

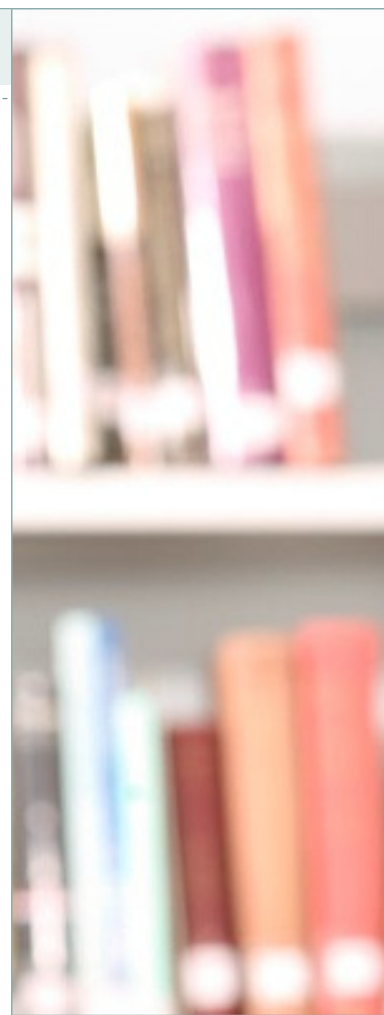
WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM COLLEAGUES IN DIFFERENT DISCIPLINES AND COLLEGES

The three of us co-directing the Academy for Teaching and Learning Excellence believe that we can learn much about teaching from observing our colleagues in different disciplines and colleges. During the teaching demonstrations ATLE staged last semester, we learned from a mathematician how games might be used to teach difficult concepts, such as probability; we learned from a professor of educational leadership how technology, especially streamed video, can enhance Web CT teaching; we learned from a philosopher how popular culture in the classroom can enhance reading Plato and discussing ethics; we learned from a speech-communication professor how small-group work can contribute to both classroom discussion and the construction of community-based knowledge; and we learned from a business professor how case work and cooperative learning can help students learn how to develop a marketing plan.

We learn from one another, then, not how to teach a particular content or disciplinary discourse; instead, we learn how we might fold in new teaching methods and strategies to the classes we teach. We learn how we might better enhance student learning.

This semester, please mark your calendars for the following luncheon and teaching demonstration date (from 11:15-1:00).

March 20th—College of Science and Mathematics



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SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST

- **March 20th**
College of Science and Mathematics Teaching Demonstrations

FYE COURSES BENEFIT FACULTY AND STUDENTS

- Students tend to persist in their college careers, affording them knowledge and skill for further success.
- FYE courses tend to build community among faculty and students.
- Students taking FYE courses feed into Learning Community Designed courses that also enhance student persistence.
- Departments meet students early in their academic careers and could promote their own disciplines thus possibly obtaining additional majors.
- Departments or colleges offering FYE based courses tend to retain students and increase their student semester credit hours (SSCH).
- Students develop speaking and writing skill and are better prepared to begin college work within a particular discipline increasing their persistence to graduation.

FYE: A PATH TO RETENTION AND STATE FUNDING

A new proposal has been introduced recommending a required three-hour First Year Experience (FYE) course for all entering students. This recommendation is based on recent national and UALR research that shows three-hour FYE courses increase student retention and persistence through graduation. The issue of student retention and graduation is especially relevant for UALR. Beginning July 1, 2009 state funding formulas will target institutions with higher graduation and retention rates for funding increases. This new funding rubric is problematic for UALR in light of a recent study that indicates UALR ranks at the bottom of retention and graduation rates in Arkansas. For the 2000-2006 cohort, UALR retained 29.8% of its students in their first year. The average rate is 46.3% with a high of 59.5%. UALR ranks second to last out of fifteen similar institutions across the nation, including University of New Orleans, University of Memphis, and University of Missouri-St. Louis, with a retention rate of 56% for first-year students and a graduation rate of 23.92%.

Many at UALR believe that requiring a three-hour FYE course will increase UALR's retention and graduation rates. Six studies completed on the UALR campus from 1994 until the present consistently recommend a FYE course as one way to help students persist in their academic careers. This belief is backed by national and local research. Schnell, Seashore, Louis and Doetkoff found that college students who took a three-hour FYE course graduated at a higher rate than a matched group of students who were not enrolled in the course. Likewise, a Noel-Levitz survey showed colleges with three-hour FYE courses averaged a retention rate of 46%. These findings are backed by Habley and McClanahan's results that showed students who took a three-hour FYE course said it had the greatest impact on keeping them in school.

