Evidence-Informed Initiatives and Activities
Selected Connecticut College Events & Workshops

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For more information about our programming, visit http://ctl.conncoll.edu/

Learning from the Wabash National Study
Arriving at an Institutional Narrative

Intellectual Climate & Challenge: What the Wabash Study Tells Us About Teaching & Learning at Connecticut College
Thursday, June 5th, 2008 :: 9:00 AM to Noon. Lunch served at Noon.

What does the first year of Connecticut College’s data from the Wabash National Study (WNS) tell us about how we teach and what our students learn? What insights can be gained by closely examining the evidence regarding student learning, and how do we, as a faculty, want to respond to this information? What have our students said in focus groups about their classroom experiences and about what keeps them engaged in their learning?
Facilitators include WNS Director Charles Blaich, Associate Director Kathy Wise, Roger Brooks, John Nugent, Michael Reder, and Julie Rivkin.

Grades, Grade Inflation, and Beyond
Wednesday, February 18, 2009 :: 8:30 am to 10 am
Hood Dining Room

Grades, grade inflation, and grade-related policies give rise to questions that have significance for individual faculty and for our institution as a whole. These include: What is the relationship between grading and “academic challenge”? Do grades influence student evaluations? Do grading practices impact enrollment patterns in departments and majors? Grades obviously matter; they can determine whether a student remains at the College, goes on to grad school, or receives a prestigious academic award. Yet, what does an “A” (or a “B” or a “C” or “D”) “mean”? Have grades been rendered, through inflation and the vagaries of evaluative criteria, largely meaningless?

What Do We Know about Student Learning at Connecticut College? What Would You Like to Know?
Wednesday, 26 May 2010: 3:00 PM to 4:30 PM, including drinks and hors d’oeuvres.

Connecticut College is the lead institution of a Teagle Foundation-sponsored grant, “Data into Action,” that is focused on making the myriad data colleges have about student learning useful for faculty. During this meeting, faculty will get a brief overview of the information we have about faculty teaching and student learning at Connecticut College. We will discuss what information would be most interesting and helpful for faculty to make improvements in their teaching and courses. DISCUSSANTS include Deborah Eastman, Marc Forster, Leah Lowe, John Nugent, Michael Reder, and Julie Rivkin.
Connecticut College is currently leading a multi-institutional Teagle Foundation “Systematic Learning” grant, “Data into Action: Using Assessment Data with Faculty to Improve Student Learning.” The purpose of this grant is to facilitate faculty ownership of student assessment data that institutions are already collecting, and to help systematize the ways in which faculty use that data to make decisions about enhancing curriculum, course design, and teaching to improve learning. Connecticut College’s specific focus of our grant is increasing intellectual rigor and academic challenge in the first year—a focus based on our results from our first-year Wabash National Study (WNS) data.

In discussions and focus groups with faculty, one of the challenges we have found with the data provided by studies Wabash and NSSE is that it is very “blunt.” In other words, even if faculty understand and “believe” the evidence these studies provide, they are unsure how the evidence should inform their own course design and teaching practices. In order to address this issue, in cooperation with John Nugent, our Senior Research Analyst (our Institutional Researcher), the Center for Teaching & Learning (CTL) decided to design and pilot a short student questionnaire for faculty to give their individual classes.

One of our goals of this close collaboration between Institutional Research and the CTL was to create a supplemental feedback form that could fit on one page and would take approximately 5 minutes for students to fill out. We also wanted this to be a project focused on improving individual faculty teaching—not a large-scale study that could in any way be used for evaluative purposes of Promotion & Tenure. Because this study relied on volunteers, those two conditions—brief and non-summative—were key to the participation and the project’s success.

We based the questions on specific areas of concern identified by our year-one WNS results, centered mostly on the mega-scale of “Intellectual Challenge and High Expectation,” but also including questions related to the NSSE DEEP scales and the mega-scale “Good Teaching & High Quality Interactions with Faculty.”

