Experience the Experience

College Is

Student learning in higher education is rarely analyzed through the eyes of the learners themselves; in much the same way that instructional faculty rarely analyze their teaching. While quantitative studies and surveys abound on self-perception of changes in learning by the college student population, for example, the National Survey of Student Engagement, little attention has been paid to examining student learning from a qualitative perspective.

The WCU Committee on Student Learning conducted a yearlong qualitative study designed to address this lacuna in the literature. The primary purpose of the study was to answer the research question, “How do undergraduates characterize their learning experiences both in and outside the classroom?” Through the use of open-ended questions in focus groups settings, the researchers sought the voices of students to add to the university conversation on engaged learning.

We conducted six focus groups with a total of 32 students. The groups were as follows: Honors College, Greeks, Athletes, Academic Success Program, Learning Contract, and a Random group. The data were transcribed and analyzed first through a “top-down” approach using the NSSE Benchmarks as a conceptual framework. We then used a “bottom-up approach” to see what themes emerged. Those emergent themes centered on student perceptions related to the Seven Dimensions of Teaching as well as student responsibility in learning.

Data linked to the NSSE Benchmarks revealed that students enjoy challenging academic experiences that allow them to step out of their comfort zones or to see different viewpoints. On the other hand, students spoke of frustrating experiences such as studying diligently for a test and then receiving a poor grade. In the area of active and collaborative learning, these students

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Summer Institute for Teaching and Learning

BY DEBRA RANDLEMAN

The major, university-wide initiative, The Scholarship of Teaching & Learning at Western Carolina University (http://www.wcu.edu/sotl/), formally began with the 2003 Summer Institute for Teaching & Learning. The goals of SoTL at WCU are improved student learning, teaching effectiveness, faculty development and a profoundly collegial community of and for teaching and learning. The theme for the sixth annual Summer Institute to be held on May 19-22, 2008 is “Going to Woolsthorpe: Inspiring Intentional Student Learning.” Faculty will also engage in sustained inquiry about teaching and students’ learning by choosing one topic on which to focus. For more information, go to http://www.wcu.edu/facctr/SOTL/Events/SITL/index.html

Goals of the Summer Institute on Teaching and Learning:

• Contribute to expanding the pedagogical imaginations of faculty participants
• Encourage faculty to approach their teaching as an interesting and challenging form of scholarship
• Promote interdisciplinary collaboration among faculty
• Support faculty innovation and experimentation in their teaching
• Develop an open and collegial academic culture where dialogue and interaction among faculty about teaching practices, resources, experiences and experiments with student learning are the norm

There also will be lots of good food, conversation and collegiality. There is no cost to faculty for attending the Institute.

To register, go to: http://www.wcu.edu/facctr/SOTL/Events/SITL/08/registration/login.asp

Summer Institute for Teaching and Learning
May 19-22, 2008
More than 40 faculty and staff attended WCU’s Inaugural Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) Retreat. The retreat was held at the Nantahala Village Resort & Spa, February 22-23, 2008. This year’s theme was “Asking the Right Questions” with guest facilitators Dr. Scott Johnson, Dr. Cheryl Albers from Buffalo State University and Dr. Scott Simkins for NC A&T. The retreat provided opportunities for both informal discussion and formal skill development. Participants included both experienced practitioners and those new to SoTL in a collaborative effort to critically examine teaching and learning.

Faculty chose from the following workshop topics by WCU faculty: Interviews—Individual and Groups—Dr. Mary Jean Herzog, Surveys in the Classroom—Dr. Kathleen Brennan, Quantitative Data Analysis—Dr. Chris Cooper and Student Products—Dr. Cynthia Deale and were involved in interdisciplinary planning groups to work on their own SoTL projects. Leading breakout sessions were Dr. Phil Sanger and Dr. Kathy Starr. Feedback from the participants was very positive including:

“The most valuable things I gained from the retreat were the interactions and dialogue with colleagues across the campus. These interactions ‘pushed’ me to think about SoTL in different ways and made me more aware of the resources available for my SoTL efforts”.

“This is arguably my best professional learning experience at Western and a well-planned and executed retreat (although my mind was exhausted by the last session—a lot to process).”

Based on the success of the retreat, WCU has been asked to take a leadership role in a statewide SoTL day sponsored by the North Carolina Association of Teaching Center Directors. Faculty and staff from WCU will be leading sessions for this one day conference.

