

# Reflections

Newsletter of the Teaching Support Centre, The University of Western Ontario

NUMBER 57

FALL 2007



*Reflections* is the newsletter of the Teaching Support Centre at The University of Western Ontario.

Available online at  
<http://www.uwo.ca/tsc>

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## Ivory Tower Blues: A Discussion with James Côté

*James Côté is professor of Sociology at The University of Western Ontario. He has written extensively on youth and education, identity, and the challenges facing the higher education system. His latest book (with Anton Allahar), **Ivory Tower Blues: A University System in Crisis**, addresses issues of grade inflation and engagement in Canadian higher education.*

#### **Q: So, what's wrong with Higher Education in Canada?**

**A:** That's a big question. There are many problems with the higher education system in Canada, but let me isolate two factors: grade inflation and academic disengagement. The grade inflation problem stems directly from the high school system where academic conditions are favourable to the granting of high grades. Students are basically getting an "easy ride" in high school—deadlines are soft, there are special classes you can attend to get any of the credits you missed, and there is wide-spread skipping of classes. Teachers are frankly fed up with the lack of "credit integrity," but are under tremendous pressure to bump up marks in order for students to get into university. Over the past few decades, high school grades have steadily increased to the point where forty percent of students graduate with an "A."

**Q: But what about the fact that universities have increased their entrance averages? For example, the cutoff to enter Western in the first of the double cohort years was in the mid-80's.**

**A:** Yes, that's true, but in the cohort that year, fifteen percent of the entering

students had a grade of "A+." Roughly seventy percent of students have grades that place them "above average." Clearly, this situation is anomalous. In Europe, they have addressed this problem by creating the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). Grades from any institution can be converted into a common, non-inflated standardized scale. In essence, grades are "curved" so that only the top ten percent receive an "A," the next twenty-five percent receive a "B," and so on. (Note: the ECTS is reproduced at the end of this article.)



#### **Q: And what about disengagement?**

**A:** It boils down to effort. Incoming high school students expect to put out much more effort in university as compared to high school. However, after they arrive, they realize that they do not have to put out the effort at all. The work load for students is very light. This seems to be across the board by the way, and not just in a single faculty such as Social Science.

#### **Q: How has this situation come about?**

**A:** It's a gradual shift in course work and grading practices over time. For example, following an exam in which there is a high percentage of "F's," professors tend to make the next exam a little easier. Over time, the easier exams become the norm for the course.

#### **Q: What do you think is the reason for the higher percentage of "F's"?**

**A:** There are multiple factors, but one is the poor high school preparation that I mentioned before. In fact, many professors who are returning to the classroom after several terms of administrative duty comment that the students are not as

*Continued on page 2*

prepared as they used to be. This puts a lot of pressure on the faculty member—you simply cannot fail large numbers of students. High failure rates will be questioned by one's Chair or Dean, and the students will retaliate by giving you bad teaching evaluations.

**Q: Let's talk about teaching evaluations. The fact that we have evaluations at Western that are accessible to the university community has come under some scrutiny lately, in addition to the requirement that evaluations of teaching be used in the promotion and tenure process. How do you see teaching evaluations factoring in here?**

**A:** Teaching evaluations suffer from three important problems. First, they are influenced by the grades given out in a course. In courses where the grades are high, evaluations tend to be more positive. If the grades are lower, the evaluations decline. Thus, a professor who gives out lower grades does so at his or her own peril. Second, evaluations tend to reflect the charisma of the instructor, rather than serving as an index of course quality. More likeable instructors tend to receive higher ratings. Finally, teaching evaluations may serve as a venue for frustrated students to retaliate for perceived slights or injustices. Thus, once again, they are not valid ratings of course or instructor quality. (Editor's note: these issues have been mentioned both in *Ivory Tower Blues* and by Robin Wilson (1998) in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.) One need only look at students' initial expected grades in a course (mostly A's and B's) to get a feeling for the difficulty facing the instructor. If one maintains standards, then the grades will decline along with your evaluations. Savvy instructors will learn to play the game—to get really good evaluations, one needs only to make the course easier. In addition, many professors object to the written comments portion of the evaluations. These comments can be offensive and demeaning.

**Q: What about the work by Harry Murray (Professor Emeritus here at Western) suggesting that student evaluation of teaching is not only valid, but also results in greater learning?**

**A:** It may be the case that really good professors do, indeed, receive higher evaluations, but this is likely due to other factors. For example, if students really are engaged, they will get better grades and good instructors will engage the students. However, for the partially engaged student, teaching evaluations do not serve a useful purpose. In my course, I outline my standards and expectations at the very beginning of the year. I get a large number of drops from the course—up to 25%. But the people who remain are very engaged and willing to do the work.

**Q: So what should we do to improve the university system?**

**A:** First of all, we need to push back on the high school system. We need to control grade inflation or else we will

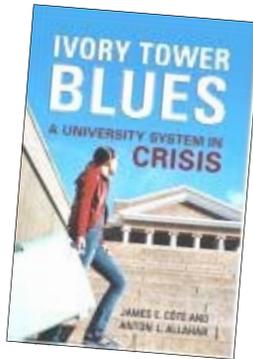
not be able to tell what these grades mean. It would be useful if we moved toward the ECTS so that grades from all schools would mean the same thing. In addition, we should rank high schools for undergraduate admission in much the same way that we rank undergraduate institutions for graduate admission. Second, we should bring back some kind of standardized exam for undergraduate admission, much like the SAT exams in the United States. Such exams are predictive of time to completion in undergraduate school and could be used as another means of assessing applicants.