The first pilot group—mostly faculty associated with the CTL—administered the survey in Fall 2009; the following semester, Spring 2010, a slightly-revised and re-scaled supplemental survey was offered to anyone interested in administering it. In 2010-11 we worked on revising the form further based on individual and group feedback from the faculty in these two pilots groups. In the Spring 2011 we administered the most revised (and current) version of the survey—now 2 pages and with a few more student demographic questions and three open-ended questions at the end. We also changed the scale from 5 to 4 items and made the scale more descriptive; we also asked faculty to fill out the same form as their students, highlighting what practices they thought their course emphasized and guessing how their students would respond. To date (through Fall 2013), over 75 different faculty members participated, and we gathered data from more than 200 different courses—a total of over 3,700 surveys.

Following are two of the documents related to this initiative, the current survey itself, and directions for administering it. Although the original purpose of this study was to provide data to individual faculty members only, we also ran a variety of cross tabulations with the entire data set, looking at variables such as the gender and rank of the instructor, the level of the course, and the type of course (see page 10 for an overview of the data set). We shared these analyses with faculty participants, but together they decided not to share these comparisons beyond the group involved, because such analyses exceeded the original intention and design of the survey. We followed up these activities with a multi-part workshop designed to lead faculty through the revision of a course using, in part, the evidence they garnered by participating in this survey.

For more information about the Joy Shechtman Mankoff Faculty Center for Teaching & Learning, please visit our website at http://ctl.conncoll.edu/ or contact the director.
### SUPPLEMENTAL COURSE SURVEY - SPRING 2013

**COURSE/INSTRUCTOR:** ____________________________

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<th>Question</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Once during the semester</th>
<th>Twice during the semester</th>
<th>Once a month</th>
<th>Twice a month</th>
<th>Once a week</th>
<th>Continously during the semester</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Worked on a paper, project, or lab that required integrating ideas or information from various sources.</td>
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<td>2. Completed class reading assignments, writing assignments, or discussions that included diverse perspectives (different races, religions, genders, political beliefs, social or cultural views, etc.).</td>
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<td>3. Discussed readings, labs, materials, theories, studio work, or events associated with the class with the professor outside of regularly scheduled class meetings (for example, during office hours, during individual meetings, or via email).</td>
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<td>4. Discussed readings, labs, materials, theories, studio work, or events associated with the class with others outside of class (other students, in other classes, with family members or friends, etc.).</td>
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<td>5. Spent significant amounts of time on work for this course.</td>
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<td>6. Examined the strengths and weaknesses of my own views on a topic or issue.</td>
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<td>7. Tried to better understand someone else's views by imagining how an issue looks from his or her perspective.</td>
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<td>8. Learned something that changed the way I understand an issue, concept, or activity.</td>
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<td>9. Received regular feedback from the professor about my work or academic performance in a timely manner.</td>
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<td>10. Felt challenged by the professor or the course to think about new ideas and to learn.</td>
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<td>11. Felt challenged by the professor or the course to do my best work.</td>
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**Are you currently working for pay (either on campus or off)?** Yes [ ] No [ ]

**Are you on an intercollegiate athletics team that was "in season" (competing) during this semester?** Yes [ ] No [ ]

Excluding time spent in class, approximately how many hours a week altogether do you spend on school work for all of your courses? [ ]

Excluding time spent in class, approximately how many hours a week did you spend this semester on work for this course? [ ]
How much has the coursework in this class emphasized or required the following mental activities?

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<td>12. <strong>Memorizing</strong> facts, ideas, or methods from the course and the readings so I could repeat them in pretty much the same form.</td>
<td>Very little</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>Quite a bit</td>
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<td>13. <strong>Analyzing</strong> the basic elements of an idea, experience, creative work, or theory, such as examining a particular case or situation in depth and considering its parts.</td>
<td>Very little</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>Quite a bit</td>
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<td>14. <strong>Synthesizing</strong> and organizing different ideas, information, or experiences into new, more complex interpretations and relationships.</td>
<td>Very little</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>Quite a bit</td>
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<td>15. <strong>Making judgments</strong> about the value of information, arguments, interpretive approaches, or methods, such as examining how others gathered and interpreted data and assessing the soundness of their conclusions.</td>
<td>Very little</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>Quite a bit</td>
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<tr>
<td>16. <strong>Applying</strong> theories or concepts to practical problems, to creative interpretations, or in new situations.</td>
<td>Very little</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>Quite a bit</td>
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**ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS**

What parts of this class contributed most to your learning? Why?