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Enjoy class discussions, hands-on, project-based, experiential learning, and any opportunity to connect learning to real life. They mentioned specifically case studies and scenarios. Student-faculty interaction was an important area for students. They spoke of the importance of faculty presence, availability, positive support, communication, and respect. When speaking of the WCU faculty, with very few exceptions, participants were most complimentary especially of faculty who have worked in the field in which they are teaching. According to the students in this study, WCU has a supportive campus environment with leadership opportunities as well as places and people to go to for help. They acknowledged the need to ask for help. For these students, WCU provides enriching educational experiences through university programs and communities. The students noted that they enjoy opportunities to work with people of different backgrounds and perspectives. They spoke of service learning and internship opportunities that have enriched their lives and given them opportunities for academic success.

In the area of teaching, students were anxious to comment on three dimensions of teaching that do not correlate with the NSSE benchmarks. In the area of instructional design, they spoke of a desire for choice in assignments and a need for clear guidelines and expectations. Related to evaluation, they want these clear guidelines to include a match between what is tested and what is taught. For the millennial generation these students represent, there is a need for organization and structure to enhance learning, clear rules and deadlines as well as the pacing and frequent monitoring of instruction. While they enjoy some aspects of group work, they are frustrated when all members do not pull their weight. They indicate that working in groups with friends is a bad idea.

Other emergent themes dealt with student responsibility. In many cases, participants in the study stated that some things could be learned only through experience. They spoke of learning to manage their time, to live independently, to accept responsibility for their

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Continued on page 3
At WCU many if not most of the academic departments, with their new Colleget Review Documents, have followed the lead of the Faculty Senate and recognized the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) as a legitimate form of scholarship. In our new criteria for scholarship, based on the so-called Boyer model, SoTL joins three additional forms of scholarship: Discovery, Integration, and Application, to create a “broader, more capacious” (in Boyer’s words) conception of scholarship. Furthermore, a few weeks ago at WCU’s inaugural SoTL Retreat over 40 members of the faculty and staff spent a good day working on developing and implementing SoTL projects.

With the stage is now set for the continued growth of SoTL at WCU, the Coulter Faculty Center offers a wide range of support and consultation services for the members of the faculty and staff who are engaged in SoTL projects or who would like to learn more about SoTL.

1. Online Resources: The SoTL website (http://facctr.wcu.edu/SOTL/index.html) provides links to information about the major SoTL events at WCU, including the Summer Institute for Teaching and Learning and the SoTL Retreat. In addition, the website provides a link to MountainRise, an open, online, international journal of SoTL based in the Coulter Faculty Center, and a link to a user-friendly, well-organized web site with an annotated list of online SoTL resources.

2. The State-wide SoTL Retreat: The inaugural UNC SoTL Retreat will be held at UNC Greensboro on Friday, May 30. This new, system-wide event is modeled after WCU’s inaugural SoTL Retreat, and all members of the faculty at WCU and at other institutions in the UNC system are invited to participate. For more information, including the online registration procedure, go to: https://utlc.uncg.edu/workshops/list_by_category.jsp?cat_id=77000233

3. Faculty Enrichment and Education Day: WCU’s second annual Faculty Enrichment and Education Day (FEEd), will be held on campus in September. FEEd offers members of the faculty and staff who are engaged in SoTL projects a venue for disseminating or “going public” with the outcomes of their SoTL work. For more information, including procedures for submitting a presentation proposal, go to http://facctr.wcu.edu/feed/.

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5. SoTL Grants and SoTL Awards: This spring the first SoTL grants at WCU will be awarded, and next fall a new call for proposals for SoTL grants will be disseminated. In addition, an annual SoTL Award is given to a member of the faculty or staff who engages in exemplary SoTL work.

6. Consultations: The two SoTL Faculty Fellows at the Coulter Faculty Center, John Habel, from the Department of Psychology, and Laura Cruz, from the Department of History, are available to consult with individuals and teams of members of the faculty and staff who have questions about SoTL work, including getting started, designing a study, selecting appropriate methods, obtaining approval for research with human subjects, and going public with outcomes.

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It is our contention that Western is perfectly poised to meet these needs. One student in our study agreed:

“Well, I just think that Western is a unique environment, so any of the things that we can do maybe aren’t going to work for other schools, but I definitely think that they should listen to the students, because we have a chance here to do more hands-on, more out of the classroom stuff because of the small class size. So I think that’s important; you know, it doesn’t have to be a universal thing, but if it works here, then we should really go for it.”

