Why a Collaborative Environment Makes Sense in Student-Centered Learning

Lisa Nalbone

The sometimes subtle, sometimes not so subtle, shift from teacher-centered to student-centered methodology has challenged me to find more creative ways to engage students in a manner that is meaningful to them, supporting theories that students learn best when they have a stake in what they learn. In teaching various levels of Spanish, one of the strategies I enjoy incorporating deals with collaborative learning. The appeal of this learning environment spans the disciplines and the levels within those disciplines.

After years of asking students to write or talk about common, everyday subjects, I realized in speaking to my students and colleagues that students usually enjoy the challenge of discussing a topic in a new light. For example, instead of asking students to write about their plans after graduating, I simply modify the assignment to make it pertinent to class. I ask them to interview one or two classmates and find out about their plans and then incorporate their findings in the writing assignment. To include the element of technology, depending on the course set-up, the information gathering portion of this type of assignment could be accomplished through NetMeeting (this works especially well in the collaboration classrooms) or through the WebCT forums.

The ‘together everyone accomplishes more’ idea behind the concept of ‘team’ certainly applies in this kind of activity that taps into so many more skill levels than a typical first-person narrative from personal experience. It builds the identity of class as a group of individuals working together rather than students just working for themselves. Students may begin to take ownership in their class and, more important, their learning. You might not be surprised to learn that students “need to go to class because someone might be depending on me for information and I need to get the information from someone else,” instead of going to class for the notes or to fulfill an attendance requirement.

When working from the premise that students rely on each other, the feedback students give me falls into several categories:

- They are introduced to vocabulary/themes with which they might not be so familiar, thus enhancing their language and overall learning experience.
- The interview material provides a working outline from the beginning of the assignment.
- Students like getting to know their classmates better.
- Classmates use a variety of grammatical structures and verb forms that the writer might not otherwise use. The writer also has to modify these structures to fit in with the reporting aspect.
- Interviews provide a forum for speaking practice.
- This assignment encourages students to become better listeners.
- It encourages them to demonstrate forethought in the interview process, to make sure they have enough quality material to include in the final product.
- Interviews provide a forum for speaking practice.

...continued on page 2
Peter Telep is a member of the Writer’s Guild of America, is a produced television writer, and is the author of over twenty novels ranging from television and film adaptations to science fiction, medical drama, and military action/adventure. He earned his B.A. and M.A. from the University of Central Florida and has been a GTA, Visiting Instructor, and is currently a Permanent Instructor of English at the University of Central Florida.

When I first began teaching composition as a GTA, I believed that asking for student input regarding the course or even on a particular assignment would damage my credibility. I could never admit to students that I wasn’t sure about the course or materials. I assumed they needed a champion who was as confident as he was unequivocal. Thus, I forged on, grading papers and becoming frustrated when students “just didn’t get it.” At semester’s end, I would pour over my student evaluations, note common strengths and weaknesses, and become more determined to improve next semester.

Of course, like many of you, I shared my triumphs and challenges with my colleagues. During a conversation with Dr. Beth Young, Director of the University Writing Center, I learned that she polled her students weekly to see how well they liked the course and what help they needed regarding particular concepts. She distributed index cards and asked students to respond anonymously. She also discussed the results of the poll with her students and made adjustments to the course as needed. At that time, I was teaching a course with a web component, so I decided to develop a polling system via WebCT’s quiz function. Every Friday, students logged on anonymously and discussed the course without fear of jeopardizing their grades or alienating themselves from me. Sure, my ego was occasionally bruised, but I was able to make course adjustments that better met the students’ needs without sacrificing my credibility. In fact, students commented on how the process made me seem more credible because I was open-minded enough to listen to their suggestions and actually implement them. Moreover, this was my first step in realizing that I did not need to be the sage on the stage with all the answers. And while the students needed me for a grade, I needed them just as much to make the course more effective.

This semester in my Fiction Writing class, I’ve continued the process of ongoing student assessment. I created several rubrics for critiquing stories, distributed them to the class, and asked students to make suggestions for improvement before we actually use them in our workshop. Once I receive their suggestions, I revise the material, post it online, and have students comment again to see if we had reached the final draft. Not only have I been seeking their advice to improve the course materials, but I have been modeling the importance of drafting and revision—key skills in any writing course.

Admittedly, it does take some courage to ask students what they think of your course and course materials, and you will undoubtedly receive some comments that are not as useful as others. However, engaging in this process allows you to address challenges early on so that there are no shocking surprises come course evaluation time. Additionally, the process empowers students by making them active participants in how they will be taught and graded. They begin to own the course, trust in you and the materials, and consider the process fair.

But most of all, getting students involved in how you teach the course demonstrates your care and concern for them. I don’t know about you, but I became an instructor to change the world—one student at a time.

While this last item applies specifically to the foreign language environment, we all have students who maintain a level of disconnectedness with the class, who are introverts, who are more apt to work independently, etc. Collaborative activities encourage everyone to participate. Everyone must be involved.