**Q: And at the university level?**

**A:** We should reward instructors for setting and maintaining high standards. This could be done in a number of ways. We could redesign the teaching evaluations so that the items reflect engagement. For example, you could use items similar to those from the National Survey of Student Engagement—ask how many papers they had to write in the course, rather than items directed to an interesting presentation. Perhaps we should move toward the British system in which the instructor is not the person who sets the exams for a course. A separate, independent grader is less likely to be influenced by student demands. Finally, faculty need to become more engaged themselves. We need a debate, a dialogue on what kind of educational system we want.

**Q: Any last thoughts?**

**A:** We've received lots of good feedback about the book already, and would welcome any comments from the university community. In fact, there is a campus-wide Town Hall meeting coming up (Nov. 5, 3:30 — 5:30 p.m.), and I urge you to attend. We can handle this problem if we approach it differently.



### The European Credit Transfer System

The performance of the student is documented by a local/national grade. It is good practice to add an ECTS grade, in particular in case of credit transfer. The ECTS grading scale ranks the students on a statistical basis. Therefore, statistical data on student performance is a prerequisite for applying the ECTS grading system. Grades are assigned among students with a pass grade as follows:

- A best 10%
- B next 25%
- C next 30%
- D next 25%
- E next 10%

A distinction is made between the grades FX and F that are used for unsuccessful students. FX means: "fail — some more work required to pass" and F means: "fail — considerable further work required." The inclusion of failure rates in the Transcript of Records is optional. From: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/socrates/ects/index\\_en.html#5](http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/socrates/ects/index_en.html#5)

# Socializing Graduate Students to the Culture of their Discipline

NANDA DIMITROV, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, TEACHING SUPPORT CENTRE

Graduate and undergraduate education differ in important ways. During their undergraduate years, students are primarily “consumers of knowledge,” while during their graduate education, students grow into junior scholars and “producers of knowledge” (Boyle and Boice, 1998). Graduate education also prepares students for professional life in a discipline and introduces them to the unspoken norms of scholarship and scholarly communication in sociology, statistics or civil engineering. Whether they will become researchers, faculty members or professionals in industry, familiarity with these unspoken norms of the discipline – or *disciplinary communication competence* – is a necessary, though not sufficient condition for their effective participation in a scholarly community. What this means is that no matter how well they know the theories in their field and how brilliant their research is, they will not succeed unless they can communicate the value of their work to other colleagues in appropriate ways through conference presentations, publications, and other avenues. By the time they graduate, they need to be able to walk the walk and talk the talk of economists, music theory scholars or microbiologists.

The development of such competencies among young scholars is gaining interest beyond university campuses as well. This summer, the Canadian Association of Graduate Studies and representatives of NSERC, SSHRC, and CIHR organized a conference in Ottawa to discuss how they could promote the development of professional skills among young researchers and support universities in mentoring their graduate students to become well-rounded scholars of their discipline. Disciplinary communication competence, along with integrity and ethics, featured prominently among their top 15 list, which also included teaching excellence, leadership, interpersonal skills, project management, creativity, research skills, a sense of social and civil responsibility, and intercultural intelligence (Berkowitz, 2007).

So what does “disciplinary communication competence” really mean? Communication competence in economics, for example:

- involves the ability to communicate with other economists in a way that is perceived as effective in reaching rewarding objectives; (For example, knowing that mentioning their faculty supervisor, and how much they learned from their supervisor more than five times in their cover letter for a tenure track job application, while true, will present them as a student rather than as a junior scholar, and is unlikely to get them an interview.)
- is appropriate to the context in which the interaction occurs (Spitzberg, 1988); (For example, the student knows that they cannot submit the same journal article

to multiple journals at the same time, but that they can send a book manuscript to multiple publishers.)

- and allows them to establish meaningful relationships with scholars both within and outside their discipline (Hammer, 1989). (For example, in critiquing the work of other scholars at a conference, they recognize that qualitative researchers value and conduct very different types of research than scholars using a quantitative approach and not critique one with the other’s standards.)

Most graduate students do not realize that becoming familiar with the culture of their discipline is such a crucial part of their graduate education. They enter graduate school assuming that their program will be an “extension” of their undergraduate studies, and when asked about their goals for graduate study, they often say that they want to get good grades, complete all the coursework successfully, and write a good thesis or dissertation. They do not realize that in addition to the readings and the content learned in their classes, they are expected to become familiar with the style of academic writing particular to their discipline, the appropriate ways of networking with scholars at conferences, the effective ways of collaborating on research or the appropriate ways of critiquing others’ work. (Which is why book reviews written by graduate students often de-construct rather than constructively critique other scholars’ work; this is partly because they do not realize the impact of published book reviews on a scholar’s tenure application).