What advice would you give a student who was going to be taking this class next semester?

If you would like, please provide more detail about any of your answers to questions 1-16 above.
Suggestions for Administering the Student Survey

Suggested Instructions for
Intellectual Challenge/Academic Rigor
CTL Supplemental Student Feedback Form
Spring 2013

Many thanks for your willingness to administer this survey in your classes. The survey is one-page front and back.

Just a reminder: the data we are gathering are all confidential and for your use—in addition to PDFs of feedback forms with your students’ responses, you will also receive summary data about your students’ responses and comparisons to the responses from all students/courses (with no identifiers). We may also cross-tabulate the overall results to try to discern any trends and to offer faculty who are participating in this project more of an understanding of the overall trends. This cross-tabulation will be done in a way that masks the identity of any one faculty participant. We will not use the results in any form for evaluative purposes, although you may certainly utilize them any way you wish.

John Nugent and I estimate that the entire survey should take between 5 and 8 minutes to complete.

Two suggestions:

First: You may want to emphasize to your students that you won’t look at these until after you turn in your grades, just so they answer as honestly as possible.

Second: To get a sense of whether faculty members’ perceptions of their courses correspond with their students’ perceptions, while your students are filling out the survey (or before), we’d like you to fill out an “Instructor’s Copy” (and clearly identify it as such), doing three things:

1) Answer the questions in the manner that you think your students, on average, will respond.

2) Place a plus sign (+) next to the 3-5 questions that pertain to activities you think your course emphasized most.

3) Place a minus sign (-) next to the 3-5 questions that pertain to activities you think your course emphasized least.

***Please remember to clearly mark the copy you complete as “INSTRUCTOR’S RESPONSES,” then return it with the rest of the completed surveys.***

When your students are done filling these out you can put them in an envelope and send them to me (CTL, Box 5313) or keep them until after you turn in your grades, look them over, and then send them to me . . . your choice. During the upcoming semester, John Nugent’s office will compile the results and send you a report.

Thanks again for doing this. I really appreciate it, and I expect the results will continue to deepen the faculty’s understanding of how students perceive the intellectual challenge in our courses. If you have any questions, email or call me (x2122, cell 860-460-3440).

Best,

Michael
**Using Evidence to Inform Decisions**
Helping Faculty Use Assessment Data to Improve Student Learning

Examples from Summer Workshops, 2010-2013

**Connecticut College Students’ Attitudes about Discussion:Implications for Critical Thinking and Diversity with Carol Trosset**
Tuesday, 25 May 2010: 9:00 AM to Noon; lunch to follow.

Based on a new CTL survey of over 90% of Connecticut College’s first-year students during Fall 2009, this workshop draws upon Carol Trosset’s ground-breaking research on student attitudes about discussion that she conducted at Grinnell College. In that study, Trosset explores the student view of discussion as advocacy, their notion that the purpose of discussion is to reach a consensus, and the implications of these beliefs as possible roadblocks to productive classroom discussions, particularly those focused on diversity or controversial subjects. During the workshop Trosset will present the results of the survey of our students and we will discuss the implications and strategies for running productive classroom discussions. Guest facilitated by Carol Trosset, Institutional Researcher at Hampshire College. Trosset is the former Institutional Researcher at Grinnell College, where she taught Anthropology. Discussants include Anne Bernhard, Sunil Bhatia, Simon Feldman, Cherise Harris, Leah Lowe, John Nugent, Michael Reder, Andrea Rossi-Reder, and Abby Van Slyck.