Although this process might seem daunting at the beginning, the best advice I have received is to start small, knowing that a successful shift to student-centered learning is an evolutionary process. By incorporating collaborative activities, I have gained a deeper appreciation for the class both on the merits of the individual students as well as of their accomplishments as they work together.

"The aim of curriculum is to awaken, not 'stock' or 'train' the mind. That goal makes the basic unit of a modern curriculum the question. Given the intimidating, easily trivialized mass of knowledge, what the modern student needs is the ability to see how questions both produce and point beyond knowledge (whether one's own or the expert's). Educational progress would thus be measured as the ability to deepen and broaden one's command of essential questions by marshaling knowledge and arguments to address them." —Grant Wiggins

**Dude, How’s My Class?**

**Peter Telep**
Stacey Tantleff Dunn, Associate Professor in Psychology, joined UCF in 1996 from the University of South Florida. Her primary research is in body image and eating behavior. She is greatly interested in the scholarship of teaching and has won both a Graduate Teaching Award and a TIP award.

Confessions of a Working Parent: Balancing Academia and Family
Stacey Tantleff Dunn

As a faculty member with a 4 year-old and baby on the way, I can't help but reflect upon how lucky I feel to have a job that truly allows me to balance family and work... at least to some degree. Flexible hours, ample vacation days, and a sense that time spent at work has meaning and value have all made it possible to keep working hard, even when the sweet face of my little girl makes me want to never leave her side.

In many ways, the idea of having it all is a fantasy. After all, trying to do it all results in constant sacrifices. In my first few years at UCF I literally worked all the time. Not because I was a masochistic freak or because I was overcome by fears of not making tenure, but because I loved what I was doing. The fact that my husband was also an assistant professor in the same department with an office next door to mine made it really easy to spend late nights and weekends in the office, trying to figure out how to be a good academician and relishing in the freedoms and challenges of the job. My senior colleagues would tease us that we really needed to develop some hobbies and get out more, but we mutually decided that we were doing what we enjoyed and what felt good, and we had the rest of our lives to find hobbies.

Well, we finally found a "hobby"—making and sustaining a family. We were a little nervous to announce we were pregnant, but we received an enormous outpouring of support. Our friends and family were amazing, and Mike, but people quickly understood that we were a team and were both faced with the challenges of being working parents.

Then came baby. It was quite a transition. At work I felt like I was not giving 100% and therefore was failing. At home I felt like I was not fully present for my daughter when I worked about work. In addition to juggling two roles I loved, I was dealing with the adjustment of going from a workaholic to a guiltaholic.

And then, something miraculous started to happen. My teaching evaluations were still really good. My articles were still getting published. My progress toward tenure was still right on track. My daughter was thriving and meeting many developmental milestones earlier than expected. I began to realize that the countless hours I spent in class preparation may not have been what made my classes any good. There was more to measuring students' learning than obsessing over their essay exams. Not having endless time to complete various tasks meant I had to get them done more efficiently, not necessarily less effectively. In most of the ways that mattered, I was still doing a good job.

So I tried to convince myself. It wasn't until something else started to happen that I truly became at peace with my everlasting balancing act. On the back of my teaching evaluations students were writing that I was "an outstanding role model." Female students at the end of class were saying that they were "inspired" by how I seemed to handle being a working mom. They hoped to someday pull off the same balancing act. My colleagues weren't sure it were really possible. Even more astounding were the comments from other junior faculty. "Thanks for paving the way" some of them said just months before announcing their own pregnancies. Within a very short time, five other faculty members had babies and nearly all of them frequented my office to show off baby pictures, compare stories, or just talk about the balancing act we're all struggling with.

Overall, I genuinely consider being a parent and a faculty member to be two incredible gifts for which I am eternally grateful. Both take a lot of time, passion, skill, and commitment, and both give back an enormous sense of meaning and fulfillment (albeit in different ways). We at the Faculty Center are really interested to learn more about your own balancing act. Log on to the Faculty Forum so we can talk about and exchange ideas!

Effective Teaching Award Portfolios
Terri Fine

Terri Susan Fine has been on the UCF faculty since 1989. She has served on numerous teaching award committees during that time. Her own interests focus on American politics with an emphasis on women and pol-itics, political parties and public opin-
Members of teaching award committees are much like desperate car shoppers. They want complete and accurate information presented respectfully. They will make the award determination, but will not likely favor your case if there are problems with your file. What makes teaching awards different from other professional awards, such as promotion and tenure, is that there is a limited number of teaching awards. Arguably, anyone applying for promotion or tenure may receive it regardless of how many others the department committee members consider for the same change in status are regarded by the committee. This is not true for teaching awards. Here are some approaches to abiding by the CAR rule:

1. Be complete. If you state that you were involved in a project, taught a course, presented a paper at a conference, made a presentation to a community group, served on a community board, reviewed a textbook or served as a faculty sponsor for a student group, make sure to include documentation with your file. File documentation can be anything from pages from web sites that include your name and the date you accessed it to notes from publishers and community groups. Committees look for such documentation, and it will distinguish you from those who do not provide it.

