Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL)

Bruce Wilson

Bruce M. Wilson is an Associate Professor of Political Science. His primary research concerns Latin American political economy as well as the impact of judicial reform in Latin America. He is the editor of The Latin Americanist. He teaches classes in comparative politics and his teaching has been recognized by international, national, and UCF teaching awards. He has also published numerous articles on teaching.

I was drawn to the scholarship of teaching and learning early in my career at UCF as a result of two rapidly changing factors: first, UCF quickly became a huge university, which caused my upper division classes to expand from 20+ students to 70+; second, the tools available to me as a teacher were also changing. Principally, the internet became usable, my students were increasingly familiar with it, and access to computers, usable (if not user-friendly) communications software became available, and UCF set up the institutional framework and units to support faculty wishing to incorporate web-enhanced tools into their teaching.

Teaching the larger classes presented a series of problems and challenges that had not been present for the smaller classes. I sometimes felt that the students in the larger classes were being short-changed; there was necessarily less discussion or more lecture in class and student participation generally decreased as there was less interaction of students with each other or with me. If growth had presented the problem, I thought that computer-enhanced technology might present part of the solution. In my attempts to compensate for large class size I tried to reengage the students in the learning process through the creation of on-line discussion groups, interactive assignments, and simulations. I took advantage of the software supported by UCF, WebCT, that offered various functions allowing for the monitoring of students’ active participation. While colleagues at different institutions were often skeptical of the use of computer-mediated technology, I found it a useful supplement for my classes and a valuable tool in overcoming some of the challenges of teaching large classes. Over time I became convinced that the extra work in creating and administering these assignments was effective, but I only had anecdotal evidence to back up my perceptions. Examples of the online modules employed are discussed in Kerstin Hamann and Bruce M. Wilson (2003).

In 1999 I was a co-PI on a large grant from the Pew Foundation Program in Course Redesign Award to redesign and evaluate the department of Political Science’s General Education American National Government course. This class was traditionally taught three hours per week in a lecture format with up to 100 students. The redesigned format consisted of students spending only half the time in the classroom and using the rest of the class time to complete student-centered, interactive online modules. One part of the grant required us to evaluate the impact of the redesigned course on student learning outcomes. My co-PI, Dr. Philip H. Pollock, and I set up the evaluation in such a way that the reduced seat-time sections were compared with sections taught in the original format by the same instructors and with the same textbook. We were thus able to develop a quasi-experimental design holding as many variables constant as possible. We found that students actually learned more in the reduced-seat-time format than in the all-lecture format. The methodology and results are available in Bruce M. Wilson, Kerstin Hamann, and Philip H. Pollock (2000).

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This spurred my interest in the effects of the potential of active learning through online discussions for different courses. Together with Dr. Philip Pollock and Dr. Kerstin Hamann, I developed a research project that involved the coding of online discussions for different kinds of postings. Our focus here was particularly on the gender composition of the online discussion groups, and our research showed that students are more interactive in groups that are gender-balanced rather than the ones clearly dominated by women (due to course demographics, we were not able to assess groups that were almost entirely populated by male students).

In our early work in this area of male and female online discussion behavior, we analyzed data obtained from student postings to 50 discussion groups in three different upper-level comparative politics courses taught by two different instructors in multiple sections. This database allowed us to perform a content analysis of 1,908 messages containing 14,442 statements made by 453 students. We employed and trained four undergraduate students who coded the statements. To ensure the quality and consistency of the coded material, periodic tests were administered with all the coders coding the same content, which did produce a very high consistency rate across the coders. The methodology and results are available in Philip Pollock, Kerstin Hamann, and Bruce M. Wilson (2005).

I have found my research on teaching valuable and gratifying. As I try new things in the classroom, I keep wondering whether they "work". Substantively, my research on online teaching has helped me overcome much of my initial skepticism of utilizing instructional technology. I now use online components in all my courses, and based on my research, I am convinced that this truly enriches the students’ educational experience. The scholarship of teaching and learning allows me to assess my work as a teacher independently from grades and students’ course evaluations. I believe it has made me both a better teacher and a better researcher as I have found myself applying my research skills to a new context.

Bibliography
The Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning will provide sixty $500/person grants for faculty members who are transforming their courses. Faculty will receive assistance for the completion of a project that modifies their face-to-face or web-enhanced courses for the purpose of improving teaching, learning, and evaluation. Faculty members from all colleges are invited to apply. All participants will work in teams of at least three members and faculty are strongly urged to apply as teams. Individuals applying as such will be grouped with others working on similar projects.

