



# Faculty Forum

*From the Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence*

WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

CULLOWHEE, NORTH CAROLINA

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*This month we received many thoughtful responses to our poll and to Robbie Pittman's opinion piece. It seems clear that the faculty would like the Response issue continued, even if it doesn't materialize every month. We thank you for your feedback.*

## Faculty Responses

Terrific! Having just written a final exam with essay items at the analysis, synthesis, and evaluation levels, I find Robbie's suggestions "right on." I would only add that reviewing the questions orally with the students and asking if they have any questions about what is expected of them is a helpful way to test your ability to communicate in an essay question.

**Judy Stillion, Academic Affairs/Psychology**

I hope all of the English faculty read Robbie's piece. Ironically, some of us who create essay topics on a weekly basis have the least expertise when doing so--experience isn't always the best teacher.

**Jim Nicholl, English**

Though the number of responses may have declined, the quality of those responses remains high. They intrigue me and I read them carefully.

**Carol Hill, Nursing**

The lack of written response to the issues presented in Faculty Forum does not necessarily indicate a lack of interest. I find the items informative, provocative, or interesting for the most part, and certainly helpful. Keep the response issue coming through flood, fire, and drought! Robbie's "Essay" piece is most helpful and I will integrate some of the hints into my exam structure.

**Jeff Neff, Geosciences/Anthropology**

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I would like to respond to Robbie Pittman's "To Essay or Not To Essay" by making two points:

1. Robbie's good advice on essay questions can also be applied to research papers. Assignments such as "Write a 20-page paper on \_\_\_\_\_" (e.g. computers, Antarctica, or the history of psychoanalysis) will also leave the student guessing about what the instructor wants if no additional instructions are given.
2. (and perhaps most important) The grading of essay questions and research papers is infinitely easier when instructions, expectations, and the basis for evaluation is clearly and specifically stated.

**Sandra B. Oldendorf, Psychology**

Excellent suggestions by Robbie. The only qualification I would make is that less structure is necessary if one of the things you want to test is the student's ability to select what is important. To expand on Robbie's suggestions, I have found it useful to provide a 45-minute period between handing out the test question and handing out the answer sheets (obviously, this is in 3-hour night classes or final exam periods). When students are not permitted to begin writing immediately, they are more likely to take some time to organize their responses. I have seen an increase in the quality of answers as a result of using this procedure.

**Anonymous**

I applaud the teaching tips which Nell Holtzclaw suggested for our international students. Just as we provide special services for our physically handicapped, our learning disabled, and our minority students, we should also be alert to the special needs of our foreign-born students. Ideally, our special services should be extended not only to the classroom but to many other aspects of the international students' lives in Cullowhee.

**Natalie Haberland, Library-Reference**

Since students sometimes interpret my essay questions in a way I had not intended, I usually read the set of exams through once before I set up the grading system. Another way I have gotten around this problem is to give the students 10-20 study questions from which I choose a few for the test. The students have an opportunity to discuss these questions before the exam.

**Dan Pittillo, Biology**