2. Be accurate. Make sure that you were involved in whatever activities that you say you were involved in and provide proof (See #1 above). All too often, a candidate for an award will claim that s/he was involved in a task (such as co-

Valerie Sims is an Assistant Professor in the Psychology Department. She studies human-computer interaction with her many undergraduate and graduate student collaborators. Her favorite video game is Tetris.

L et me begin by saying that I am not anti-technology. In fact, I revel in it. I love my laptop and my stereo system, and I am proud to say that I am a great video game player. I love creating elaborate computer demonstrations to impress prospective car shoppers. They too want complete and accurate information presented respectfully. They will make the award determination, but will not likely favor your case if there are problems with your file. What makes teaching awards different from other professional awards, such as promotion and tenure, is that there is a limited number of teaching awards. Arguably, anyone applying for promotion or tenure may receive it regardless of how many others the department committee members consider for the same change in status are regarded by the committee. This is not true for teaching awards. Here are some approaches to abiding by the CAR rule:

1. Be complete. If you state that you were involved in a project, taught a course, presented a paper at a conference, made a presentation to a community group, served on a community board, reviewed a textbook or sponsored a group, make sure to include documentation with your file. File documentation can be anything from pages from web sites that include your name and the date you accessed it to notes from publishers and community groups. Committees look for such documentation, and it will distinguish you from those who do not provide it.

2. Be accurate. Make sure that you were involved in whatever activities that you say you were involved in and provide proof (See #1 above). All too often, a candidate for an award will claim that s/he was involved in a task (such as co-

PI of a grant) only for a member of the committee to already know that such information is false (the person may have worked on the grant, but was not listed, or did not serve as PI). Being inaccurate, even once, will cast a shadow over your entire file and will significantly reduce your chances of receiving the award.

3. Be respectful. This means that you should respect that the committee is comprised of your peers who are even busier than you (after all, they are sitting on the award committee!). Provide details to back up any claims that you make. We are all great teachers; saying that you are a great teacher disregards the committee because it is a general statement that has little substance.

Another way to respect the committee is to provide any and all relevant information in the file. In this age of the Internet, it is too easy to tell the reader to seek out another source (such as “see my web page”) rather than provide the information in the file. Remember that reading award files takes time. Do not ask the committee to take extra time by perusing your web site or course home page. When you tell the committee to look somewhere on the Internet, and the room housing the award files has no computer, you are being disrespectful of the committee members’ time.

These tips do not guarantee that you will win a teaching award; however, they will improve your chances because you will make it easier for any committee member to understand and appreciate the merits of your case.

University of Central Florida Division of Graduate Studies
UCF Program Announcement

Awards for Excellence in Graduate Teaching and Research

The Division of Graduate Studies is pleased to announce the availability of new awards for excellence in graduate student teaching and for excellence in thesis and dissertation research. Specifically, four new awards have been established for graduate students, as follows:

- **Award for Excellence by a Graduate Teaching Assistant:** This award recognizes excellence by Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) who are responsible for a laboratory or other similar teaching assignment under the direction of a faculty member who serves as the instructor of record. It focuses on the quality of the assistance provided by the GTA to the lead instructor and students in the class.

- **Award for Excellence in Graduate Student Teaching:** This award recognizes excellence in teaching by Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) who have independent teaching responsibilities. It focuses on the quality of the student’s teaching activities and the academic contributions to those activities.

- **Award for Excellence in Graduate Student Research:** This award recognizes excellence in research by Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) who have independent research responsibilities. It focuses on the quality of the student’s research activities and the academic contributions to those activities.

- **Award for the Outstanding Master’s Thesis:** This award recognizes excellence in the master’s thesis. It focuses on the quality and contribution of the completed master’s thesis.

- **Award for the Outstanding Dissertation:** This award recognizes excellence in the doctoral dissertation. It focuses on the quality and contribution of the completed dissertation.

These recognitions will be awarded for the first time within the current academic year. Application materials must be submitted by Friday, February 6, 2004, and award recipients will be announced at the Research Forum to be hosted by the Graduate Student Association and the Division of Graduate Studies on March 22-23, 2004. University-level award winners will receive $1,000 cash awards.

Detailed information regarding the eligibility requirements, application processes, submission materials, and deadlines will be forthcoming from the Division of Graduate Studies soon. Watch for this information on the graduate website at www.grads.ucf.edu.

Summer Faculty Development Conference 2004

April 26, 27, 28, 29, 2004

The Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning will provide 120 $800/person grants for faculty members who are transforming courses or programs by emphasizing the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) or other innovations. Faculty will receive assistance for the completion of a project that modifies their face-to-face or web-enhanced courses or programs for the purpose of improving teaching, learning, assessment, and scholarship. Faculty members from all colleges are invited to apply.

