



TA Connections

Newsletter for Teaching Assistants ♦ Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center
Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, Illinois 60115, (815) 753 0595, facdev@niu.edu, <http://www.niu.edu/facdev>

Fall 2003 TA Orientation

The fall 2003 Teaching Assistant orientation held on August 21, 2003 was attended by nearly 200 graduate teaching assistants at NIU. Dan Cabrera, Multimedia Coordinator at the Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center, moderated the morning sessions held in the Danielson Auditorium at the Wirtz Hall.



Dan Cabrera, one of the presenters at the TA Orientation

The orientation began with a formal welcome message by Dr. Carla Montgomery, Associate Dean for the Graduate School, who encouraged the TA participants to benefit from the orientation and navigate the academic year and teaching assistant responsibilities successfully

The morning sessions included presentations and lively discussions on the following topics:

- "Who's the NIU Student?" by *Dan House*, Director, Office of Institutional Research
- "Overview of Teaching and Learning" by *Dan Cabrera*
- "Classroom Management" by *Tim Griffin*, Ombudsman
- "Preventing and Handling Academic Dishonesty" by *Larry Bolles*, Director, Judicial Office

The afternoon concurrent sessions held in the Holmes Student Center Tower rooms covered the following topics:

- "Active Learning Techniques" by *William Johnson*, English
- "Effective Grading" by *Paula Brown*, Management
- "Conducting Laboratory Sessions" by *David Ballantine*, Chemistry and Biochemistry
- "Stress Management and Time Management" by *Rebecca Weisenthal*, Counseling and Student Development
- "Surviving the First day" by *Christopher Jones*, Political Science, and
- "Tips for International Students" by *Doris Macdonald*, English

In between each session during the morning door prizes were drawn and awarded to the following participants:

- *Michal Clarke*, Geography (A Practical Companion to Ethics by A. Weston)
- *Jennifer Guon*, Political Science (The Craft of Research by W. Booth, G. Columb, and J. Williams)

- *David McCaig*, Anthropology (\$25.00 gift certificate, LubePro of Sycamore)
- *Heather Crichton*, Communication Studies (Research Design: Qualitative and Mixed Methods Approaches by J. Creswell)
- *Stephanie Blaha*, Accountancy (Active Learning: 101 Strategies to Teach any Subject by M. Silberman)
- *Jace Robinson*, Biological Sciences (Effective Grading: A tool for Learning and Assessment by B. Walvoord, and V. Anderson)
- *Joseph Agate*, Technology (Style Toward Clarity and Grace by J.M. Williams), and
- *Phil Tokarz*, Biological Sciences (\$25.00 gift certificate, LubePro of Sycamore).

The following participants also received \$25 gift certificates for the NIU Bookstore in the door prize drawing attached to the TA Orientation feedback form:

- Chris Farkas, Statistics
- Kheang Leang, Foreign Languages and Literatures
- Rob Mishur, Chemistry and Biochemistry
- Louise Steeves, Communication.

The participants received refreshments in the morning and during the break, and were given lunch cards for the Blackhawk Cafeteria. All the participants also received copies of handouts from all the sessions and a binder containing the Teaching Assistant Handbook and the 175-page Instructional Guide for University Faculty. There are a few copies of the Teaching Assistant Handbook and the Instructional Guide for University Faculty still available and those TAs who could not attend the Orientation can get the copies from the Center or find them online at the faculty development website at <http://www.niu.edu/facdev>.



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There are several reasons for creating an inclusive classroom, which include understanding viewpoints other than the traditional western viewpoint, accommodating diverse learning styles of students, and preparing students for a global workforce.

An inclusive classroom promotes the valuing of diversity and understanding of the contributions and perspectives of people of differing race, ethnicity, language, religion, gender, sexual orientation, and differing physical abilities.

An important reason for creating an inclusive classroom is the need for understanding viewpoints other than the traditional western perspective. Including the study of various cultural groups and their historical experiences allows students to analyze diverse perspectives. This balancing of perspectives lends a better understanding and tolerance on a global scope.

With this in mind, how can we implement a model of course change towards multicultural inclusion in the classroom?

There are several models of multicultural transformation available and one such course change model can be found in A. I. Morey and M. K. Kitano. (1997) Multicultural Course Transformation in Higher Education: A Broader Truth, pp. 25 – 28. Instructors can consider the following elements from Morey and Kitano's course change model of multicultural integration for their courses and classrooms:

- Content
- Instructional strategies
- Assessment
- Classroom dynamics

Content. Instructors can select course content that reflects the cultural characteristics and experiences of the students. To the extent that knowledge is socially constructed, allowing the students' own truths into the course content replaces the exclusive and traditional norm with a new inclusive norm. This course change model is applicable to subjective disciplines as well as objective disciplines.