—WCU undergraduate

Note: The research team included Glenn Bowen, Carol Burton, Chris Cooper, Laura Cruz, Chesney Reich, Melissa Wargo, and Anna McFadden

ANNA T. MCFADDEN
DIRECTOR AND PROFESSOR
This year, the Faculty Center has launched several new initiatives to support eTeaching and eLearning. Under the leadership of the four CFC eLearning faculty fellows (Claire DeCristofaro, John LeBaron, Dixie McGinty and Mary Teslow) and two instructional developers, (Robert Crow and Amy Martin), the following faculty services have been launched or strengthened.

ONLINE COURSE DEVELOPMENT (OCD)
The CFC has had success with two iterations of the OCD day. We average thirty participants per session. Faculty members bring electronic versions of their course materials, then receive assistance as necessary with construction of their courses. CFC faculty members, including the eLearning Faculty Fellows, are on-hand to assist. CFC support includes online pedagogy, digital media assistance, “other” instructional technology available, and WebCat. The Center has received stellar reviews/evaluations of OCD. One thing that especially stands out is faculty members who declare, “Now, we know who to call when we need help.”

THE eLEARNING FACULTY LEARNING COMMUNITY
The EL-FLC boasts a membership list exceeding forty. Therefore, while retaining the full FLC for occasional meetings and events, this group has split into three special interest groups (SIGs): student engagement/transition, eTeaching tools, and course design. The full FLC met three times in 2007-2008 with an average attendance of approximately 15 participants. Each SIG met (or will meet) once or twice in the current academic year. Guest speakers to the EL-FLC include Buddy Tignor of Haywood Community College, Ed Gehinger of NC State, and the CFC’s own Chris Snyder and Neil Torda.

eLEARNING-eMENTOR PROJECT
This service will be announced to the campus, with stepwise guidelines for accessing and using it, at the beginning of April 2008. At launch, full-blown eMentor pages appear on the CFC server for seven WCU faculty and support staff. Pages will soon appear for two additional resource people. This project offers teaching faculty with access to in-depth peer consultations and thus an essential “third leg” on the eTeaching service tripod that also includes OCAT and the eTeaching Water Cooler. The eMentor Web site may be found at: http://www.wcu.edu/facctr/InstructionalTechnology/OnlineTeachandLearn/mentor/index.asp

eLEARNING SCHOLARSHIP
In national and international venues, 2007-2008 saw several WCU-authored conference presentations and publications on eLearning and eTeaching. Conference venues have included the Sloan Consortium in Orlando, AACSE-Learn in Quebec City and UNC-TLT. Journal articles and book chapters have appeared or been accepted at Information Science Publishing/IGI Global, the international Journal of Interactive Learning Environments, and MountainRise.

eTEACHING WATER COOLER
Thanks to the initiative of Mary Teslow, the eTeaching Water Cooler has been exceedingly successful in 2007-2008. All WCU faculty (<1500) are automatically enrolled in this electronic meeting space. During the current academic year, users have made extensive use of this resource, exchanging information and solving problems. More than 1500 user sessions have been recorded, averaging nine “hits” per day. Over 1800 discussions have been read, with more than 1300 folders and nearly 1300 files viewed. The Water Cooler has emerged as a powerful resource for peer-to-peer professional development to support excellence in eTeaching.

JAY M. ROBINSON ANNUAL eTEACHING AWARD
The second annual university-wide eTeaching Award recognition has again successfully concluded. Eleven individuals were initially nominated, producing four finalists, and a winner whose name will be announced at the 2008 general faculty assembly. A peer review panel was drawn from an invitation to all colleges and schools, the graduate and undergraduate student associations, and other key stakeholders. Instructional Developer Amy Martin’s work was substantially responsible for the successful conclusion of the 2007-2008 award process.

ONLINE COURSE ASSESSMENT TOOL (OCAT)
OCAT is available to all WCU faculty members on the CFC website as a fully interactive PDF form. It may be used for self-assessment of online courses, or for peer assessment. Peer assessment is undertaken in discipline-based partnerships for course review, or through a formal confidential peer assessment arranged via the CFC (contact Director Anna McFadden to take advantage of this process). Additionally, faculty members have found it helpful as a “roadmap” of curriculum elements when creating or restructuring new online courses.

PASSENGES 2007
The third two-day Passages Retreat was held in November 2007. Consonant with a strong University mission element, for the first time in 2007, Passages was organized and funded in cooperation with Haywood Community College. Approximately 50 faculty from WCU and HCC participated this year, an increase of approximately 40% over 2006. Two faculty members from ASU keynoted. Other events included a student panel and six break-out sessions. Participant evaluations were highly positive. The most recent Passages Web site is located at: http://wiki2.wcu.edu/groups/passages/.

