Know About CELS — But Were Afraid to Ask

What was most helpful? I don’t even know where to start! Probably walking through the CELS experience from the perspective of a student, first through senior year.

We need to keep these conversations going and know that students are the priority. It helps us all work together and continue the communication.
First-Year Seminars: Planning the Pilot(s)

Elements of the pilots will include … faculty will be advising students in the seminar; pilot seminars will be residentially connected, with shared events and thematic links; the seminars will meet in the same time slot, to facilitate connections.

To build community in the pilots … clusters will be created across campus; and there will be a deliberate effort to help students connect who they are inside and outside the classroom.

First-Year Seminars as a Cornerstone of Curricular ReVision

Among the new ideas … social mapping of the campus; and having students interview each other, to learn about one another.

First Year Seminars seem to be lacking a common or shared structure, which ultimately manifests in a lack of student seriousness. Collaboration and engagement can change that.

I learned that these seminars should not aim to teach one particular subject, but to teach ways of thinking/learning; the student’s choice. And there will be a deliberate effort to help students connect who they are inside and outside the classroom.

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Rethinking Advising

Lessons learned … the educational process unfolded in a piecemeal process for students, and students need mentors, even more than advisors. Integrating learning is difficult.

Faculty need to give even more thought to … the diversity of student backgrounds; to the reality that we are encountering students — even students new to the College — late in the students’ educational careers; to assessing advising, in order to foster faculty accountability.

Rethinking Larger Introductory Courses: Strategies for Improving Student Learning & Success

Among the strategies for improving student success were … pre-course interventions (like a boot camp), supplemental instruction (like out-of-class study groups), peer instructors, active learning, parachute courses (if a student fails the first course, they can parachute down to a lower class), co-curricular support (e.g. living communities). The way this workshop was structured, we had to think about how to re-think our course & this was good in forcing us to think about it now rather than putting it off for later.

I’m most excited about the possibility of embedding peer mentors in my large lecture course. At the same time, I’m most worried about the financial reality of embedding peer mentors in my large lecture course. At the same time, I’m usually in traditional lecture mode — I need to be willing to slow down and go off schedule if necessary. But then, how do I plan for such a situation? I’m going to work on making student preparation specific to each class. And then I’ll have an in-class reinforcement of ideas with the peer mentors doing a teaching activity with the students.

I’m looking forward to implementing techniques that improve student participation in class. I’m mildly concerned about making these changes, but not too much. The workshop offered support for the ideals I want to implement & suggestions for efficient ways to accomplish the reforms.

It was helpful to think about ways to have student prepare better for class. For example, integrating the seating of peer mentors and lecturers in the class. And there was a compelling argument for adding more extensive class activities that require specific preparation. I really should use clickers to reinforce student prep.

This presentation was excellent. The message was that different techniques work in different circumstances, so you need to assess their impact. Not all “best practices” work in every situation.

Senior Symposia: Who, What, Why, & When?

The goal is to infuse students with a sense of intellectual curiosity as they’re looking at Conn. Fiskalis galvanizes students … why shouldn’t something academically done so? Students know, from the time they are first-years, that they will have to present as seniors; it might change the whole four-year experience.

Questions for us to think about … What does or should a culminating experience be based on? For example, with 95% of students in CELS, should this be a practicum? Should we commit to something new or to coordinating existing “capstones”? When and how will we make it possible for students to present and to attend one another’s presentations?

I now have a better understanding of capstone projects across campus — and we are NOT aware of different programs. We all agree that advising needs Re-Invigoration, though some faculty are worried that this model is daunting or prohibitive.

Team Advising: Planning the Pilot

What would an advising team look like? It would include faculty, staff, student advisors, coaches, CELS … and would use e-portfolios, for example, to facilitate case management.

We all agree that advising needs Re-Invigoration, though some faculty are worried that this model is daunting or prohibitive.

Technology in the Liberal Arts Classroom

There are many ways to encourage student collaboration, including peer review through Forums and chat room exercises. We want to teach students to teach themselves, and we need to set aside time for reviewing ideas and performance.

We teach students to collaborate, but then we also need to teach them how to evaluate their collaborative relationships and processes.

Most helpful … brainstorming faculty-wide programs/collaborations to improve tech in the classroom; and sharing our approaches/failures/alternatives. The role of Tech Fellows — and the commitment to collective faculty needs & students.