Mentoring, departmental seminars, and professional development workshops go a long way towards socializing graduate students to the culture of their discipline, but often do not spell out the unspoken assumptions about the crucial factors of success that make the difference between graduate students who stand out and those who do not within a particular discipline. Do your students know, for example, that taking initiative (as opposed to being reactive) is expected of them? Do they know that - in some disciplines - completing their degree fast and only starting to look for a job after completion will put a “gap” between their graduation date and their job application, and this is looked upon more negatively than taking longer to complete the degree? Do they know that during job interviews they are interviewing the department/employer as much as they are being interviewed and should, therefore, ask lots of questions about the climate of the department or the funding opportunities available?

Many of the new programs of the *360° Graduate Student Professional Development Initiative* this year are designed to encourage students to learn



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## Faculty of Science Appoints First Learning Development Coordinator



Tom Haffie

Under the leadership of Dean Wardlaw, the Academic Plan for the Faculty of Science sets a clear priority on creating conditions in which various members of the Faculty – undergraduates, graduate students, faculty and staff – can learn effectively. One component of the plan was the creation of a new part-time secondment position as Learning Development Coordinator. As of July 1, 2007, Tom Haffie assumed this role with a job description to:

1. promote dialogue with and among the various members of the Faculty of Science to foster a culture that values excellence in teaching and learning in all areas;
2. provide a variety of professional enrichment programming to inspire reflection on the quality of education and support participants in addressing issues that arise;
3. facilitate access to the research literature as well as the resources and programming available through Western's Teaching Support Centre;
4. facilitate the dissemination of novel perspectives, techniques, and technologies to enhance the experience of teaching and learning in Science;
5. promote the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning; and
6. encourage partnerships with other groups who, although perhaps outside the Faculty of Science, have complementary objectives.

One of the inaugural projects for the LDC has been the founding of the New Faculty Network as a learning community in which novice faculty members can find support, information, and opportunity to "learn the ropes" toward building a successful career at Western.

## Global Campus

- How do undergraduates respond to faculty who speak English as a second language?
- How long does it take to start feeling comfortable in Canada?
- What can you do to facilitate your transition to teaching at a Canadian university?
- What are the challenges of communicating, socializing and working with colleagues from other cultures?



Join us for **Global Campus**, a lunchtime discussion series for international faculty. Discuss the challenges of adapting to academic life in Canada as an international faculty member, learn about cross-cultural adaptation, and meet faculty who have successfully navigated the transition to Canadian academic life. Facilitators will discuss various topics of interest to members of the group, ranging from communicating in the Canadian classroom, surviving "academic culture shock," and supervising students from cultures other than your own. Join us for the whole series or just drop in when you have time.

**Tuesdays, 12 noon — 1:00 p.m., Room 122, Weldon Library**

October 16	January 29
October 30	February 12
November 13	February 26
November 27	March 11
January 15	March 25

**Registration — See Upcoming Events at [www.uwo.ca/tsc](http://www.uwo.ca/tsc)**  
For more information, contact Nanda Dimitrov at ext. 84624  
or e-mail [nanda.dimitrov@uwo.ca](mailto:nanda.dimitrov@uwo.ca)



## Congratulations!

The Teaching Support Centre is delighted to announce that the provincial government has awarded six faculty members from Western with the new Leadership in Faculty Teaching (LIFT) Award.

The LIFT award was developed to recognize and encourage teaching excellence at Ontario's colleges and universities. The award honours faculty who influence, motivate, and inspire students and demonstrate leadership in teaching methods for the diverse student body in Ontario. The winners will receive \$20,000 over two years to encourage continued excellence in the classroom setting.

The recipients are:

*Anton Allahar, Sociology*  
*Tom Haffie, Biology*  
*Andrew Krahn, Medicine*  
*Denis Shackel, Business*  
*Tom Stavraky, Physiology & Pharmacology*  
*Mel Usselman, Chemistry*

The TSC will host an awards ceremony at the end of October where the recipients will receive an award certificate and commemorative pin.

# Enhancing Teaching II: Supporting Research on Teaching

KEN N. MEADOWS, EDUCATIONAL RESEARCHER, TEACHING AND LEARNING SERVICES

In the Spring 2006 edition of *Reflections*, Debra Dawson, Director of the Teaching Support Centre (TSC), provided an excellent introduction to the growing area of research on teaching (i.e., the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning). In that article, Debra also emphasized the TSC's ongoing commitment to support faculty members, librarians, and archivists who are interested in performing this type of research. Since then, a number of initiatives have been developed to support those interested in performing research on teaching. Each of these TSC initiatives is described below.

1) The TSC has introduced the **Research on Teaching Small Grants Program**. The RT Grants are small grants designed to support faculty members, librarians, and archivists interested in doing research on their teaching. The grants range from \$500 to \$2500 depending on the needs of the researcher(s) and the number of competitive applications.

The first round deadline: October 1, 2007. The second round deadline: Rolling until the funds are spent.

For more information on the RT Grants, please see the RT Grants web page (in the Awards section of the main TSC web site - [www.uwo.ca/tsc](http://www.uwo.ca/tsc)).