**Using Evidence:**
**Changing Your Course to Improve Student Learning**
During this interactive workshop, participants will consider data about student learning (both at the College in general and information related to their courses specifically) and revise a course with the aim of improving student learning, academic challenge, and student engagement. Participants will consider the data, explore ways to incorporate evidence-based teaching and learning practices into their course, and then re-design a course. Follow-up workshops will be offered later in the summer and during the fall semester.

Part 1: Tuesday, 24 May 2011: 9:00 AM to Noon; lunch served at noon &
Part 2: Thursday, 26 May 2011: 1:00 PM to 3 PM; lunch served at noon.

Workshop leaders include: Bridget Baird, Anne Bernhard, Leah Lowe, John Nugent, Michael Reder, Sufia Uddin, & Abby Van Slyck.

**The Myths & Realities of Multitasking and How It Affects Student Performance**
Thursday 24th May 2012: 11 AM to 12:30 PM, lunch served at 12:30 PM

Can some people really function efficiently while attempting to consume more than one item or stream of media content at a time? Do multitaskers process information differently than non-multitaskers? Is there a limit to the number of simultaneous streams of media information an individual can process? These questions are especially relevant when considering the education of digital natives of the i-generation. This and other research will serve as an introduction for a discussion of how to deal with today’s multitasking student in the classroom and how to prepare them for a rapidly changing, digital work environment. Discussion led by Joe Schroeder.
Learning from the Wabash National Study:  
A Conversation with the WNS Working Group  
Tuesday 22\textsuperscript{nd} May 2012: 1 PM to 3 PM, lunch served at Noon

The final report of the WNS Working Group represents a tremendous amount of effort and thought by our colleagues analyzing a substantial amount of evidence—both quantitative and qualitative—about student learning and experiences here at Connecticut College. Their analysis offers insight into the education we offer—both what works and for whom, and what we can do better. It also contains specific recommendations related to policy and programs, additional areas of research, advising, and faculty involvement with admissions. Please come and discuss the report’s implications for introductory classes, First-Year Seminars, advising, the structure of General Education, and admissions, as well the authors’ own thoughts on the implications on their findings for teaching and learning at Connecticut College. *Discussion led by Dean of the Faculty Roger Brooks, and featuring members of the WNS Working Group, including Maria Cruz-Saco, Ron Flores, Heidi Henderson, Carrie Kent, Julie Rivkin, Bill Rose, and Stuart Vyse.*

Sleep Patterns and the Factors Affecting Them in Connecticut College Students: What Impact Does Sleep Quality Have On Academic Performance?  
Tuesday 22\textsuperscript{nd} May 2012: 10:30 AM to Noon, lunch served at Noon

Students enrolled in Psychology of Sleep (PSY204, Spring 2012) kept a sleep journal and used personal electroencephalographic monitors to collect sleep stages data over the course of the semester. How does the amount of light, deep and dream-state sleep correlate with reported stress levels, alertness, exercise, caffeine and alcohol intake, etc? How does the sleep of Conn students compare to students on other campuses? More importantly, how does sleep quality affect academic performance and measures of learning and memory in Conn students? Did students apply what they learned in the course to improve their personal sleep patterns? A report on these and other interesting findings from the first Psychology of Sleep course will be reported and discussed. *Discussion led by Joe Schroeder.*

Using Your Student Evaluations to Improve Your Courses  
Thursday 23\textsuperscript{rd} May 2013: 8:30 AM to 10:30 AM, breakfast served at 8 AM

We all receive student evaluations, but how helpful are they really in improving your course design and teaching? Many of us read our student evaluations and then put them aside, perhaps noting a few helpful suggestions or possible improvements for the next time we teach. But using this information in a more intentional and systematic manner can be challenging. This hands-on workshop will discuss strategies for more intentionally utilizing the feedback you receive from students about the courses you teach. Both the All-Campus Evaluation (ACE) and the CTL Supplemental Course Survey contain information about student experiences that can be interpreted in light of current research on effective teaching practices. Such practices can also provide an analytic framework for interpreting student responses to questions on both the ACE and the CTL surveys, and for designing—and assessing—new teaching practices. *Facilitated by Christine Chung, Ruth Grahn, John Nugent, & Bill Rose.*
Selected Events from Our Faculty Discussion Series