Most helpful … the small group discussion about what is digital literacy. New idea … to take an online course, to experience what our students experience in a new classroom/discipline.

Title IX: It’s Not (Just) about Athletics Anymore

Most helpful … (1) Definition of the legal requirements; (2) Discussion of implementation, addressing Title IX, general faculty sensitivities and rules. Most helpful … re. being active, understanding my responsibilities to the students. Starting to talk about our roles as mandatory reporters.

Writing and Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is something that needs to be worked on and maintained, or it fades away, I think. Follow-up to this workshop would be great, in my view.

This was a great opportunity to learn from others, to hear their ideas about critical thinking and to have examples of assignments. There were lots of ideas to jump-start assignments, from smaller practical nuggets to large ways to frame a whole course.

I valued the tangible ideas to create rich learning opportunities for students that are lacking intent or focus.

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Teaching & Reaching All Students in STEM Classes

Suggestions for frustrated faculty to assess whether their teaching is working … assess student understanding with clickers; encourage students to prepare for class, even forcing with quizzes; assess note-taking, as these skills are often qualified. Remember to set goals that are measurable, that allow for feedback, and that help students to evaluate their work. It’s important that students do something so that they construct their own knowledge and then can apply their learning. Active learning.

Most helpful … reminders about simple things like think — pair — share, which I will use more intentionally now. Think, give a prompt to students; Pair, discuss with a neighbor; Share, with the class.

Most compelling … case studies — bringing in real world examples in a dynamic way.

New ideas … one-minute papers at the end of class to figure out what students are having challenges with.

FACULTY DISCUSSION REVISION INITIATIVES AT A CAMP TEACH & LEARN WORKING LUNCH.

Most helpful … reminders about small group exercises. We regard to curricular ReVision … curricular ReVision … two small group exercises. We want to teach students to work in different circumstances, so we need to assess their impact. Not all “best practices” work in every situation.

Scaffolding breaks writing into smaller pieces / stages, so that we teach students how to accomplish big complex tasks. Sequencing involves looking at the whole shape of the semester, looking at the overall trajectory of the course, and designing a meaningful sequence of three to four writing assignments. Both work to counteract last minute papers, by having projects unfold over time. But require being intentional about student skills and about content, so that we cultivate the habit of daily writing.

Most helpful … Feedback from peers, idea brainstorming for a particular assignment and for a particular course. Most helpful … Scaffolding, giving lots of mini assignments beyond drafts — revision — final. Instead, give “tiered” assignments that lead to the final product.

I feel that our students really struggle with what to do with their sources, so I liked the idea of exploring why we ask them to use sources.

Great advice on scaffolding critical reading as a stage in working toward writing. There were also ideas on how to dissect a text with students so they will know how to construct a response.

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Teaching & Reaching All Students in STEM Classes

Suggestions for frustrated faculty to assess whether their teaching is working … assess student understanding with
Developing and Sustaining Successful First Year Programs


This is a book about making first year experiences vibrant and meaningful for students and teachers alike, with the hope/expectation/proof that “... experiences in the first year often set the tone for students’ entire undergraduate experience.” (p.4)

Each of the 12 chapters — which address topics such as pedagogy, orientation, advising, learning communities — gives a history of what worked, what didn’t, and a personal reflection about new discoveries.

The Peak Performing Professor: A Practical Guide to Productivity and Happiness


In this book, the author stresses the importance of approaching a career in academia with purpose. It is, she says, an undertaking filled with meaning. In my own teaching, I value opportunities for students to explore, discover, and uncover new meaning — I don’t see teaching and learning as merely conveying information or transmitting knowledge. Instead, it is, at its best, a search for truth. As a literature scholar, I study and teach the stories that reveal humans in their world, with all their complex relationships and interactions; and I have seen so many interpretations and so many truths in the language and the narratives of these stories.

College (Un)Bound, The Future of Higher Education and What It Means for Students


College (Un)Bound is an easy-to-read book that describes the challenges, changes, and opportunities currently facing higher education. The book hits all the major topics, including college cost-benefit calculations, the student/institution match, enrolling vs. completing college, advising, technology and new pedagogies, and learned skills and competencies. There are lots of meaningful case studies that describe students’ college experience, and the work of innovators and entrepreneurs. The book is strictly focused on academics and not the broader co-curricular aspects of a college education.