2) The TSC also offers **Research on Teaching Consultation Services** for those in the Western community who are interested in doing teaching-based research. Consultation could address any aspect of the research on teaching process including but not necessarily limited to:

- generating a research question;
- developing a research design;
- selecting appropriate research methods;
- writing a proposal for the Research Ethics Board;
- developing and implementing an analysis strategy;
- preparing the findings for presentation or publication.

3) The TSC will also be introducing the **Research on Teaching Learning Community (RTLCL)**. The RTLCL is an opportunity for members of the Western academic community to meet and discuss issues related to research

on teaching as well as their own research on teaching projects. The meetings will be held twice an academic term. The dates for the Fall 2007 meetings have yet to be finalized but will be announced shortly on the RTLCL web page ([www.uwo.ca/tsc/RT\\_Teaching\\_Learning\\_Community.htm](http://www.uwo.ca/tsc/RT_Teaching_Learning_Community.htm))

4) In April 2008, the TSC will be holding the first annual **Research on Teaching Conference**. This half-day conference will provide an opportunity for interested participants to showcase their research on teaching to the larger Western community. More information about the conference will be available shortly on the main TSC web page.

5) The TSC has also developed the **Research on Teaching Resource Web Page** ([www.uwo.ca/tsc/sotl.htm](http://www.uwo.ca/tsc/sotl.htm)). This web page includes links to practical and theoretical articles on research on teaching as well as links to other relevant web sites and references to helpful print-based resources. The web page is updated regularly to ensure that you have access to the most current research on teaching resources.

As Debra emphasized in her earlier *Reflections* article, the TSC is committed to supporting faculty members, librarians, and archivists who are interested in performing research on their teaching. The initiatives outlined above reflect that commitment but are only the beginning. New initiatives to support research on teaching and learning are currently in development. For further information on any of the research on teaching initiatives outlined above or to take advantage of our Research on Teaching Consultation Services, please contact me at:

Ken Meadows, Ph.D., Educational Researcher  
Teaching Support Centre  
519.661.2111, ext. 81301  
Email: [kmeadow2@uwo.ca](mailto:kmeadow2@uwo.ca)

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[www.uwo.ca/tsc/pdf/Reflections\\_54.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/tsc/pdf/Reflections_54.pdf)

Coming  
Soon!

## GRADUATE SUPERVISOR

by Dr. Elizabeth Skarakis-Doyle  
and Gayle McIntyre

## TSC Purple Guides

The second publication of our Purple Guide series will be available soon. This guide offers advice from experienced supervisors here at Western and shares good practices from the literature on graduate supervision and from other universities around the world.

If you would like to receive a free copy of this publication, or a copy of our first purple guide on *Mentorship in Academia*, please contact the Teaching Support Centre by phone at ext. 80346 or e-mail: [tsc@uwo.ca](mailto:tsc@uwo.ca).

# Information Literacy Update



## Western Libraries

TOM ADAM, INFORMATION LITERACY COORDINATOR, WESTERN LIBRARIES

### Teaching Partnerships

Effective teaching involves the creation of effective learning environments where the efficient access to information, and its critical assessment and responsible application are essential and necessary skills. This is sometimes daunting, especially in our information-rich environment. Western Libraries' dedicated group of teaching librarians is eager and available to work with you to embed these all-important information literacy skills into the fabric of your course or program. We can structure in-class or in-library sessions specific to your assignment, or that directly relate to the particular needs of your course. We also can tailor Western Libraries' Assignment Planner, our interactive time management tool, to meet your specific needs, making research assistance available to your students anytime and anywhere.

Over the past few months there have been some personnel changes in Western Libraries, so please visit Western Libraries' Contacts page ([www.lib.uwo.ca/Librarians-Subjects.shtml](http://www.lib.uwo.ca/Librarians-Subjects.shtml)) to determine the Subject Librarian for your particular area. In addition to assisting you with the creation of student-centred learning opportunities, these librarians are also eager to help with your individual research needs.

### Service Enhancements

Over the course of this academic year, three new library initiatives will have significant impact on the look and feel of Western Libraries' web presence.

### Encore:

Western is participating as a Phase II partner with Innovative Interfaces Incorporated (III), our integrated library system provider, in the development of Encore, a new discovery services platform that facilitates searching and finding material in our vast collections of resources. We will test and provide feedback to III to ensure that this new catalogue interface meets the needs of the Western community.

### Federated Searching:

We are investigating the acquisition of a multiple database searching tool that will retrieve results from a variety of online databases and other web resources.

### Web Site:

We also are in the planning and development phase of a year-long project that will result in a new web site for Western Libraries next September. Our new web site will enhance the process of discovering our resources, making it an essential gateway to information and services that advance research, teaching, and learning at Western.

Watch for developments in each of these projects in the next months. We will be soliciting your input and feedback on each of them during the upcoming year, so watch also for opportunities to have your say in ensuring that Western Libraries remains a key player in your teaching and research here at Western. Please contact me ([tadam@uwo.ca](mailto:tadam@uwo.ca)) if you have comments or questions about any of these initiatives.