Some themes for the conference include Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, Assessment, Research, Interdisciplinarity, Student Engagement, and Service Learning.

Faculty will receive support from staff in the Faculty Center, OR, CD&DWS, and the Library, who will provide a series of hands-on experiences designed to help explore teaching techniques and student participation activities that have proven effective in teaching subjects with multimedia or web supports, as well as in large or small class settings. Participants in this project will be invited to serve as mentors during the 2005 Summer Faculty Development Conference.

Final decisions will be provided to all applicants by November 19, 2004.

Faculty Center Showcases UCF Artists Linda Brant & Judy Welch

Linda Brant is a watercolor artist as well as a licensed psychologist. Her paintings are inspired by her reflections, her dreams and her observations of life in all its forms. Linda had been painting since childhood. Most of her paintings are done with a combination of watercolor, gouache, and pen and ink. Interlocking patterns and layers of dots and lines characterize her current style.

Judith K. Welch is an Associate Professor in the School of Accounting, College of Business Administration. She currently serves on the FCTL Advisory Board. She is actively involved in the creation and assessment of technology learning tools to promote learning. Judy is passionate about quiltmaking. Her fabric-art features traditional techniques, appliqué, and stained-glass effects.
Service-Learning at UCF 2002-2004

Linda Hargreaves

Linda Hargreaves coordinates the service-learning program at UCF. She has also worked with undergraduate research initiatives, the UCF common theme Brown v. Board: Cultural Awareness and Social Change, and is currently the campus liaison for The Washington Center in Washington, D.C. She has taught courses in composition, contemporary women's fiction, and women in drama. Linda graduated as a "nontraditional" student from Rollins College in 1997 and earned her master's degree in English Literature at UCF in 2001.

Service-Learning is a pedagogical approach that integrates learning objectives with civic engagement. Students are asked to apply their course curriculum to service in the community and reflect on the experience. As Dee Dee Rasmussen, Director of the Florida Campus Compact (a coalition of college and university presidents committed to the civic purposes of higher education) once commented to me over a Diet Coke, "It doesn't take a rocket scientist to understand the concept." It does, however, take a dedicated faculty member and up-front preparation to teach a service-learning course.

At UCF, we define service-learning as a teaching method that uses community involvement to apply theories or skills being taught in a course. Service-Learning furthers the learning objectives of the academic course, addresses community needs, and requires students to reflect on their activity in order to gain an appreciation for the relationship between civics and academic studies.

While there were several faculty members at UCF who used service-learning in their courses prior to 2002, most of the campus community was unfamiliar with this pedagogical approach until Dr. Rick Schell, Dean for Undergraduate Studies, received a $50,000 grant from the Florida Campus Environment (NTSC Tech. Rep. No. TR-86-014).

Service-Learning is particularly effective in increasing student motivation and retention. Students who participate in service-learning courses generally achieve higher grades than those who do not participate. This is true even for students who are not initially interested in the course content. Service-learning also helps to develop critical thinking skills by requiring students to apply theoretical concepts to real-world situations.

However, service-learning can also present challenges for both faculty and students. Faculty must be prepared to tailor their courses to include service-learning components, and students must be willing to devote time and effort to both academic and community responsibilities.

References


Morgan, B. (1986). "Measurement of Team Behaviors in a Navy
Grade Inflation: It's Not Just An Issue For The Ivy League

John Merrow

While back, Randy Cohen's regular column, "The Ethicist" in The New York Times Magazine, focused on the evidence that "grade inflation" is a big-time issue. A professor had asked whether he should raise grades because those he was giving were below the departmental average. And last week, students and professors at the University of Oregon debated whether grade inflation exists on that campus in an article for the student newspaper, The Daily Emerald. Even in the UK, The Telegraph questioned whether the university degree in England was losing its meaning because of grade inflation.

I've interviewed a number of students on this issue. Here's what I found: Matt Mindrum of Indiana University says he studied a total of eight hours for his four semester exams, while a colleague student, Bonnie Vanzler, says she studied for just 12. All four made the Dean's List at their respective institutions.