This year’s themes include:

- **SoTL**
- **Service Learning**
- **Interdisciplinarity**
- **Diversity**
- **Engaging students, assessment, instructional technology, etc.**
- **Other**

Final decisions will be provided to all applicants by March 26, 2004.

UCF Relay For Life 2004

The Relay for Life is the American Cancer Society’s signature event and the number one non-profit special event in the country. UCF will host the Relay on April 3rd and 4th at the UCF track. If you are not on a team but would like to be, come join our team at the Faculty Center. For more information go to http://www.fctl.ucf.edu/events/relayforlife/.

Dr. Judy Welch, Dr. Alison Morrison-Shetlar, and Dr. Ruth Marshall are making another quilt as a gift for the Relay for Life. We are offering the quilt in a drawing which will be made on Friday evening, April 3rd at our Relay booth. If you would like to place your name in the bowl for the drawing to receive the quilt, please stop by the Faculty Center.

Proceeds go to Relay for Life Donations are welcome, but not required. Stop by the Faculty Center (CL1-207) and enter now!
Mentoring: Building Community and Supporting Success
Alison Morrison-Shetlar

Everyone needs mentoring in some way throughout their lives, be it professional or private. We look to each other for clarity of vision, guidance, and support because without these characteristics we lack goals, ambitions, or a desire to know more about a subject. We need to know that others have traveled the same paths and can act as guides in our own journeys. Mentoring is one of the most effective ways to support personal and professional growth.

Learning is the basis of mentoring, and must be nurtured and maintained. Mentors should not treat their mentees as recipients of information but as partners in the learning process. By sharing their knowledge and experiences, mentors act as role models for their mentees, providing guidance and support along the way.

Support can come in the form of a safe place where the mentor serves as an enabler for new ideas, thoughts, and approaches. It can also mean "to bear the weight of" and "to provide for or maintain," offering an opportunity for the development and success of an individual. We all need to share our successes and concerns with people who can look objectively at our situation and help us see our paths clearly. We must trust the people with whom we talk; otherwise, we cannot clearly articulate our wishes and desires.

Challenge is an essential element of the mentoring process. We should be critical of ourselves and our decisions; thus having someone as a sounding board for our ideas and beliefs is crucial to our success. Also defined as "a test of one’s abilities or resources in a demanding but stimulating undertaking," a mentor that challenges her/his mentee to think in new ways can promote informed risk-taking to foster growth.

How can a mentoring program be successful and sustainable? In higher education mentoring has to be seen as an integral part of an organizational culture that values learning. It has to serve the community and benefit the participants. Just like any good educational program, it has to have a focused, clear and concise mission or purpose with well-defined outcomes. Mentoring needs support from the faculty, dean, and university administration; participants at all levels should champion mentoring. If this occurs, everyone involved will benefit by increasing personal and professional satisfaction.

Throughout our lives there are people who have touched us in some way, changed our direction, or challenged our beliefs. These people have taught us things about ourselves and our lives. They care about us and act as a mirror for us to see ourselves. Mentoring is one of the most important and rewarding parts of our lives. We need mentors to be successful and sustainable.

What are the roles and responsibilities of the mentor and mentee? Both need to be mutually accountable for their roles in the mentoring process. You should only mentor one or two people at a time; too many become a drain on time and energy. Mentors should use a variety of methods to support, challenge, and provide vision for the mentee.

The only way to help students become ethical people, as opposed to people who merely do what they are told, is to have them construct moral meaning... That’s why dropping the tools of traditional discipline, like rewards and consequences, is only the beginning. It’s even more crucial that we overcome a preoccupation with getting compliance and instead bring students into the process of developing and justifying ethical principles.

Alfie Kohn, Beyond Discipline: From Compliance to Community

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Alfie Kohn, Beyond Discipline: From Compliance to Community
Attention faculty! Do you want to get in shape this spring? Improve your health? Or make some new friends? Join UCF-Fit. You design your own program and keep track of your own progress. We give you the tools and resources to accomplish your goals and provide you with the opportunity to make some new friends while doing it—and earn some prizes, too!

You design your own program and keep track of your own progress. On-campus activities include:

- Weight loss
- Cardio
- Stretching
- Body composition (Body Fat, Body Water, Bone Mineral, and Lean Body Mass)

Newly Restructured International Service Center to Implement SEVIS Requirements for International Students and Scholars

Stricter government regulations after September 11th have brought about increased government monitoring of international students. According to Dr. Patricia Bishop, Vice Provost for Student Affairs, new international students and returning international students will be required to register with the International Student and Scholar Services (ISSS). As of this January, UCF professors must provide all new international graduate students with the yellow information packet containing an Aliens Report Form, which they must fill out and return to ISSS office to get an I-20 Form which can later be used for a visa application. Full-time international students are also required to register for a minimum of 9 credits per semester, while part-time students cannot register for fewer than 6 credits per semester.