### Socializing Graduate Students *(continued from page 3)*

about the culture of their discipline. A day of workshops on academic and non-academic career development will be part of the Career Centre's **Graduate Career Day** on Friday, October 12<sup>th</sup>. In late November, the TSC will host a one-day **Conference on Graduate Education** for faculty, where colleagues from across the university will discuss the creative ways departments build professional development into their curriculum and demystify scholarly norms for their graduate students. Several of the TSC's programs for international graduate students also introduce participants to expectations for young scholars in Canada, among them the new **Pathways to Canadian Academia** workshops and our **Communication in the Canadian Classroom** series. Several of the workshops in the **Future Professor** series focus on the graduate student-supervisor relationship and discuss expectations for professional behaviour in collaborative research and teaching partnerships. Please encourage your students to attend these events.

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# Teaching Awards and Grants

## WESTERN TEACHING AWARDS

### *The Edward G. Pleva Award for Excellence in Teaching*

Recognizes up to four continuing members of full-time faculty who are either limited term or tenured at Western and its Affiliated University Colleges.

### *The Angela Armitt Award for Excellence in Teaching by Part-Time Faculty*

Recognizes a part-time faculty member at Western or its Affiliated University Colleges.

### *The Marilyn Robinson Award for Excellence in Teaching*

Recognizes a continuing member of full-time faculty who is either limited term or probationary at Western or its Affiliated University Colleges and who usually has seven years or less of full-time university teaching experience.

Deadline for receipt of dossiers: **December 15, 2007**

Information and guidelines can be found at: <http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/sutaregs.pdf>

## EXTERNAL TEACHING AWARDS

### *3M Teaching Fellowships*

Deadline for nominations: **November 2, 2007 (Provost's Office); November 16, 2007 (STLHE)**

Established by 3M Canada and the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education to recognize teaching excellence and educational leadership at Canadian universities. Details at: <http://www.mcmaster.ca/3Mteachingfellowships>

### *The Alan Blizzard Award*

Deadline for applications: **January 11, 2008**

Sponsored by the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, the award is for collaborative projects that improve student learning. Details can be found at: <http://www.mcmaster.ca/stlhe/awards/alan.blizzard.award.html>

### *OCUFA Teaching Awards*

Deadline for nominations: **February 2008 (Date TBA)**

The Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations recognizes outstanding teachers and academic librarians in Ontario universities. Details can be found at: <http://www.ocufa.on.ca/awards>

## WESTERN FUNDING INITIATIVES

### *Fellowship in Teaching Innovation*

Application Deadline: **March 1, 2008**

The purpose of the fellowship is to encourage full-time members of faculty to pursue teaching innovations at Western.

Application procedures can be found at: <http://www.uwo.ca/tsc/awards.html>

### *International Curriculum Fund*

Application Deadline: **January 16, 2008 (Dean); January 30, 2008 (Research Development & Services)**

Funded by the Office of the Vice-President (Research), the awards are designed to promote initiatives that support the internationalization of academic programs and/or course curricula at Western. Details at: <http://www.uwo.ca/research>

## Teaching with Technology Workshop Series

### **Simple Steps Towards Quality WebCT OWL Course Design**

Presenter: *Jeff Longland, ITS*

Friday, October 26, 2007, 12:00—1:30 p.m.

### **Wimba Collaboration Tools That Bring the Traditional Classroom to Online Instruction**

Presenter: *Jane Winkler, ITS*

Friday, November 9, 2007, 12:00—1:30 p.m.

### **Teaching Technology for Large Enrollment Classes**

Presenter: *Mike Atkinson, TSC*

Friday, November 23, 2007, 12:00—1:30 p.m.

### **Creating Podcasting: How to do it**

Presenter: *Kim Holland, TSC*

Friday, January 25, 2008, 12:00—1:30 p.m.

### **Discussion Forum—Podcasting: A Community of Practice?**

Facilitator: *Kim Holland, TSC*

Friday, February 1, 2008, 12:00—1:30 p.m.

*For registration and program details, see  
Upcoming Events on the TSC web site:*

[www.uwo.ca/tsc](http://www.uwo.ca/tsc)

# A New WebCT on Campus

KIM HOLLAND, INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGNER, TEACHING SUPPORT CENTRE



WebCT Vista has been upgraded recently to “Blackboard Learning System Vista Enterprise License Release 4,” which will mercifully be known as WebCT OWL. For people familiar with the old version, working in this new WebCT should be a relatively easy change. Love it or hate it, WebCT OWL remains WebCT.

This new WebCT OWL does have improvements and new student learning tools that are a welcome addition. In the improvement category, the course tools are now found on the left side of the screen rather than at the top, which had the unfortunate habit of limiting the student’s view to only four items. In the new version when you build your course content, the tools that you use (Add Files, Create Folder, Add Content Link) appear at the top. This simple positional change, and calling ‘Organizer Pages’ folders, makes what to do clearer when it comes to creating your course. I have found these uncomplicated changes improve the way that my students and I interact with WebCT.

I will only touch on a few of the new tools category. The discussion tool has been expanded and now has a “Blog Topic” area. The Blog tool allows students to post their thoughts in chronological order on a specific topic that also allows others to respond with their comments. Another new item is the Goals tool that allows you to record the goals for a course, and to create categories to organize the learning goals of the class. You can also associate files and course content, such as discussions, assessments or assignments, with one or more goals. This could unify your course materials so your learning goals are explicative and understood by your students.