For someone at Connecticut College, the book offers insights into other types of institutions — large universities, community colleges, and lower ranked private institutions. It also provides food for thought on how we can do better for our students, though most of these ideas are helpful reminders, including Robison’s Rule that with just one life to live, you had best make it a good one. The second, and stronger criticism, is that the author’s tendency to speak in absolutes and binaries, so that a reader either is or is not “peak performing.” This is disheartening, even harmful. Avoid the experience by looking at the table of contents, picking up the chapter that speaks to you. And then sample the rest and the reminders, try this or that exercise. Part 5 of the book, “PACE Your Roles and Responsibilities,” is a sound and useful point of departure if you are seeking specific strategies and activities to apply in your courses and research right away. The exercises in this section address, in a step-by-step fashion, teaching strategies (effective course design, connecting courses to larger questions, designing content activities) and our role as scholars (thinking of “body of work,” not publications).
formation in the United States, then you know how befuddling the idea is to undergraduates steeped in the ideology of individualism. Davis and Harrison argue that positivism requires us to rewire our concept of "culture" and "power." Rather than a dialectic, a positivist argues that reality is a "given," a "socially constructed" state, if we simply try to make sense of it.

The implications are enormous. To illustrate, policy discussions that reject positivism would begin (our GE discussions might hopefully be a good example of this) by posing questions about institutional culture that recognize the pervasiveness of language and knowledge systems, the language of critique that enhances our understanding of the roots and structures of power. But I disagree with Davis and Harrison that social justice loses its impact if it is reified, framed by slogans rather than some sort of apolitical, mushy sentiment. My sense is that Davis and Harrison do not name the "failure to examine a phenomenon" (say Connecticut College "cultur[e]") in depth often leads to theorizing that reduces it in ways that diminish its complexity. Said described the outcome as "the local, creating a situation where what counts as real or true [my emphasis] is simply the point of view of those in power." As we discuss intended outcomes in revisioning general education, Davis and Harrison would want us to grapple with what we mean by "education, Davis and Harrison would have identified outcomes in revisioning general educational practice. Readers can use Citing Edward Said, Davis and Harrison argue that the "flipped classroom" presents students with small group work in the classroom, students work in unison to complete assigned activities. The faculty member continually assesses student learning through both formative and summative assessment. Academic Advising Approaches, Strategies That Teach Students to Make the Most of College Jayne K. Drake, Peggy Jordan, and Marsha A. Miller, ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2013. Every year, I officially advise approximately 40 to 50 majors and minors, and unofficially advise other dozen or so students who already have a faculty advisor but who also share a personal rapport with me. I was especially interested in reviewing a segment of this book, as my advising experience is ad hoc only. My interest was also sparked by a Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) session I attended this May about CEIS (Career Enhancing Life Skills) advising and how to better "team-advice" as an institution. My students always give CEIS counselors rave reviews. Reading Drake, Jone, and Miller’s (2013) book cover-to-cover, I was mostly drawn to Appreciative Advising (Chapter 6), Advising at Coaching (Chapter 10), and Sociative Advising (Chapter 12). These topics were somewhat familiar to me but the chapters were also innovative, specific, and structured. Appreciative Advising, for example, was "rooted in Appreciative Inquiry, an organizational change theory focused on the cooperative search for the positive in every living system and leveraging this positive energy to mobilize change." (Blow, Huison and He, pages 83-3). As a reader and an advisor, I valued the emphasis on mutuality and the accountability process that occurs only after we build trust and support. The importance of non-verbal behavior, open-ended questions and well-coming gestures dominated this section. Settlers and colonizers make barriers and facilitates the one-on-one developmental process needed in relationship building. Personally, I admire effective coaches and my students call me "Coach López" in class, so I am thrilled to witness the recognition and support of advising and academic advising. The idea of emphasizing that my students and I have a common goal, and that we both actively be part of the decision facilitation process (as opposed to the advisor passively prescripting the student what to do) is very appealing when we are problem solving together. But explicitly discussing strengths and weaknesses to lay out a successful goal-setting plan is a "delightful, self-revealing, self-examination, reflection and critical thinking skills that some students may not have early in their college careers. The Socratic approach to advising can be helpful in this circumstance, since it involves a method of negative hypothesis elimination" that can help students and their students reach this reflective stage together to "become self-aware thinkers" and "more autonomous, independent and resilient." (Spence and Spence, 1998: 83). Uncovering faulty thinking and embracing humility instead of egocentrism in order to reach an informed, honest decision is not always easy. It doesn’t always yield perfect results, either, just like real life. I particularly enjoyed reading the practical scenarios, which illustrated specific cases and deepened my knowledge of the stages of these three — appreciative, coaching, and Socratic — types of advising. Advising transcends writing letters of recommendation, signing forms and providing PIN numbers to complete major requirements and graduate school. I hope that college and departments provide additional supportive materials, such as this book, to young and seasoned faculty alike. We can always update what we are doing, and learn and share effective advising techniques. — Mónica López-Anuarbe, assistant professor of economics Facilitating Seven Ways of Learning, A Resource for More Purposeful Student, in Every Class, Every Day James R. Davis and Bridget D. Arend, Sterling, Virginia: Stylus Publishing, 2013. Facilitating Seven Ways of Learning promotes the idea that “teaching succeeds when learning occurs” and offers strategies for instructors to bring about effective learning. The premise of the book is that teachers should consider desired learning outcomes for their course or course segment, and then choose the “way of learning” that fits with those outcomes. While offering some historic perspective, the book focuses on offering concrete ideas to facilitate each way of learning. I read closely the section on “cultivating problem-solving and decision-making abilities.” One of my primary goals in teaching chemistry is have students learn how to solve problems and analyze data, in class and in the laboratory. Though we practice problem solving during class, and students have opportunities to work more problems outside of class, I find it can be challenging to guide their learning of the process of problem solving. This book provides a clear look at teaching and learning to solve problems through the use of mental models, a fairly simple way to diagram a route from defining the problem (initial state) to solutions (goal state) via possible solution paths. I like the idea
of being more transparent and purposeful about the steps involved in taking a problem apart and determining possible paths to a solution, and plan to try this in my class. I also will make sure that my assessment of problem solving stresses the process of problem solving as well as the outcome.