An example used by Morey and Kitano is a course on leadership theories. The exclusive course focuses on traditional leadership theories based on White male leaders. An inclusive course focuses on women's leadership and non-Western theories of leadership. Going further, the inclusive course would analyze why some theories have been left out of the curriculum and the effect of the omission on education.

Instructional strategies. Instructors in some disciplines may feel that their subject matter does not readily lend itself to transforming the content multiculturally. In such



situations, instructors can incorporate teaching strategies and learning activities that capitalize on students' diverse experiences and learning strengths, include opportunities for personal participation and growth, and foster skills such as critical thinking and social participation.

An inclusive literature course on Shakespeare might look at what has traditionally been taught and which questions have been asked. The inclusive instructor might ask students to look at Othello's race and class and focus on stereotypes of race, class, and gender.

Assessment. Under this model of course change, instructors should provide students with multiple methods for demonstrating their understanding of course content. This form of assessment would allow students to make meaning as opposed to giving the "right" answer.

Classroom dynamics. The human interactions that occur in the classroom make up the inclusive classroom dynamics. Classroom dynamics consist of the relationship between the instructor and the students as well as the relationship between students. This can be achieved by creating a safe environment for dialogue, encouraging equity among participants, and perceiving learning as a shared experience.

An example of creating inclusive classroom dynamics may be to allow diverse students' viewpoints or arguments without singling out individual students to speak for their groups.

An inclusive classroom opens a more honest view of social and intellectual reality and better meets the needs of the students by leading to better contextual understanding, feelings of self-efficacy and empowerment, and citizenship engagement.

Please contact Brenda Hodges, Program Coordinator, at brhodges@niu.edu or 753-3015 for more information on this topic. Hodges will also offer a workshop titled, "Creating an Inclusive Classroom" on November 6, 2003 from 12:00 to 1:00 p.m. and more information about the workshop can be found on the next page.

Blackboard 6 for Students

September 17, 2003 from 10:00 am to 12:00 pm – or – September 18, 2003 from 1:00 to 3:00 pm

Information Technology Services (ITS) offers these FREE short courses for graduate students. Enrollment begins August 18, 2003. Enroll by calling the Customer Support Center 753-8100 or e-mailing shortcourse@niu.edu. NOTE: You are not actually enrolled in a short course until you receive an official registration confirmation e-mail from ITS.

Best Practices in Instruction

Thursday, August 28, 2003 from 12:00 pm to 1:30 pm

This session by Christa Dallmann (Faculty Development) will offer a collection of core practices that constitute excellence in teaching. The best practices discussed in this session will focus on those aspects of classroom teaching competence that are visible to oneself and others, and thus useful for formative evaluation. Some of the practices that will be discussed are group discussion triggers, reflective responses to learner contributions, cooperative group assignments, modeling, climate setting and fostering learner responsibility. Advanced registration is required.

Blackboard Overview

Friday, August 29, 2003 from 9:00 am to 12:00 pm

In this hands-on workshop, learn the basics of creating and developing a course in Blackboard, NIU's web course management system. Participants will get an overview of course layout and navigation and will have an opportunity to place materials in a sample course. Knowledge of web browsing is necessary. Advanced registration is required.

Building an Accessible Blackboard Course: Recommended Settings and File Formats

Wednesday, September 24, 2003 from 9:00 am to 11:00 am

This hands-on workshop is the third in a series offered by ITS on Web Accessibility. Participants will receive information on how to make a Blackboard course accessible to students with visual or hearing disabilities. Blackboard Overview or equivalent is required, and registrants should have access to a Blackboard course in order to test settings and document samples. Please register online at <http://www.its.niu.edu/its/CSupport/Shortcourse/register.shtml> or call (815) 753-8100.

On the Future Possibility of Liberal Education at Northern Illinois University

Presidential Teaching Professor Seminar by Gary D. Glenn (Political Science)

Wednesday, September 24, 2003 from 12:00 – 1:00 pm, Holmes Student Center Heritage Room

The title's forward-looking sound is meant to deceive, for the following questions will be discussed in the Professor's usual retrograde manner. What is liberal education? What does it require of students and teachers? What are the primary obstacles to it both now and in the foreseeable future? We will proceed in a manner appropriate to liberal education: participants are encouraged to ask thoughtful questions, even if they suggest that the professor has erred in some trifling particular. Sponsored by the Office of the Provost. No advance registration required.