To help in the transition to OWL, ITS (Information and Technology Services) has been running training sessions over the summer, and these sessions will continue into the fall/winter term. Over the summer the ITRC (Instructional Technology Resource Centre) has created a very useful set of manualettes (short four-page instructions) and videos on using WebCT OWL and the many teaching tools that are available. The videos are an excellent example of the level of sophistication of the educational material that the ITRC can produce. Viewing these videos may suggest ideas on how this technology could be used in your own instruction.

After having used this new WebCT over the summer, I have found OWL is not a revolutionary new learning management system, but its changes reflect the program’s evolution as an improving product.

# Running the Course

MARGARET MCNAY, FACULTY ASSOCIATE, TEACHING SUPPORT CENTRE

The word *curriculum* derives from the Latin word *currere*—meaning the running of a course or, perhaps, the course itself. Indeed, when one speaks of *the curriculum* one tends to envision a document—the outline, plan, or syllabus that lays out the course. Curriculum may, however, just as readily refer to the act or experience of moving through a course, or on or over the course.

In planning, evaluating, or revising a curriculum, whether for a single course or an entire program, questions about what students *do* in the course or program, how they *experience* it, and what they read between the lines and hear between the lectures are as important as questions about the knowledge and skills explicitly ‘covered’ in the course or program. The hidden curriculum is often learned more readily, understood more thoroughly, and remembered longer than is the official curriculum.

What habits of mind, for example, do students learn in a particular course or program? One might like to take openmindedness for granted, and the official curriculum may encourage critical mindedness. Do instructors and teaching assistants model such habits of mind? Are students rewarded for displaying such habits of mind in classes, tutorials, assignments, and examinations? One might also ask what messages about the nature of the discipline are subtly (or not so subtly) communicated to students by the approaches to instruction used in a course, the kinds of knowledge and understanding emphasized, and the thinking processes required by assignments and examinations.

In subsequent columns, I will comment on approaches to curriculum evaluation that include attention to what happens as students *run the course*, and on pedagogical approaches that make a difference.

I am available to support departments/faculties undertaking curriculum review and development. You can reach me by phone at ext. 88558 or e-mail: [mmcnay@uwo.ca](mailto:mmcnay@uwo.ca)

# Update on Clickers at Western

TOM HAFFIE, FACULTY ASSOCIATE, TEACHING SUPPORT CENTRE

Clickers, or “Personal Response Units,” are hand-held radio-frequency transmitters that promote engagement in lectures by enabling every individual student to respond to questions. Responses may be aggregated and displayed, recorded and posted on WebCT by the instructor. Over the past two years, the PRESSWestern project has established Western as a leader in the large-scale implementation of this technology (Barnett, 2006). Well over 4,000 students use clickers in at least one course out of two dozen offered in Anatomy, Astronomy, Biology, Calculus, Computer Science, Economics, Engineering, Health Science, Kinesiology, Nursing, Physics, and Political Science. A strong majority of students in our Year One Biology class reported that clicker use facilitated their learning through increased attendance and engagement in class, increased awareness of their preparation to meet course objectives, and increased motivation to change specific study strategies (Haffie et. al, 2006 & 2007). The Clicker Users Group continues to work with the TSC to develop and disseminate effective practice.



## The Change from eInstruction to Interwrite

The PRESSWestern project was founded in 2005 with the only suitable technology available at the time – provided by eInstruction. However, assessment of alternative technologies during a recent open-bid RFP process prompted the university to enter into an exclusive support agreement with a new supplier – Interwrite (<http://interwritelearning.com>). The new technology offers improved security, reduced institutional support, and expanded functionality with lower cost to students. Although faculty may adopt any clicker technology, as of September 2007, Western will provide institutional support for Interwrite products only. A trade-in allowance is available for students who own a previous model and need to purchase a new one.

## Change Management

Information regarding the conversion in general, and specific details of training workshops etc., are available on the PRESSWestern website ([presswestern.uwo.ca](http://presswestern.uwo.ca)). For additional information, please contact Tom Haffie, Faculty Associate, TSC (86502, [thaffie@uwo.ca](mailto:thaffie@uwo.ca)) or Bryce Hunter, Clicker Conversion Technical Coordinator, TSC ([bhunter2@uwo.ca](mailto:bhunter2@uwo.ca)).

# 3M TEACHING FELLOWSHIPS

## Call for 2008 Nominations

The Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (STLHE) and 3M Canada invite nominations for the 2008 3M Teaching Fellowships. Up to 10 awards, presented annually at the STLHE conference in June, recognize exemplary contributions to educational and teaching excellence in Canadian universities. Awards are open to all individuals currently teaching at a Canadian university, regardless of discipline or level of appointment. The selection committee looks for independent evidence of excellence in teaching over a number of years, principally (but not exclusively) at the undergraduate level, as well as commitment to the improvement of university teaching with emphasis on contributions beyond the nominee's discipline or profession.