UALR statistics support this research. First-year students who take UALR's current three-hour FYE course (PEAW 1300), show a persistence rate of 60% to 80%. A 31% to 51% increase over UALR's average retention rate of 29%. UALR's Systems Engineering department has developed its own FYE course and indicates the persistence rate for students rose from 40% to 81% during its initial offering.

While it is evident that FYE courses help students stay in college and graduate, a cookie-cutter approach for all courses is not the answer. Within the proposal, is an avenue for departments to develop their own FYE course. This allows departments to meet students early in their academic careers and influence them to become majors. The department would then receive the student semester credit hours from these courses. While there may not be much time for a department to develop a FYE course this year, we expect many depart-

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ments may want to develop a course for the next academic cycle.

Another avenue to get involved in the FYE movement is to teach a FYE course through University College (UC). Although the learning objectives for the UC courses are already in place, faculty could follow the Harvard method of teaching through questions, content, and problems generated from their own areas of study. This method creates an opportunity for faculty to promote their discipline as a possible major for students.

Because the benefits to students and the University are proven, the FYE proposal recommends that all entering students be required to take some version of an FYE course. Once students take a FYE course whether it is through UC or departmental, the student's FYE requirement is fulfilled. The student would not need to take another FYE course even if they change majors. The three hour FYE course would fulfill the required elective hours in almost every area of study. Thus, most students would not be required to take additional hours.

The new FYE proposal is about helping students. Ample research shows that FYE courses improve student's retention and graduation rates that affords them knowledge and skill for future success.



PROPOSED FYE LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In the new FYE proposal, the following learning objectives are stated:

- Students will develop an awareness of the University, its organizational structure, and its responsibilities. In addition, students will learn about college life and their responsibilities.
- Students will prepare for community involvement through an understanding of the purpose and goals of service learning, and actively participating in service learning projects.
- Students will develop a sense of belonging to the academic community by becoming aware of the academic, personal, city, and University publications and resources including, but not limited to, Career Links, the writing center, financial aid, testing services, the bookstore, the cashier, the Office of Campus Life, and the Bailey Center.
- Students will learn critical thinking skills in a reflective essay, develop memory techniques using textbooks, and develop sophisticated test taking skills.
- Students will prepare for the future by looking at interests, skills, aptitudes, and thinking about career possibilities.
- Students will gain personal development techniques. This will be accomplished by setting personal, professional, and time management goals; learning personal finance management; learning to recognize personal value systems; learning the appropriate use of passive, assertive, and aggressive behavior; learning to develop inclusive relationships; and learning stress management techniques.

FUNDING FOR PUBLICATION

While the idea of soliciting funds for scholarly publication is recoiling, be aware that many, if not most, university presses are now told by their university administrations that they will not be permitted to lose money. It is now common for major university presses (not vanity presses) to request a subvention, or financial subsidy, before making a commitment to publish.

When applying for funding, keep the following points in mind:

- Spend some time researching the various organizations, foundations and institutes to which you will send your proposal. In your cover letter, demonstrate a familiarity with the work of the organization.
- Remember that most people reading these proposals are not academics; keep the language jargon-free.
- Avoid false modesty, but do not claim more for your work than you are able to deliver.
- Make use of university resources. Network with colleagues in and out of your department. UALR's Office of Research and Sponsored Programs can assist you in locating possible outside funding.
- Be creative and persistent; do not get discouraged. For every one successful proposal, it is typical to receive one or two rejection letters.
- Receiving a modest grant (\$1,000) might mean a solid piece of scholarship gets published.

Adapted from "Funding for Publication," by Stanislaw G. Pugliese, *Official CTSE Newsletter*, Spring 2008, Vol. 4, 1

TEACHING BEYOND THE TIME AND SPACE BOUNDARIES OF OUR CLASSES

People unfamiliar with what college teachers actually do with their time might be surprised to learn that, for many of us, teaching goes well beyond the ordinary time and space boundaries of our classes. Indeed, it is in extra-classroom teaching that we can contribute greatly not only to our students learning, but also to their persistence and their success once they leave the university.