Davis and Arend also present an interesting section comparing novice and expert problem-solvers. Problem solving often requires specialized knowledge in a particular field, something that novices are working to possess. Apparently novice problem solvers have a harder time classifying problems, determining a particular field, something that novices have in common is that they are trying to apply knowledge in solving problems or working through case studies. It would be helpful if the authors had provided more of the information about how to facilitate this type of learning. — Tanya Schneider, assistant professor of chemistry

The New Science of Learning, How to Learn in Harmony With Your Brain


This short book should be required reading for all incoming first year college students.

Terry Doyle and Todd Zakrajek provide a succinct yet thorough review of the latest neuroscience research on how the brain processes information and utilizes it for learning and memory. Written for students, the book is essentially a ‘how to’ guide for success in college. Complex neuroscientific concepts are explained in a manner that does not require the reader to have background knowledge of the field and are illustrated using real-world contextual examples that students can apply to develop successful study and learning strategies. Each ten- to twenty-page chapter is divided into concrete sections that keep the reader’s attention and ends with a summary list of key ideas that serve as future reference points.

The authors explain the importance of distributed practice vs. cramming for learning course material, and the impact of sleep, nutrition, and exercise on learning and memory. They provide guidelines for students to develop effective study strategies such as chunking, patternning, and cause-and-effect relationships, citing research studies to support their strategies. Doyle and Zakrajek debunk the myth of multitasking and emphasize the importance of adapting from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset.

While some of the information from chapter to chapter is repetitive, important take-home messages like ‘the one who does the work does the learning’ and ‘you don’t have the luxury in college to pay attention only to what interests you’ are emphasized and re-emphasized in order to drive home points home. The book is specifically directed towards students of the ‘information age’ whose access to information and temptation by digital distraction are exploding at exponential rates.

The New Science of Learning is a short, information-packed reading that would be an ideal discussion topic for the start of a first-year seminar. In fact, after reading it I have decided to incorporate it into my own FYS in the Fall of 2014.

— Joseph Schroeder, associate professor of psychology

Introduction to Rubrics, An Assessment Tool to Save Grading Time, Convery Effective Feedback, and Promote Student Learning, 2nd ed.