A letter of support from the Provost and Vice-President (Academic) must accompany the nomination documentation. Please submit nominations to the Provost's Office by:

**INTERNAL DEADLINE DATE - Friday, November 2, 2007**

Nomination information is available at: [www.mcmaster.ca/3Mteachingfellowships](http://www.mcmaster.ca/3Mteachingfellowships)

# Helping Second Language Listeners Navigate Lectures

NADINE LE GROS, LANGUAGE & COMMUNICATION INSTRUCTOR, TEACHING SUPPORT CENTRE

**D**r. Carl Wieman, a Nobel Prize winner for Physics, reported that the average science student learns less than 30% of the essential concepts in science classes regardless of the quality of the lecturer or the class size (STLHE 2007). This gives me pause, as I wonder how much less than 30% second language speakers might be retaining. Clearly some of the lost 70% involves the very format of lecturing, which is a larger pedagogical issue. However, if we consider issues that improve second language comprehension of lectures, perhaps first language listeners will learn more as well.

Research has shown that many factors affect second language (L2) listening comprehension: whether language is modified for the audience, level of background knowledge of the listener, whether the lecture is scripted, whether the content is external to the schemata of the listener, speech rate, etc. (Chiang & Dunkel, 1992; Flowerdew & Tauroza, 1995; Jung, 1999; Long, 1989). It would be challenging - although worthwhile - to adjust a lecture to make allowances for all these factors, but let us consider how some minor adjustments could increase student comprehension and retention.

Modifying the language used in instruction can assist L2 listeners with unknown terms.

- Avoid phrasal verbs, idioms, and colloquialisms: not all L2 learners will recognize the term 'to look down on,' whereas they would more readily understand the words 'to hold a low opinion of.' L2 students will probably not understand 'to cram for an exam,' whereas, they would easily understand the words 'to study hard the night before an exam.' If you do want to use such terms, be mindful of defining them.
- Elaborate and be redundant to clarify vocabulary: 'Written English is far more lexically dense than spoken English. So, what does lexically dense mean? Lexically dense means that the sentences are longer, they are more complex, and they contain more precise and richer vocabulary.'
- Use discourse markers. Jung (1999) offers 10 types of cues, which include:

previews	We are going to look at five components that affect L2 listening ...
topic markers/shifters	Let's just talk about how schemata affects learning for a moment ...
summarizers	So, let's look at what we've learned so far ...
emphasis markers	So, what's critical about this is ...
exemplifiers	As an example, ...
relators	... which is called ...
definition markers	That's called ...
rhetorical questions	What does lexically dense mean
logical connectives	Consequently, finally ...
numerative	Firstly ...
intersentential	So, ... because ...
temporal	So after that, ...
framing/segmentation marks	And so now, ...

(pp 576-577).

Concomitant with modifying language in lectures, instructors can also encourage L2 students to assume greater responsibility for their learning by doing advanced readings. The benefits of this would be twofold. Professors cannot have an accurate sense of how much background knowledge international students bring to class; however, activating student schemata is highly beneficial to learning. If lecturers inform students in advance (in writing) of what will be covered in future classes, motivated students can familiarize themselves with the vocabulary they will need to understand the lecture and develop background knowledge of the topics. Faculty members who feel particularly enthusiastic might even be inclined to provide a list of pertinent terms to their L2 students in advance.

In addition to focusing on the language of teaching and learning, the delivery of the lecture itself can either aid or impede comprehension. Many presenters feel more secure reading from notes than speaking naturally for many reasons.

But, what does reading written notes do to a lecture? Written English is far more lexically dense (Lewis, 1993) than spoken English, and it is also harder to understand. In addition, there is notably less natural inflection when reading out loud than there is in natural speech. The absence of inflection makes the speech more monotonic, and it also makes it more difficult for the listener to be cued about upcoming important information. If, however, reading is absolutely unavoidable, making the text sound more like spoken English and injecting longer pauses would still help students.

While all of this will help students comprehend lectures better, there is more to lectures than just listening: students need to be taking good notes, and instructors can help L2 students with their note-taking. Even when L2 students can understand everything that they are hearing, being able to isolate salient information and then record it is still an additional skill they need to develop. By offering the students guided note-taking, instructors will greatly assist L2 listeners. Guided note-taking can be as simple as informing the students at the beginning of the lecture about how you are going to organize your talk and advising them specifically to take notes under certain headings.

Some of these methods might sound contrived, and some lecturers may feel that students might resist or scorn such directive approaches. However, these methods can be used dramatically, humorously, and transparently. Moreover, if the students are attuned to the process, they will more easily recognize the moments when they ought to write something down, pay very close attention, or stop messaging their friends. And, like many accommodations that are originally meant for second language learners, paying closer attention to the language of instruction will benefit *all* learners.

### References:

- Chiang, C.S., & Dunkel, P. (1992). The effect of speech modification, prior knowledge, and listening proficiency on EFL lecture learning. *TESOL Quarterly*, 26, 345 – 374.
- Flowerdew, J., & Tauroza, S. (1995). The effect of discourse markers on second language lecture comprehension. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 17, 435 – 458.
- Jung, E.H. (1999, March). *The evidence of discourse-marking devices in second language comprehension*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Association for Applied Linguistics, Stamford, CT.
- Lewis, M. (1993). *The State of ELT and a Way Forward*. London: Language Teaching Publications.
- Long, D. (1989). Second language listening comprehension: A schema-theoretic perspective. *Modern Language Journal*, 73, 32-40.
- Wieman, C. (2007, June). *Science Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Using the Tools of Science to Teach Science*. Opening Plenary at the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, Edmonton, Canada.