For 2008-2009, Carlie Merritt will join the eLearning faculty fellow team, succeeding Claire whose term expires this year. The entire CFC thanks Claire for her creative energy and leadership with all EL-FF projects, especially the Online Course Assessment Tool.
The Faculty Learning Communities sponsored by the Coulter Faculty Center have had a busy and productive year. Each community has undertaken activities that will contribute not only to teaching and learning within individual faculty classrooms, but also to teaching and learning at the university level.

Our largest community, the eLearning FLC, split into three sub-groups in order to focus on specific faculty interests within eLearning. Several members of this FLC also recently participated in the UNC Teaching and Learning with Technology Conference. Members of the Process Oriented, Guided Inquiry Learning (POGIL) FLC also participated in an off-campus event this year, attending the first southeast regional POGIL meeting at Agnes Scott College in Decatur, Georgia.

On campus, the Civic Engagement FLC has been working closely with the WCU branch of the American Democracy Project, and provided a description of their FLC and of the HR 436—Leadership in Civic Engagement course (a course designed out of the work of this FLC) to the ADP website. Continuing with their successful efforts from last year, the Learning Reconsidered/Faculty Enrichment and Education FLC is hard at work planning for the second Faculty Enrichment and Education Day (FEED), scheduled for Tuesday, September 23, 2008. The Distinguished Professors FLC, meanwhile, educated the campus on the new Madison Distinguished Professorship by holding a panel presentation in which several distinguished professors and administrators discussed the roles of distinguished professors on campus. And in an event that engaged students across campus, the Sustainability in Higher Education FLC sponsored WCU’s participation in Focus the Nation: Stabilizing the Climate in the 21st Century, which included events in classrooms and in the UC organized around the theme of sustainability.

The Service Learning FLC is currently designing ways to spread the word about WCU’s Service Learning initiatives. They have spent the year working on video clips which will showcase exemplary Service Learning projects and plan to distribute these videos via CD, the WCU website, and iTunesU. The International Faculty FLC is also making use of the WCU website by designing a webpage devoted to the needs of international faculty at WCU and is making plans to welcome the new international WCU faculty to campus in the fall.

Two faculty learning communities are specifically focused on better engaging our students in the classroom. The Synthesis and Integrative Learning FLC created a plan to synthesize content from theater, art, history, diversity, music, and education into a Theater in Education course and began to develop a cultural/humanities institute that would foster cooperation among disciplines sponsoring cultural/humanities events on campus. And the Learning through Reading FLC discussed two books and a documentary dealing with reading at the college level in the hopes of incorporating some of the suggested techniques for encouraging students to read into their teaching.

If you are interested in joining any of these Faculty Learning Communities or have a suggestion for a new one, please contact Amy Martin at x2762 or amartin@email.wcu.edu.
24-7 WebCat Support Arrives
BY CHRIS SNYDER

With more and more students—especially those taking online courses—demanding access to technology help at all hours of the day and night, colleges and universities are responding by extending help-desk hours. More than half are open late into the evening, according to a recent survey by Educause, the educational technology consortium, and a few are available 24x7. But most universities are not set up for the extra hours. Their staffs are too small, and their budgets too tight. So many institutions are outsourcing the service to Presidium Learning and similar companies.

At the beginning of the semester, when things are busiest, Presidium will receive between 3,500 and 4,000 calls per day, with the majority coming in between 7 a.m. and midnight. Things run more slowly at night during most months. Just a handful of people are on duty, down from just over 100 during the day. However, the students and instructors who call are generally relieved that anyone is there at all.

Information Technology Services (ITS) and the Coulter Faculty Center have updated our WebCat support process to include services provided by Presidium Learning, whose consultants are now providing 24x7 support for WebCat. WCU faculty and students now have direct access to WebCat support via these means:

TELEPHONE SUPPORT
• 24 hours a day; weekdays, weekends and holidays
• IT Services Helpdesk 828-227-7487, option 1
• toll free 866-WCU-7ITS, option 1

SELF SERVICE KNOWLEDGE BASE
• http://d2.parature.com/ics/support/default.asp?deptID=8030
• Includes FAQ tip sheets, animated tutorials, and access to chat, web, and phone based support channels Accessible from any computer connected to the Internet

LIVE CHAT
• Great for dial-up users
• Users interact live with a support technician

SUBMISSION OF WEB-FORM E-TICKET
• Enables you to directly submit a support ticket to a technical specialist whose expertise matches your inquiry. This online tool provides an alternative to phone and chat helping to expedite the resolution of your issue. You can track the status of your ticket in My Support in the online system.