Graduate students who are writing dissertations, taking one course for credit, or 3 online credits per semester counting toward the full-time course load. Students may take additional online courses above the full-time course load. International students in the Engineering and Computer Science programs may only register for 3 credits of FEEDS courses. They may register for more than one FEEDS course if the additional course is designated "L" (for Live FEEDS modality) in which attendance will be taken, for which one live class or exam is mandatory. Generally, faculty are not required to monitor attendance of international students; ISC will monitor students’ enrollment and status updates. Faculty who assist international students should encourage them to apply to programs for which more than 25% of the courses are offered online because the SEVIS requirements will make it difficult for those students to complete that program in a timely manner.

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Faculty Focus

Teaching peer-observed. Simply contact the Center and let us know when you would like someone to come to your class. This is rather an informal way to have an external review of your teaching. We also offer videotaping of the class if you wish.

For example, full-time enrollment, (12 credits per semester for undergraduates; 9 credits for graduate students) is required of every international student on F and J visas. A full course load is not required in the summer (exceptions are GTA's and GRA's).

Students on an F-1 visa will only be allowed to take one distance learning (online) course or 3 online credits per semester counting toward the full-time course load. Students may take additional online courses above the full-time course load. International students in the Engineering and Computer Science programs may only register for 3 credits of FEEDS courses. They may register for more than one FEEDS course if the additional course is designated "L" (for Live FEEDS modality) in which attendance will be taken, for which one live class or exam is mandatory. Generally, faculty are not required to monitor attendance of international students; ISC will monitor students' enrollment and status updates.

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All you need to do is sign up, and follow the road to better health.

Graduate Teaching Assistant Certificate Program

The Karen L. Smith Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning invites Graduate Teaching Assistants to enroll in our GTA Certificate Program. Students will receive group and individualized instruction by Faculty Center staff and experienced UCF professors, as well as textbooks and materials. GTA’s will attend a 12 week, non-credit program with a $200 stipend.

Themes

1. Presentation skills and practice
2. Balancing the many roles of TA’s
3. Course design and management
4. Delivery of instruction, teaching strategies
5. Learning differences among students
6. Instructional technology (hands on)
7. Giving assessment and soliciting feedback
8. Building a peer support network
9. Professional survival skills, ethics, legal issues

Interested graduate students should register online at <www.fctl.ucf.edu/events/gta> and follow the instructions. Written approval from department chair or graduate coordinator is required. Participation is limited, so please enroll early.

Two classes will be offered:

- Wednesdays (4:30-7:20pm) Jan. 14th - April 7th
- Fridays (1:30-4:20pm) Jan. 16th - April 9th

Please register by January 9th.

Faculty Forum

Don't forget to check out the Faculty Forum, our online faculty discussion board. Sign on and join the discussions!

http://forum.fctl.ucf.edu/forum/

Classroom Observations

The Center is offering an opportunity for teachers and those observing their teaching to have an external review of your teaching. We also offer videotaping of the class if you wish.
Mentoring: Building Community and Supporting Success
Alison Morrison-Shetlar

Everyone needs mentoring in some way throughout their lives, be it professional or private. We look to each other for clarity of vision, guidance, and support because without these characteristics we lack goals, ambitions, or purpose. We all have mentors who help us see that there is an option other than status quo. Being a mentor can be a good thing—right? Well, only if there is investment of time and energy and a commitment to the success of others. Only then will the mentor be a powerful force for change.

Learning is the basis of mentoring, and must be nurtured and maintained. Mentoring should be a journey for the mentor and mentee, weaving a web of interaction with each other and with others with whom we have already built a strong connection. We choose mentors who have achieved what we want to achieve, or whom we admire for their personal characteristics, or for any number of other reasons. The next step is to build that relationship into a mentoring partnership that will benefit both participants. Mentors should use a variety of methods to support, challenge, and provide vision for the mentee.

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Challeng is an essential element of the mentoring process. We should be critical of ourselves and our decisions; thus having someone as a sounding board for our ideas and beliefs is crucial to our success. Also defined as “a test of one’s abilities or resources in a demanding but stimulating undertaking,” a mentor that challenges her/his mentee to think in new ways can promote informed risk-taking to foster growth.

A person with experience can often open doors to others who are not as well informed. A person with intelligent foresight can take mentees to thought processes that they may not have considered and provide insights and directions only experience affords. Helping people create a vision for themselves and supporting them to be successful in that vision is one of the most satisfying parts of mentoring.

How can a mentoring program be successful and sustainable? In higher education mentoring has to be seen as an integral part of an organizational culture that values learning. It has to serve the community and benefit the participants. Just like any good educational program, it has to have a focused, clear and concise mission or purpose with well-defined outcomes. Mentoring needs support from the faculty, deans and university administration; participants at all levels should champion mentoring. If this occurs, everyone involved will benefit by increasing personal and professional satisfaction.

Throughout our lives there are people who have touched us in some way, changed our direction, or challenged our beliefs. These people have taught us things about ourselves and our lives; they are the catalysts for change. As a mentor, we must be ready to give of ourselves, of our time and energy and a commitment to the success of others.