Here are some of the things we do, or should be doing, to contribute fully to the learning and persistence of our students:

- Remain open to e-mail and telephone communication with students.
- Stick around after class to answer questions and continue the discussion with interested students.
- Meet outside of class with small working groups of students to facilitate discussion, project-based learning, etc.
- Be available to meet with students during hours other than office hours, especially if students have time conflicts with office hours.
- Be willing to make library visits with students who are attempting to do difficult research projects.
- Do the same kind of written work we ask our students to do, and be open to modeling what we do as scholars and sharing our own published work with students.
- Support students' efforts to get scholarship aid, to apply to graduate schools, or to find fulfilling jobs by writing well developed and thoughtful letters of recommendation.
- Learn as many student names as possible and converse with students as we go about our daily travels on campus.
- Endeavor to include students in our own research and writing whenever possible.

If we "only connect" with our students, good things are bound to happen for them and for us.

A CAMPUS COMMITMENT TO UNIVERSAL DESIGN

In our last article, we discussed the social model of disability and how the Disability Resource Center has implemented the principles of universal design, and provided some suggestions on how faculty can implement these same principles into their courses. In this edition, we broaden our perspective to consider how we can make the shift from the medical model of disability to the social model of disability for the campus at large.

Some of the ways in which we can all work together to make this vision a reality are to

1. Adopt a formal campus-wide commitment to universal design and publish a summary statement on key web pages and in undergraduate and graduate catalogs. An example of such a statement is—*The University of Arkansas at Little Rock is committed to the creation of usable, equitable, inclusive and sustainable learning environments. We promote the principles of universal design for the betterment of all members of our diverse campus community, including people with disabilities and other identity groups.*
2. Infuse universal design concepts into faculty and staff training—especially training that relates to course design, Web design, information delivery, and service delivery.
3. Implement a campus diversity initiative that includes Disability as an aspect of the diversity that is an integral part of our campus community.
4. As staff and faculty orientation materials are developed, incorporate messages that promote this philosophy as a part of our campus culture.

It is our hope that by taking a formal position on this important issue, we can work together to create a tipping point that make will this paradigm the primary lens of our campus community and will make our vision become our reality. For the complete rationale and recommendations, go to www.ualr.edu/shift/commitment.htm



A community that excludes even one of its members is no community at all. —Dan Wilkins

UPCOMING EVENTS

- **March 20th**
Teaching Demonstrations
- **April 16th**
Teaching Fellows luncheon &
ATLE Annual Report

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GET YOUR STUDENTS THINKING

Getting students thinking often requires “priming the pump.” During the March 4th Teaching Demonstration Luncheon, Dr. Judith A. Hayn, an assistant professor of secondary education, illustrated how she encourages students to begin thinking about the lecture before it even begins. Dr. Hayn uses the KWL method—What do you **K**now? What do you **W**ant to learn? What did you **L**earn? By using a video produced by a former UALR student, Roy Boney, Dr. Hayne prompts learning about the Cherokee Nation’s Trail of Tears using the KWL method.

Before showing the video, Dr. Hayn writes *K* on the board asking, “What do we know about the Trail of Tears?” After the answers are listed, Dr. Hayn writes *W* and asks, “What do we want to learn about the Trail of Tears?” After showing the video, Dr. Hayn writes *L* asking, “What did we learn about the Trail of Tears?”

Because there is not a right answer to these questions, a collaborative discussion occurs leading students to look at the Trail of Tears in different ways.

During the same Teaching Demonstration Luncheon, Dr. Scranton, a professor in the political science department, discussed how she encourages students to think outside the box by analyzing Bill Clinton’s Vietnam anti-draft letter through three different sources: Clinton’s original letter, a *New York Times* article reporting the letter, and a section from *All’s Fair: Love, War, and Running for President*. Scranton asks her students to answer a series of essay questions that require an analytical synthesizing of all three text. The exercise is designed to get students to critically think about the meanings of the texts and move into a deeper level of examination beyond the first bit of text that “answers” the question. This method of teaching urges students to think outside of their own perspective. It also prompts students to think about each author’s purpose in writing the text and how this purpose influences the text.

Each of these teaching methods are highly adaptable to any content area and learning situation. These methods can be especially useful in establishing fruitful class discussions, which offer a “low stakes” environment for students to creatively answer questions. For more information about these teaching methods, or other teaching demonstrations, please contact any of the ATLE Co-directors. The Co-directors contact information is found in the box to the left.