Helping Students Overcome Barriers to Learning
Friday, March 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 2007  
10:00 am – 11:20 am  
Hood Dining Room

Our students face a number of challenges that can prevent them from performing well academically, including learning disabilities, substance abuse problems, and personal crisis. How do students’ problems or challenges outside of class affect their experiences inside the classroom? What can we do to educate ourselves about the challenges facing students today? Come meet with faculty and staff from Student Health Services, Disabilities Services, and Counseling Services to learn more about the issues facing our students, and to participate in an important dialogue between faculty and representatives from Student Health Services.

\textit{Featured discussants:} MaryAnne Borrelli, Blanche Boyd, Sue Duques, Ruth Grahn, Cate Moffett, and Janet Spoltore.

CC: \textit{Challenge and Curiosity in Teaching}
Wednesday, 4 November 2009, from 11:50 AM to 2 PM Alice Johnson Room

\textit{How can we stimulate students’ intellectual curiosity and challenge all students in our classes, especially when students have different levels of preparation and different interests?}

Come share your views on how to achieve this goal, while discussing the report and recommendations of the Faculty Working Group on Academic Challenge. How does faculty engagement with students outside the classroom, the intellectual climate in the residence halls, and the broader presentation of the College impact this issue of academic challenge? Recent data from the Wabash National Study indicate that students’ perceptions of intellectual challenge and academic rigor are surprisingly low at Connecticut College. What are your experiences as you assess teaching-and-learning in your classrooms, office hours, and more informal conversations? How have you responded to student evaluations of their workload and your grading? What is a rigorous course? How might the faculty and the College strengthen its commitment to intellectual growth and development among our students?

\textit{Co-sponsored by the Faculty Working Group on Academic Challenge.}


FROM EVALUATING TO IMPROVING
Wednesday, 2 November 2011, 11:50 AM to 1:30 PM  
ERNST COMMON ROOM

\textit{What are the best practices in utilizing teaching evaluations—of all kinds—to improve teaching & learning?}

There is an abundance of evidence about teaching and learning at Connecticut College, from peer evaluations to student teaching evaluations to campus surveys, to name just a few. How can we best utilize and share this information to refine the classroom experience for faculty and for students? Discussants and participants will reflect on their own experiences in using these measures, sharing their insights about the ways in which empirical data can be used to enhance the substance and the form of our teaching. \textit{DISCUSSANTS INCLUDE ...} Bob Askins, Anne Bernhard, Mohamed Diagne, Ruth Grahn, Christopher Hammond, Chad Jones, Andrea Lanoux, John Nugent, Abby Van Slyck, and Dana Wright. \textit{Co-sponsored by FSCC.}
How do close parent-child relationships impact teaching & learning at Connecticut College?

In a recent *Atlantic* article, psychotherapist Lori Gottlieb observes that “indicators of self-esteem have risen consistently since the 1980s among middle-school, high-school, and college students,” as have those of narcissism, anxiety, and depression. Among the circumstances contributing to these seemingly contradictory developments are parenting philosophies that stress encouragement and comfort, often to the exclusion of challenge, that define well-being as being “better than everyone else,” and that foster insecurity by providing endless praise. We will discuss our own experiences with such students, and how to both challenge and support their learning. DISCUSSANTS INCLUDE ... Theresa Ammirati, Marc Forster, Dirk Held, Eva Kovach, Andrea Lanoux, Nina Martin, Don Peppard, Andrea Rossi-Reder, and Janet Spoltore.

“I WORK HARDEST WHEN I HAVE A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH THE PROFESSOR”
MOTIVATING STUDENTS, ESTABLISHING RELATIONSHIPS & SETTING BOUNDARIES
Friday, 24 February 2012: 11:50 AM to 2:00 PM  
Hood Dining Room

What do students mean by having a “personal relationship” with faculty? What does it involve for faculty members? Research suggests that Connecticut College students work harder and learn more when they know that a professor cares about them as individuals. More generally, evidence suggests that the student-faculty relationship provides a foundation for effective teaching and learning. What are the best ways to establish and maintain this important pedagogical relationship? Carefully chosen readings, thoughtfully prepared lectures, and extensive feedback on student work all depend, to a significant extent, upon the qualities of this relationship. But what are the boundaries for this association? This conversation will draw on evidence from several surveys conducted at the College and will feature the insights of faculty colleagues who have taken a relational approach to teaching, even in larger courses.