Learning is the basis of mentoring, and must be nurtured and maintained. Mentoring should be a journey for the mentor and mentee, weaving a web of interaction with each other and with the participant’s personal ecology. One component of successful mentoring is trust. You have to trust the people that you are mentoring or that mentor you. So, to establish a mentoring relationship, often we look to people with whom we have already built a strong connection. We choose mentors who have achieved what we want to achieve, or whom we admire for their personal characteristics, or for any number of other reasons. The next step is to build that relationship into a mentoring partnership that will benefit both participants. Mentors should use a variety of methods to support, challenge, and provide vision for the mentee.

Support can come in the form of a safe place where the mentor serves as an enabler for new ideas, thoughts and approaches. It can also mean “to bear the weight of” and “to provide for or maintain,” offering an opportunity for the development and success of an individual. We all need to share our successes and concerns with people who can look objectively at our situation and help us see our paths clearly. We must trust the people with whom we talk; otherwise, we cannot clearly articulate our wishes and desires.

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Don't Throw Out the Baby with the Bathwater

Valerie Sims

Valerie Sims is an Assistant Professor in the Psychology Department. She studies human-computer interaction with her many undergraduate and graduate student collaborators. Her favorite video game is Tetris.

L et me begin by saying that I am not anti-technology. In fact, I revel in it. I love my laptop and my stereo system, and I love my tea making machine, etc. Engaging students, assessment, instructional technology, etc. I revel in it. I love my laptop and my stereo system, and I love my tea making machine, etc. Engaging students, assessment, instructional technology, etc. I revel in it. I love my laptop and my stereo system, and I love my tea making machine, etc. Engaging students, assessment, instructional technology, etc. I revel in it.

1. Be complete. If you state that you were involved in a project, taught a course, presented a paper at a conference, made a presentation to a committee, served on your own committee board, reviewed a textbook or served as a faculty sponsor for a student group, make sure to include documentation with your file. File documentation can be anything from pages from web sites that include material you used, to notes from publishers and community groups. Committees look for such documentation, and it will distinguish you from those who do not provide it.

2. Be accurate. Make sure that you were involved in whatever activities that you say you were involved in and provide proof (See #1 above). All too often, a candidate for an award will claim that s/he was involved in a task (such as co-

PI of a grant) only for a member of the committee to already know that such information is false (the person may have worked on the grant, but was not listed, or did not serve as co-PI). Being inaccurate, even once, will cast a shadow over your entire file and will significantly reduce your chances of receiving the award.

3. Be respectful. This means that you should respect that the committee is comprised of your peers who are even busier than you (after all, they are sitting on the award committee!). Provide details to any claims that you make. We are all great teachers; saying that you are a great teacher disrespects the committee because it is a general statement that has little substance. Another way to respect the committee is to provide any and all relevant information in the file. In this age of the Internet, it is too easy to tell the reader to seek out another source (such as “see my website”) rather than provide information in the file. Remember that reading award files takes time. Do not ask the committee to take extra time by perusing your web site or course home page. When you tell the reader to look something up on the Internet, and the room housing the award files has no computer, you are being disrespectful of the committee members’ time.

These tips do not guarantee that you will win a teaching award; however, they will improve your chances because you will make it easier for any committee member to understand and appreciate the merits of your case.

Members of teaching award committees are much like desperate car shoppers. They too want complete and accurate information presented respectfully. They will make the award determination, but will not likely favor your case if there are problems with your file. What makes teaching awards different from other professional awards, such as promotion and tenure, is that there is a limited number of teaching awards. Arguably, anyone applying for promotion or tenure may receive it regardless of how other candidates for the same change in status are regarded by the committee. This is not true for teaching awards. Here are some approaches to abiding by the CAR rule:

The Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning will provide $120,000 in grants for faculty members who are transforming courses or programs by emphasizing the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL), assessment of learning outcomes, service learning, interdisciplinary work, or other innovations. Faculty will receive assistance for the completion of a project that modifies their face-to-face or web-enhanced courses or programs for the purpose of improving teaching, learning, assessment, and scholarship. Faculty members from all colleges are invited to apply.

This year’s themes include:

- SoTL
- Service Learning
- Interdisciplinarity
- Diversity
- Engaging students, assessment, instructional technology, etc.
- Other

Final decisions will be provided to all applicants by March 26, 2004.

University of Central Florida
Division of Graduate Studies
UCF Program Announcement

Awards for Excellence in Graduate Teaching and Research

The Division of Graduate Studies is pleased to announce the availability of new awards for excellence in graduate student teaching and for excellence in thesis and dissertation research. Specifically, four new awards have been established for graduate students, as follows:

- Award for Excellence by a Graduate Teaching Assistant: This award recognizes excellence by Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) who are responsible for a laboratory or other similar teaching assignment under the direction of a faculty member who serves as the instructor of record. It focuses on the quality of the assistance provided by the GTA to the lead instructor and students in the class.
- Award for Excellence in Graduate Student Teaching: This award recognizes excellence in teaching by Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) who have independent teaching responsibilities. It focuses on the quality of the student’s teaching activities and the academic contributions to those activities.
- Award for the Outstanding Master's Thesis: This award recognizes excellence in the master's thesis. It focuses on the quality and contribution of the completed master's thesis.
- Award for the Outstanding Dissertation: This award recognizes excellence in the doctoral dissertation. It focuses on the quality and contribution of the completed dissertation..