Our partnership with Presidium Learning is an enhancement to our current in-house support, offering WebCat support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and 365 days a year! Services include the addition of an updated support request entry system and supplemental multi-channel technical support for our campus. The implementation of these updates/services will allow for uninterrupted services and the continuation of quality support for our campus. Of course, you can still reach the local WebCat team directly by calling the IT Services Helpdesk at x7487 or via the Coulter Faculty Center during our regular business hours noted above.

Online students need and demand 24-7 support.

Faculty who teach online, such as Jeanne Dorle, will benefit from 24-7 support.
By STEPH CERASO

Becoming Professional: A Story of Development

I’m twenty-six. This is my third year of college-level teaching. I’m often mistaken for a student. I dangle precariously between the familiar realm of student life and the world of veritable adults. I guess you could call me an undeveloped professional. Even as I’m weeks away from completing my “Certificate of Professional Development in Teaching and Learning” (CPDTL), I still don’t feel quite “developed.” But maybe that’s a good thing.

The word development is significant here. It implies an ongoing process, a state of becoming. This is appropriate in the sense that as teachers, we never stop becoming (learning, growing, and, well, developing). Or if we claim to be “professionally developed,” it probably just means we stopped caring somewhere along the way.

Development is inherently incomplete; it’s a process of getting better, of understanding deeper—but there is always more to learn. The CPDTL, open to all WCU faculty by the Coulter Faculty Center, offers us a rare opportunity to seriously reflect on our teaching and learning. I know what you’re thinking. Why does reflection have to involve a campus-sponsored program? But honestly, how many of us, in the midst of committee meetings, paper grading, preparing lesson plans, juggling student conferences, research, and sleeping (if we’re lucky), actually take the time to think about what we do on a daily basis? Reflection seems like a luxury, and sometimes, an impossibility. The CPDTL enables us to slow down and take a cognitive breath; to look back and evaluate.

The requirements are not terribly demanding (complete a teaching journal, attend some workshops, participate in small group analyses, and revise a teaching statement over the course of a year). Yet, doing these tasks in small steps provides you with a year’s worth of documented self-evaluation and learning. In fact, rereading my CPDTL journal entries has resulted in a total overhaul of my teaching philosophy—evidence that real learning and developing is taking place. Whether you’re a new instructor or a seasoned pro, the CPDTL is a stimulating and rewarding exercise that will undoubtedly jump start your desire for development.

Do words like wiki, blog, iTunes and streaming mean anything to you? If not, don’t worry! The Coulter Faculty Center has resources available that will help you learn how to manage all of your digital media projects.

You might not be sure how you can take advantage of these resources or how you can incorporate them into your classes. Here is a quick guide to what these terms mean and how you might use them in teaching and learning.

Wiki – collaborative web site that allows multiple individuals to edit the content directly on the server with no special software. One way to use wikis in your course is for group projects. Divide your class into teams and they can work on a single document from many different locations.

Blog – short for web log, it’s an online diary. If you have your students keep a journal in your course, then a blog is a perfect replacement. One of the great features that blogs have over paper journals is the ability for your comments to be added directly to the entries. In addition, students can also embed audio, video or still images into their blogs.

WCU on iTunes U – course based podcast solution. There are many ways to podcast in your course. You can record your lecture and post it online for further review, or you can have supplemental information available as a download so you don’t have to use precious face-time to cover it during class. Content that is put into an iTunes U course can be downloaded to the students’ computer or loaded onto digital media players like the iPod or Zune.

Streaming – pre-recorded or live audio or video that is delivered over an Internet connection that can’t be saved to the local computer. Some Western faculty are streaming their courses live by having a camera in the classroom, allowing distance and online students to participate in real time with the class. If you are interested in any of these digital media delivery methods, contact Neil Torda (mailto:torda@email.wcu.edu) or Laura Chapman (chapmanL@email.wcu.edu) in the Coulter Faculty Center. Also, check out the Digital Media Wiki for more information and training: http://wiki2.wcu.edu/groups/dm/.

Neil Torda, Digital Media Lecturer, works with Laura Chapman in the Sandbox to provide support for faculty.
Coulter Faculty Center staff

Have a wonderful summer.