Mastering the Control Panel

Thursday, September 25, 2003 from 2:00 pm to 4:30 pm

This hands-on session provides an overview of the various Control Panel features and offers participants an opportunity to work within their own courses to learn course management. The Control Panel in Blackboard is the key to adding course content, managing discussion, setting up groups and many other essential course management functions. A basic knowledge of Blackboard is necessary for this session. Advanced registration is required.

Effective Use of Basic Multimedia in Blackboard

Thursday, October 9, 2003 from 2:00 pm to 4:30 pm

This workshop will cover basic multimedia integration using Blackboard. Participants will learn how to import images, video and audio clips into different sections of the Blackboard online package. Participants will be using a browser (IE or Netscape). Advanced registration is required.

Creating an Inclusive Classroom

Thursday, November 6, 2003 from 12:00 pm to 1:00 pm

This workshop by Brenda Hodges (Faculty Development) will establish some of the pedagogical concerns on creating an inclusive classroom. This workshop will focus on how contexts such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age and physical ability affect instructing, learning, organizing and evaluating students. Issues covered will include: recognizing unconscious sexism, preventing miseducation, including diverse students, and creating a safe classroom. Advanced registration is required.

Registration Information

Graduate Teaching Assistants can contact Amy Deegan at the Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center at 753-0595 or email at facdev@niu.edu their full name, department, email address and phone number to pre-register. Program locations will be made available when you register. If you register for a program and are unable to attend it, please notify the Center at least two working days in advance so that those on the waiting list could be given the opportunity to attend that program. Contact sponsoring units for more information about their programs.

NIU students are beginning to expect it. Faculty members are finding new educational applications each semester. NIU offers access to all students and teaching faculty and staff. It's available for TA use. What's all the excitement about? NIU's web course management system, Blackboard.

Blackboard allows instructors to develop and deliver course materials online. It has built-in discussion areas for synchronous (chat) and asynchronous (electronic bulletin board) communication and offers testing capabilities. The electronic grade book automatically records test and assignment scores created in Blackboard and students can quickly turn in assignments electronically without attaching them to email.

NIU has been using Blackboard for almost three years and recently upgraded the system from 5.5 to 6.0. The current version has great new features such as assignment scoring and grade book upload capabilities that have great promise for instructional use.

If you are a TA or a GA assisting a faculty member who uses Blackboard, the faculty member can add you to the course as the graduate assistant. This status will afford you access to the Control Panel in the course and will allow you to add materials and grade assignments.



In order for GAs to be assigned their own Blackboard courses, they must have a Novell login ID in addition to their campus z-id. If you are listed as the instructor of a course and are interested in using Blackboard, contact the chair of the department for which you teach. The chair can request a Novell id for you at no charge to the department.

Once you have the Novell account, follow the instructions online at: <http://www3.niu.edu/blackboard/requests.html>. Your course will appear upon login to Blackboard on the next working day. Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center (FDIDC) offers periodic workshops for graduate teaching assistants on using Blackboard. Watch for the workshop fliers. If you have technical questions about Blackboard, contact the Information Technology Services Customer Support Center at 815-753-8100.

Message from the Director

Welcome to the fall 2003 semester. This is the first issue of our newsletter for graduate teaching assistants at NIU, and we hope you find it informative and useful. As some of you may know, effective July 1, 2003, the services provided by the Office of Teaching Assistant Training and Development (TATD) were transferred from the Graduate School to the Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center due to the challenges presented by the budget reductions within the university.

We are grateful to the staff of the Office of Teaching Assistant Training and Development for their contributions to the training and development of graduate teaching assistants at NIU during these past four years. We value the important role graduate teaching assistants play at NIU and we will do our best to continue the services the Office of TATD had established for teaching assistants. We also seek your support as we absorb these additional responsibilities in these difficult budget times and work towards establishing the necessary programs, resources, and services for you.

Along with hosting the fall 2003 TA Orientation, we have quickly established a webpage for Teaching Assistants at

our website at <http://www.niu.edu/facdev> (click on "Teaching Assistant Support" under Links) where you can find information about our programs, services, and resources for TAs. We wish you a productive academic year and benefit from our programs and services and call on our staff for your teaching-related needs.

- Murali Krishnamurthi

Newsletter Name Chosen

At the fall 2003 TA Orientation participants were given the opportunity to recommend a name for the TA newsletter published by the Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center (FDIDC). Out of all the recommendations submitted by participants one name that aptly captured the essence of the newsletter was the "TA Connections" submitted by *Leslie Kivi* of the Department of Accountancy, and it has been chosen as the name of the TA newsletter. Leslie will receive from FDIDC a \$25 gift certificate for the NIU Bookstore for her recommendation. The Center hopes the newsletter will connect TAs with the development opportunities at NIU and assist them in their teaching-related responsibilities.