These recognitions will be awarded for the first time with the current academic year. Application materials must be submitted by Friday, February 6, 2004, and award recipients will be announced at the Research Forum to be hosted by the Graduate Student Association and the Division of Graduate Studies on March 22-23, 2004. University-level award winners will receive $1,000 cash awards.

Detailed information regarding the eligibility requirements, application processes, submission materials, and deadlines will be forthcoming from the Division of Graduate Studies soon. Watch for this information on the graduate website at www.graduate.ucf.edu.

The Relay for Life is the American Cancer Society’s signature event and the number one non-profit special event in the country. UCF will host the Relay on April 3rd and 4th at the UCF track. If you are not on a team but would like to be, come join our team at the Faculty Center. For more information go to <http://www.fctl.ucf.edu/events/relayforlife/>.

Dr. Judy Welch, Dr. Alison Morrison-Shetlar, and Dr. Ruth Marshall are making another quilt as a gift for the Relay for Life. We are offering the quilt in a drawing which will take place on April 26, 27, 28, 29, 2004. If you would like to place your name in the bowl for the drawing to receive the quilt, please stop by the Faculty Center.

Proceeds go to Relay for Life. Donations are welcome, but not required. Stop by the Faculty Center (CL1-1207) and enter now!
Stacey Tantleff Dunn, Associate Professor in Psychology, joined UCF in 1996 from the University of South Florida. Her primary research is in body image and eating behavior. She is greatly interested in the scholarship of teaching and has won both a Graduate Teaching Award and a TIP award.

Confessions of a Working Parent: Balancing Academia and Family

As a faculty member with a 4 year-old and baby on the way, I can't help but reflect upon how lucky I feel to have a job that truly allows me to balance family and work...at least to some degree. Flexible hours, ample vacation days, and a sense that time spent at work has meaning and value have made it possible to keep working hard, even when the sweet face of my little girl makes me want to never leave her side.

In many ways, the idea of having it all is a fantasy. After all, trying to do it all results in constant sacrifices. In my first few years at UCF I literally worked all the time. Not because I was a masochistic freak or because I was overcome by fears of not making tenure, but because I loved what I was doing. The fact that my husband was also an assistant professor in the same department with an office next door to mine made it really easy to spend late nights and weekends in the office, trying to figure out how to be a good academician and relishing in the freedoms and challenges of the job. My senior colleagues would tease us that we really needed to develop some hobbies and get out more, but we mutually decided that we were doing what we enjoyed and what felt good, and we had the rest of our lives to find hobbies.

Well, we finally found a "hobby"—making and sustaining a family. We were a little nervous to announce we were pregnant, but we received an enormous outpouring of support. Our friends, colleagues, and family were so happy for us. Even more astounding were the comments from other junior faculty. "Thanks for paving the way" some of them said just months before announcing their own pregnancies. Within a very short time, five other faculty members had babies and nearly all of them frequented my office to show off baby pictures, compare stories, or just talk about the balancing act we’re all struggling with.

Overall, I genuinely consider being a parent and a faculty member to be two incredible gifts for which I am eternally grateful. Both take a lot of time, passion, skill, and commitment, and both give back an enormous sense of meaning and fulfillment (albeit in different ways). We at the Faculty Center are really interested to learn more about your own balancing act. Log on to the Faculty Forum so we can talk about and exchange ideas!

Effective Teaching Award Portfolios

Terri Fine

Effective Teaching Award Portfolios

Terri Susan Fine has been on the UCF faculty since 1989. She has served on numerous teaching award committees during that time. Her own teaching and research interests focus on American politics with an emphasis on women and politics, political parties and public opinion.

During the summer of 2002 I experienced, or rather my car experienced, the unfortunate circumstance of five breakdowns in six weeks. Soon thereafter, I decided to buy a new car. The process was difficult. I had not purchased a car in several years, and I knew that the car dealers "had my number" because I was driving an older car that would have...
While this last item applies specifically to the foreign language environment, we all have students who maintain a level of disconnection with the class, who are introverts, who are more apt to work independently, etc. Collaborative activities encourage everyone to participate. Everyone must be involved.

Although this process might seem daunting at the beginning, the best advice I have received is to start small, knowing that a successful shift to student-centered learning is an evolutionary process. By incorporating collaborative activities, I have gained a deeper appreciation for the class both on the merits of the individual students as well as of their accomplishments as they work together.