THE FIRST YEAR:
WHAT ARE WE DOING IN OUR 100-LEVEL COURSES?
FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 1, 2013: 8:30AM TO 10:15AM  
Ernst Common Room

First-year students entering Connecticut College embark on a year filled primarily with 100-level courses. The first year is essential because it shapes students’ perspectives on the college and is a critical time for student retention. These 100-level courses currently serve both as introductions to majors and as general education courses for non-majors. In this event we discuss how we can more carefully consider the nature and goals of these 100-level courses. Can the same course address the needs of majors as well as the much larger group of non-major liberal arts students? Can we rethink the way introductory courses work? How can we ensure that 100-level courses are of the highest possible quality and are placed in a liberal arts framework that addresses the needs of non-majors? The Teagle Data Into Action Summer Working Group, which has been considering these issues while working with data on the first year experience at Connecticut College, will join us in this discussion.

For more complete documentation of all of these initiatives and further examples of evidence-informed programming and workshops, go to [http://ctl.conncoll.edu/evidence](http://ctl.conncoll.edu/evidence), or, visit the Connecticut College Joy Shechtman Mankoff Faculty CTL website by going to “ctl.conncoll.edu” and clicking on “CTL Resources” in the upper left-hand corner, and choose “evidence.”
Sample of a Decade-Long, Evidence-Informed Campus Initiative

Based in large part on our NSSE results and our enrollment patterns, in April 2004 Connecticut College voted on a new General Education program that included first-year seminars (FYSs). That May the CTL began workshops to support faculty teaching those seminars, including offering workshops that shared research into effective teaching first-year students and best practices in seminar design. After the results of our first-year data in 2007 from the Wabash National Study, we began to incorporate that data about student experiences into our workshops and discussions.

Workshop May 2010 Camp Teach & Learn

In 2010, after 6 years of focusing mostly on teaching FYSs, we ran a workshop geared towards all faculty teaching first-year students in general, not only FYSs. Because of faculty interest, the workshop was followed up with a study group, led by CTL Faculty Fellow Abby Van Slyck. Faculty read *Teaching First-Year College Students*, by Bette LaSere Erickson, Calvin B. Peters, & Diane Weltner Strommer (Jossey-Bass, 2006) and agreed to try at least one new teaching method or idea mentioned in the book, with follow-up meetings to share their changes in practice and discuss the results.

**Teaching & Challenging Our First-Year Students:**
**FYSs, Introductory Courses, & Beyond**
Tuesday, 25 May: 1:00 PM to 3 PM; lunch served at noon.

This year we have expanded the topic of our annual workshop to go beyond First-Year Seminars. We will bring together both experienced faculty and faculty new to the FYS Program to discuss a variety of topics, including designing courses that both challenge and support first-year students, helping them make the academic transition from high school to college, effectively using writing and discussion, and advising. Experienced faculty will talk about what surprised them most about teaching first-year students, what they thought they did that was most effective, and what they plan to do differently next time. *Discussants include* Anne Bernhard, Simon Feldman, Leo Garofalo, Leah Lowe, John Nugent, Andrea Rossi-Reeder, Steve Shoemaker, Abby Van Slyck, & Stuart Vyse.

This summer workshop was followed-up by a reading group and several meetings during the upcoming semesters. Each participant piloted a new approach to teaching first-year students based on *Teaching First-Year College Students*. Following is an article from our CTL Newsletter that highlights the work of three participating faculty.

For more complete information about this initiative, including various documents from the workshop, visit the CTL website and look under “Resources” and “Evidence” for the document “CTL Teaching First Year Students Programming.”