This is a useful book, with ‘useful’ meant as a term of high praise. For those of us committed to providing thoughtful and individualized comments, but beleaguered by high stacks of papers and examinations to grade, rubrics can be a source of professional salvation. Stevens and Levi explain (and defend) the value of rubrics for designing and evaluating all kinds of assignments, learning opportunities, and teaching processes. They offer step-by-step guidance. And their illustrative examples, which extend across disciplines, are well chosen for their adaptability to diverse classes. Check this out!

Engaging Students as Partners in Learning and Teaching, A Guide for Faculty


Focusing on faculty – student partnerships, these three authors focus on the relationships between faculty and students engaged in collaborative teaching and research endeavors. Stressing the importance of respect, reciprocity, and responsibility, they draw upon their own teaching and research, and the experiences of innumerable others to argue for an approach to teaching that recognizes faculty expertise, honors student voice, and deep engagement. Readily acknowledging the countercultural elements of their recommendations, Cook-Sather, Bovill, and Felsen nonetheless persuasively maintain that partnerships have the potential to transform education, building participatory intellectual communities that are diverse, motivated, and invested in teaching and learning. This is a book that relates directly to independent and honors studies, and to continuing discussions of strengthening student intentionality in course selection.

Reviewers

Stanton Ching is the Margaret W. Kelly Professor of Chemistry, teaching courses in general, inorganic, and analytical chemistry. His current research is focused on porous nanostructured manganese oxides. Professor Ching has also been very active in intercollegiate athletics at the College as the Faculty Athletics Representative to the NCAA and as a former member of the NCAA Division III Management Council. Heddi Henderson is an associate professor of dance. The recipient of four Rhode Island State Council on the Arts Choreography Fellowships for excellence, she has performed and has had her work performed nationally and internationally. Her courses include Modern Technique, Composition, Improvisation, Anatomy, and Dance Writing. Aida Heredia is an associate professor of Hispanic studies. She has been awarded grants by Fulbright, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Fulbright-Hays Program for her research and publications on cultural representations of the Caribbean and the African diaspora in the Americas. Professor Heredia’s courses include Meditations on History, Arts and Politics in Latin American and the Caribbean and Literary Imagination and the African Diaspora in Latin America. Michael James is a professor of education whose courses include the seminars “Cultural Pedagogy” and “Education and the Revolutionary Project in Latin America.” His research has centered on public schooling in the United States within the larger context of class, race, and gender inequalities, capitalist development and political economy. Stephen Loomis is the Jean C. Tempel ’85 Professor of Biology. Nationally recognized as an outstanding teacher, Professor Loomis teaches a wide range of courses in biological sciences; his flipped classes include Organisms (Bio 195) and Human Physiology (Bio 282). His research centers on stress physiology of invertebrates and crayfishology. Mónica López-Anuarbe is an assistant professor of economics, whose teaching and research focuses on health economics, game theory, microeconomics, aging and long-term care, and intergenerational transfers. A major and minor advisor, she also advises independent and honors studies, developing conference papers and presentations with her students.

Tanya Schneider is an assistant professor of chemistry, teaching courses in biochemistry and organic chemistry. Her research centers on the biosynthesis of natural products, with a focus on the problem of antibiotic resistance.

Joe Schroeder is an associate professor of psychology and director of the behavioral neuroscience program. His research, which is conducted entirely with student collaborators, focuses on the development of behavioral pharmacology animal models. The recipient of the 2011 John S. King Teaching Award, he teaches a diverse set of courses including two first-year seminars, “Genius, Creativity and the Brain,” and “Global Environmental Justice: Toxins and the Nervous System.”
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when they come from radically different perspectives. I would extend such considerations beyond sexual violence to themes such as poverty, colonization and enslavement. In the same classroom, there may be students whose life experiences are being directly portrayed or are finding intense resonances with course themes. For other students, it may be a dearth of connection with these experiences that faculty seek to challenge to produce deeper understanding.

Content notes can help all students prepare by highlighting the issues that will be raised in class. Working together, we can develop a range of strategies to address the imperative of supporting student engagement with challenging topics.—Avril Baramel

References and Further Resources:

Using Exams to Improve Learning Across the Disciplines

The questions of exams and learning leads to questions of the academy, its purpose, and bigger questions about the possibility of teaching, knowledge, etc.

Most helpful … The discussion of the purposes we have for teaching in relation to the exams we give. We need to relate our purposes more closely and more transparently to the exams.

I think I should start giving exams?

What Makes a Liberal Arts Course?