Dude, How’s My Class?
Peter Telep

Peter Telep is a member of the Writer’s Guild of America, is a produced television writer, and is the author of over twenty novels ranging from television and film adaptations to science fiction, medical drama, and military action/adventure. He earned his B.A. and M.A. from the University of Central Florida and has been a GTA, Visiting Instructor, and is currently a Permanent Instructor of English at the University of Central Florida.

Have you ever asked your students for their input on how a particular assignment should be graded? Have you ever considered polling your students at the end of each week to see how your course might be improved?

When I first began teaching composition as a GTA, I believed that asking for student input regarding the course or even on a particular assignment would damage my credibility. I could never admit to students that I wasn’t sure about the course or materials. I assumed they needed a champion who was as confident as he was unequivocal. Thus, I forged on, grading papers and becoming frustrated when students “just didn’t get it.” At semester’s end, I would pour over my student evaluations, note common strengths and weaknesses, and become more determined to improve next semester.

Of course, like many of you, I shared my triumphs and challenges with my colleagues. During a conversation with Dr. Beth Young, Director of the University Writing Center, I learned that she polled her students weekly to see how well they liked the course and what help they needed regarding particular concepts. She distributed index cards and asked students to respond anonymously. She also discussed the results of the poll with her students and made adjustments to the course as needed. At that time, I was teaching a course with a web component, so I decided to develop a polling system via WebCT’s quiz function. Every Friday, students logged on anonymously and discussed the course without fear of jeopardizing their grades or alienating themselves from me. Sure, my ego was occasionally bruised, but I was able to make course adjustments that better met the students’ needs without sacrificing my credibility. In fact, students commented on how the process made me seem more credible because I was open-minded enough to listen to their suggestions and actually implement them. Moreover, this was my first step in realizing that I did not need to see the class in terms of the stage with all the answers. And while the students needed me for a grade, I needed them just as much to make the course more effective.

This semester in my Fiction Writing class, I’ve continued the process of ongoing student assessment. I created several rubrics for critiquing stories, distributed them to the class, and asked students to make suggestions for improvement before we actually use them in our workshop. Once I receive their suggestions, I revise the material, post it online, and have students comment again to see if we had reached the final draft. Not only have I been seeking their advice to improve the course materials, but I have been modeling the importance of drafting and revision—key skills in any writing course.

Admittedly, it does take some courage to ask students what they think of your course and course materials, and you will undoubtedly receive some comments that are not as useful as others. However, engaging in this process allows you to address challenges early on so that there are no shocking surprises come course evaluation time. Additionally, the process empowers students by making them active participants in how they will be taught and graded. They begin to own the course, trust in you and the materials, and consider the process fair.

But most of all, getting students involved in how you teach the course demonstrates your care and concern for them. I don’t know about you, but I became an instructor to change the world—one student at a time.

“The aim of curriculum is to awaken, not ‘stock’ or ‘train’ the mind. That goal makes the basic unit of a modern curriculum the question. Given the intimidating, easily trivialized mass of knowledge, what the modern student needs is the ability to see how questions both produce and point beyond knowledge (whether one’s own or the expert’s). Educational progress would thus be measured as the ability to deepen and broaden one’s command of essential questions by marshaling knowledge and arguments to address them.”

Grant Wiggins
The sometimes subtle, sometimes not so subtle, shift from teacher-centered to student-centered methodology has challenged me to find more creative ways to engage students in a manner that is meaningful to them, supporting theories that students learn best when they have a stake in what they learn. In teaching various levels of Spanish, one of the strategies I enjoy incorporating deals with collaborative learning. The appeal of this learning environment spans the disciplines and the levels within those disciplines.

After years of asking students to write or talk about common, everyday subjects, I realized in speaking to my students and colleagues that students usually enjoy the challenge of discussing a topic in a new light. For example, instead of asking students to write about their plans after graduating, I simply modify the assignment to make it pertinent to class. I ask them to interview one or two classmates and find out about their plans and then incorporate their findings in the writing assignment. To include the element of technology, depending on the course set-up, the information gathering portion of this type of assignment could be accomplished through NetMeeting (this works especially well in the collaboration classrooms) or through the WebCT forums.

The ‘together everyone accomplishes more’ idea behind the concept of ‘team’ certainly applies in this kind of activity that taps into so many more skill levels than a typical first-person narrative from personal experience. It builds the identity of class as a group of individuals working together rather than students just working for themselves. Students may begin to take ownership in their class and, more important, their learning. You might not be surprised to learn that students ‘need to go to class because someone might be depending on me for information and I need to get the information from someone else,’ instead of going to class for the notes or to fulfill an attendance requirement.

When working from the premise that students rely on each other, the feedback students give me falls into several categories:

- They are introduced to vocabulary/themes with which they might not be so familiar, thus enhancing their language and overall learning experience.
- The interview material provides a working outline from the beginning of the assignment.
- Students like getting to know their classmates better.
- Classmates use a variety of grammatical structures and verb forms that the writer might not otherwise use. The writer also has to modify these structures to fit in with the reporting aspect.
- Interviews provide a forum for speaking practice.

...continued on page 2