**Most of these references are available in pdf format on the TSC website under Topic-Specific Resources.**

# CMG

Classroom Management Group  
The University of Western Ontario

## The Classroom Management Group

519 661-2111 ext.82222  
cmg@uwo.ca  
<http://www.ipb.uwo.ca/cmg/>

For assistance related to the audio visual systems in general use university classrooms: ceiling projectors; switchers; computers; DVD and VCR players; overhead projectors and bulbs; microphones and batteries; remote controls and wireless keyboards



## Physical Plant - Work Control Centre

519 661-2111 ext. 83304  
ppdhelp@uwo.ca  
<http://www.uwo.ca/ppd/>

For all problems related to the physical conditions of a classroom: temperature; lighting; garbage; screens; furniture; water leaks; chalk boards and white boards; chalk and dry erase markers

## FLUENCY IN ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION FOR UNIVERSITY LECTURERS

**MONDAYS, October 15 — December 3, 2007**

**2:30 — 4:30 p.m. (Session 1)**

**OR**

**5:00 — 7:00 p.m. (Session 2)**

This course (total hours: 16) offers professors for whom English is a second language an opportunity to enhance the clarity of their speech in English.

**Enrolment:** limited to 14

**Registration:** see TSC Upcoming Events at  
<http://www.uwo.ca/tsc>

# Coming Events in the TSC

Effective Presentation in the Classroom  
October 17, 2007 ~ 9:30 – 11:30 a.m.

The Development of Graduate Students and Teaching Assistants: The Role of the Faculty  
October 19, 2007 ~ 2:00 – 4:00 p.m.

Writing Multiple-Choice Questions  
October 24, 2007 ~ 9:30 – 11:30 a.m.

Simple Steps Towards Quality WebCT OWL Course Design  
October 26, 2007 ~ 12:00—1:30 p.m.

Developing Instructional Objectives  
October 31, 2007 ~ 9:30 – 11:30 a.m.

Navigating Issues in Graduate Supervision: Skills for Preventing and Resolving Conflict  
November 2, 2007 ~ 9:30 – 12:00 p.m.

Really Good Course Outlines  
November 7, 2007 ~ 9:30 – 11:30 a.m.

Wimba Collaboration Tools That Bring the Traditional Classroom to Online Instruction  
November 9, 2007 ~ 12:00—1:30 p.m.

Academic Integrity: Preventing Cheating and Plagiarism  
November 21, 2007 ~ 9:30 – 11:30 a.m.

Teaching Technology for Large Enrollment Classes  
November 23, 2007 ~ 12:00—1:30 p.m.

Science Explanations & Effective Demonstrations  
November 28, 2007 ~ 9:30 – 11:30 a.m.

Getting Ready for Tenure and Promotion Under the Collective Agreement  
November 2007 (*Date TBA*)

Tenure and Promotion Under the Collective Agreement, How the Process Works  
December 6, 2007 ~ 1:30—3:30 p.m.

Essays, Short Answers, Other Methods of Assessment  
December 12, 2007 ~ 9:30 – 11:30 a.m.

Interactive Teaching Strategies  
January 9, 2008 ~ 9:30 – 11:30 a.m.

Creating Podcasting—How to do it  
January 25, 2008 ~ 12:00—1:30 p.m.

Facilitating Discussion  
February 6, 2008 ~ 9:30 – 11:30 a.m.

Tenure and Promotion: Development of the Teaching Dossier and a Teaching Philosophy  
February 8, 2008 ~ 1:30 – 3:30 p.m.

Evaluating Multiple-Choice Items  
February 13, 2008 ~ 9:30 – 11:30 a.m.

Leadership: An Art of Possibility  
(*Video Presentation and Discussion*)  
March 12, 2008 ~ 9:30 – 11:30 a.m.

Memory, Motivation, and Student Learning  
March 19, 2008 ~ 9:30 – 11:30 a.m.

Teaching in the Intercultural Classroom  
March 26, 2008 ~ 9:30 – 11:30 a.m.

Career Management: The Development of an Academic Career Perspective and Teaching Awards for Faculty  
March 2008 (*Date TBA*)

**SESSIONS WILL BE HELD IN THE TEACHING SUPPORT CENTRE, ROOM 122, WELDON LIBRARY**

To register, see Upcoming Events at [www.uwo.ca/tsc](http://www.uwo.ca/tsc)  
For information, contact the Teaching Support Centre, ext. 84622, e-mail: [tsc@uwo.ca](mailto:tsc@uwo.ca)

## Podcasting Lectures?

Have you considered converting your lectures to podcasts? Do you know what a podcast is? Why would you consider recording lectures and distributing them? Is the whole lecture even needed or wanted? Does 'podology' have a role to play in your instruction? If there is interest in the use of this technology, we will discuss establishing a community of practice. As part of the Teaching with Technology Series, the Teaching Support Centre will be hosting a forum discussion with these and other participants' questions. Please join us.

**Friday, February 1, 2008 at 12 noon in Room 121, Weldon Library**