Most interesting … thinking about understanding why the liberal arts tradition is important — beyond just as a of informing what we think it is important for students to learn.

For my teaching … To appreciate my relationship/modeling with my students.

For my teaching … To be more explicit about what I am doing and to make education more transparent. (And what makes it worth $50K?) I should continue to strive to be inspirational.

This prompted thought about whether every class should be taught from a “distinctive liberal arts perspective” — and what this could mean.

Talking Teaching

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help us think about discipline-specific issues.

This discussion fits very well with an initiative by NESCAC presidents to allow coaches to reach out to students of color when recruiting.

Most interesting … Discussion of making whiteness part of the discussion in the classroom, e.g. asking why are all the great scientists white and male?

Re-Envisioning First-Year Seminars: Piloting New Ideas

I came away with lots of new ideas. Ideas about structure and standards, & connecting among FYS’s.

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Classes, TRIPS & Poster Presentations

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concurrently with their peers from Professor Watanabe’s Okinawa group. Upon our return from Taiwan, however, the diet need to present meaningful findings made it necessary to prioritize each student’s individual project over following the course syllabus.

Jay: The title for my poster was “An Analysis of the Semantic and Phonetic Radicals of Chinese Characters” and it was written in Chinese. It looked at characters that are comprised of both semantic and phonetic radicals, where the semantic radical classifies the meaning of the character to some extent and the phonetic radical groups it in pronunciation.

All of the characters I studied, it is estimated that 70 to 90 percent fall within the category of semantic and phonetic character compounds. As a result, it becomes necessary for learners of Chinese as a second language to consider radicals, as they aid in character recognition and memorization. Radicals also provide an important historical context in which to consider the characters, culture, and language.

Did you coordinate the two classes?

Watanabe: One component of my grant proposal was to hold a conference that would share our experiences and findings with the college community. When I mentioned this component to my class in the first meeting, some of the students told me about the poster session they had done with another class. I then spoke with Noel Garrett. Rather than holding a conference with paper presentations, the poster session seemed more appealing. In the end, I was pleased with the way that the event turned out. As I was planning this event, I realized that Tek was taking his class to Taiwan, and we decided that we should have both of our classes present their work at this event.

King: Interestingly, our two groups of students visited lands that, to varying degrees, are considered marginalized. East Asian territories under well-established political and cultural centers, that is, China and Japan. Although the origins of the indigenous tongues—Austronesian and Japonic—are distinct, Taiwan and Okinawa are only 400 miles apart. It should therefore not be surprising that cross-group bonding was happening in cyberspace while we were 8,000 miles away from the CC campus.

What theme unified the students’ research projects? What did they want to teach through the poster conference?

King: I think, through the field activities, students discovered an authentic society in Taiwan, witnessed their perceptual and narrative tools sharpened in Chinese, and came back with deepened cultural knowledge to reflect on, to analyze, and to share with the college community.

Watanabe: Environmental degradation, warfare’s long effects, the struggle to make one’s voice heard, the pressures of a distorted economy: on islands of immense natural beauty on the one hand and rusty abandoned buildings on the other, Okinawans demonstrated resilience, humor, and a fervent commitment to overcome these trials, an optimism that has inspired the research that we shared through our conference. In Maggie’s project, for example, she delved into provocative artworks that expressed not only the horrors of the war, but also the survivors’ strength and hopes for a peaceful future.

Nelson: My poster is titled “World War II and the American Occupation: Reverberations in Contemporary Okinawan Art and Civil Society.” Okinawans remain subordinated under the United States presence and the national government’s security alliance with the U.S. Political channels are a largely ineffective means for Okinawans to express grievances, advocate for themselves, or share their perspective of the war. Therefore, Okinawans communicate their identity and beliefs, and continue to reconcile war trauma, occupation injustice, and current disenfranchisement through art and grassroots civil society organizations. My poster displays some of these initiatives, including art from the Sakima Art Museum and from the Okinawa Peace Memorial Hall, showing the historical narrative and the fervent anti-war commitment of the Okinawan people.

Would you do it again?

Watanabe: Definitely! While some Okinawans expressed surprise that I brought students to this small, economically disadvantaged prefecture—one that has not always been culturally Japanese—our group came away convinced that the challenges Okinawans are facing are ones that we too must embrace and confront.