Finally, I think most would agree that scholars must possess a passion for their pursuits. I think most researchers have had the experience of delivering passionate presentations to glazed-over audiences. No one is as interested as us in our own scholarly works (if that makes any sense). It seems to me that certain academics really love the types of research that fall within the label of SoTL. Personally, I just became familiar with the term, SoTL, only to realize that I have been SoTLizing for almost ten years. The evidence that "grade inflation" is a big-time issue. A professor had asked whether he should raise grades because those he was giving were below the departmental average. And last week, students and professors at the University of Oregon debated whether grade inflation exists on that campus in an article for the student newspaper, The Daily Emerald. Even in the UK, The Telegraph questioned whether the university degree in England was losing its meaning because of grade inflation.

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Jason V. Tesone is an assistant professor with the Rosen College of Hospitality Management at UCF. His research areas are human resource management and technology.

In my view, there are four personal drivers that determine the focus of the academy. First, there is the researcher’s personal commitment to the research area, the motivation to teach, and the desire to disseminate findings. Second, there is the researcher’s perception of the value of the research area to the broader community, including the academic community, the practitioner community, and the public. Third, there is the researcher’s belief in the potential impact of the research findings, including the potential for policy change, the potential for commercial application, and the potential for social change. And the fourth driver involves the level of passion on the part of the researcher concerning his or her research area.

A quick search of the Patent Electronic Search System (PTDS) on the website of the United States Patent and Trademark Office shows that the University of Central Florida has been busy receiving patents. According to the USPTO’s website, from 1969-2000 the University of Central Florida was granted 75 patents. During that same period the University of South Florida was granted 117 patents and the University of Florida received 435.2 (patent number 6,039,541). In 2003 the University of Central Florida ranks 12th among all organizations in the state of Florida with 81 patents granted. The University of South Florida ranks 13th with 78 and the University of Florida charts at 4th with 157 patents. Some of the patents granted to the University of Central Florida include “Treatmeant for Breast Cancer” (patent number 6,703,426), “High Efficiency Ceiling Fan” (patent number 6,039,541), and “Garden Table” (patent number 6,394,006).

A quick search of the Trademark Electronic Search System (TESS) shows that the University of Central Florida holds at least 67 federal trademarks. Some of these marks include “Managed Stormwater is Goodwater”, “H204U”, “From Promise to Prominence”, and the Pegasus logo.

The Burnett Honors College welcomes faculty ideas to provide more service learning opportunities to Honors students. There are many advantages of teaching an Honors Service-Learning course. The small class size promotes a learning environment where you can work well together, forming a tight community and focusing on their goal of producing a high quality project. The Burnett Honors College welcomes faculty ideas to provide more service learning opportunities to Honors students.

A university education is not just about career preparation. It also prepares students to become productive, contributing members of society. By working on real projects that address real needs, wants, and desires, students gain the kind of hands-on experience that will better prepare them for life and their professional careers. One proven pedagogical approach that can be integrated into various disciplines is service learning, which offers an instructional technique to meet the common goals of the student, the university, and the community. Through service learning projects students can become full partners in the learning process. The Burnett Honors College welcomes faculty ideas to provide more service learning opportunities to their students.

At the Burnett Honors College you will find an interesting, diverse group of students who bring to class a unique array of talents. They are interesting, industrious students with problem solving skills, work ethic, and intellectual curiosity—all attributes and characteristics we all look for in our students. Additionally, you will find students from various disciplines who collaborate and can be afraid to take risks. However, the major benefit to faculty is the small class size: enrollment is limited to 20 Honors students.

In the Department of English, UCF, Mary Ellen Gomrad is an Instructor. She earned her master’s degree in the English Department’s Technical Writing program in 1999. Mary Ellen teaches composition and technical writing courses and integrates service learning throughout her course. She first began working for the English Department in 1994 as the Technical Writing Lab Manager. Since then she has been employed by the department in various capacities. In January 2000, she joined the English faculty as a Visiting Instructor and two years later she accepted an Instructorship with the department. In addition to her classroom teaching responsibilities, Mary Ellen has served as the Honors In The Major Thesis Consultant since 2000, working closely with HIM students as they complete their thesis requirements.

The resources of a PTDL prove crucial to the success of cash-strapped small businesses and independent inventors who can not afford to pay a third party for patent and trademark searches. However, a patent and trademark collection is not just for the use of inventors. The United States Patent and Trademark Office’s (USPTO) webpage reads, “Patent trends reflect the rise and ebb of society’s ever changing interests, habits, concerns, fads, and fumbles.” Historians and genealogists benefit from researching patents just as much as chemists and biologists. Patent research may also prove to be a fun and engaging assignment for students. All questions and comments regarding patents and trademarks may be directed to Jason Martin e-mail: jmjmartin@mail.ucf.edu.