King: It goes without saying, particularly with such passion from the participants as well as the generous support, advice, and encouragement from all the various constituencies of the College, which includes the Office of National and International Programs, the AAPP, the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures, the Academic Resource Center, the Office of Dean of Studies, and now the Center of Teaching and Learning!

Takahiro King is a senior lecturer in Chinese. His research interests focus on syntax and morphosyntax in Chinese and Japanese pedagogies. His classes extend across the complete Chinese language curriculum, from beginning to classical and didactic studies, alongside two course offerings in the linguistics minor, “Introduction to Language and Mind” and “Syntax.”

Takeshi Watanabe is an assistant professor of Japanese. His research interests center on premodern Japan and include the literary and visual interpretation of history. Recently, he has been working on the cuisine of classical and medieval Japan, and has two forthcoming book chapters on the topic. He is completing a book titled “Art History as well as History, and include "Cooking, Consuming East Asia, " From Tea to Connecticut Rolls: Japanese Culture through Food" and "The Performing Arts in Japan."
The Challenges of Difficult Sessions
Sometimes the tutor and the student don’t click. Other times, the student just comes back with the same paper, without making any changes. And it’s hard to help if the paper is due in an hour and needs more than a quick fix. But the key point is remaining positive, because otherwise the student feels like a failure. Everyone has the ability to bring something out on paper and we’re there to help students see that. We always want to end on a positive note, to stress that progress has been made.

It can also be difficult if you have a very specific assignment or paper, and the tutor doesn’t have that disciplinary background. It is definitely hard if the professor wants a very specific tone and style, which the student doesn’t understand. If the tutor offers advice, which the professor rejects, and the student gets a bad grade, it reflects back on the tutor. We are always referring students back to their professors, especially for these kinds of questions.

Ideas for Growth and Change
It’s good to have the Writing Center — not all schools have structured peer tutoring. If we were to expand, we could have writing tutors in specific disciplines. The Writing Center could be the hub with multiple branches, especially in the larger departments. That would bring disciplinary expertise into the Writing Center and it would open people’s eyes to seeing writing everywhere. Writing is part of every major. But there are also advantages when tutors work with students who are from disciplines other than their own. That situation sometimes makes it easier to concentrate on the writing as writing.

We need to encourage everyone, everyone, to explore free writing. It is a style of writing that is almost stream of consciousness; Faulkner and Kerouac are good models. I want people to write creatively, to find vitality and to explore their ideas and imaginings through words. They should write poetry, prose, everything. I want people to get outside the frame of writing for someone else and just write for themselves, because there is such relief and joy and happiness in writing creatively.

Writing is an important act and it needs to be salvaged from neglect. Not enough people do it — they haven’t even tried to do it because it seems intimidating, or because it seems an impersonal scholarly act. When I started, I started with stories, because we don’t exist as a people if we don’t have stories.

What Faculty Should Know about Peer Mentoring at the Writing Center
First, it takes a lot of initiative, even courage, for a student to come to us. It is hard to work with a stranger. The students that we work with are doing their best and want to do well.

Second, tutors can only do so much. We don’t always know the professors’ guidelines or preferences, even though we do ask students to bring prompts for the assignments to their sessions. We are always referring students back to their professors.

Third, we have the same goals as professors. We all want to help people become better writers. — Jack Hile ’14, Susan Jacob ’16, and Jessica Karpinski ’15

Key Aspects of the Biology Peer Mentoring Approach

Peer mentoring targets traditionally difficult academic courses rather than high-risk students. Students can gain help without being singled out or having to ask for individual assistance.

Peer mentors undergo training and are mentored by Academic Resource Center staff. Mentors attend six hours of training by the ARC learning coordinator throughout the semester and earn a tutoring certificate.

The peer mentors participate in all class meetings, meet regularly with ARC staff, and meet weekly with the faculty member teaching the course. The mentors know exactly what is being discussed/presented in class and are engaged as participants in the course.

They help facilitate class discussions and assist in problem solving in class. This allows the professor to significantly increase the in-class active learning component, particularly in a large class. Importantly, this also allows the mentors to become more approachable and credible with the students, and increases student attendance at mentor sessions.

The peer mentoring sessions are open to all students, are regularly scheduled each week, and start at the beginning of the semester. In this way, students can build the sessions into their weekly studying and get help even before the first exam. Mentors actively engage students in different applications of the course material and introduce students to a variety of learning strategies.