



# TA Connections

Newsletter for Teaching Assistants ♦ Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center  
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## How to Create Mid-Semester Motivation

*The following article will help you to understand the origin of the overwhelming feelings you and your students may be experiencing midway through the semester. If the bright, shining faces of your students have changed to dull, void looks of disappointment and you are experiencing a lack of enthusiasm, it is time to create motivation in your classroom.*

Let's first review some of the general understandings about student motivation:

- When students value learning they are more likely to set goals, and work towards achieving them if they expect to gain something concrete.
- Students' intrinsic or basic motivation begins with a general sense of self-worth and a strong dose of curiosity about the world.
- Students must be able to balance their desire to be accepted by others with their academic performance and potential.
- Students must believe they can succeed in the class even when unexpected things happen to deter them.

As the teacher you have the ability to make life changing decisions. The following strategies can help you create a motivating classroom:

- A. Midterm is a good time to evaluate the overall course goals and objectives. After conducting this assessment on your own, you might consider sharing your findings with the class and getting your student's feedback.
- B. After intently focusing on the course material during the first half of the semester, your students might appreciate an assignment to now write specific goals for their own learning in your class. Don't be surprised if you get varying responses depending on individual student's motivation level.
- C. Once students write out their goals, hold them accountable for making progress towards these goals. Show them how to make the connection between stating short term goals and achieving long term goals.
- D. Mixing unexpected or thought-provoking questions into your course materials can also help increase the curiosity level in class.

- E. Engaging students in a field trip to a place they've never considered before has the potential to help students put course content into practice.
- F. The human need for approval is universal and teachers have the opportunity for acknowledging this emotion in the classroom in order to motivate their students. By giving individual feedback to high achievers, teachers may influence students who haven't been putting in much effort to improve their performance.
- G. When teachers take an honest assessment of the motivation level in their classroom they may find the need to incorporate cooperative learning activities to create playfulness and in the process support and increase their student's motivation levels.

Finally, your personal enthusiasm and communication skills greatly influence the level of student interest and motivation in the subject matter and in the classroom. The next opportunity you have to get in front of the class or interact with students, be aware of your nonverbal cues such as your facial expressions, animations, and voice intensity. Try using some of these strategies for your own benefit – ultimately, they have the power to help motivate both you and your students.



Adapted from "The Mid-Semester Blahs: How to Create a Motivating Classroom," by Joanne Holladay; published on the website of the Division of Instructional Innovation and Assessment, The University of Texas at Austin. URL: <http://www.utexas.edu/academic/diia/gsi/tatalk/blahs.php>.

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**Teaching-Related Video/Pizza/Discussion with Teaching Assistants from 12:00 to 1:30 p.m.**  
“Dealing with Problems: Discussion of Classroom Situations,” Tuesday, January 25, 2005  
“Models in Excellence: Successful Classroom Teaching,” Monday, February 21, 2005  
“Teaching in the Diverse Classroom,” Wednesday, March 2, 2005  
“Simplifying for Clarity in Teaching,” Thursday, April 7, 2005

Selected videos will be presented each month at noon. Participants will engage in a moderated discussion on aspects of the video topic that might enhance their classroom teaching and learning. Lunch will be provided. Advanced registration is required.

**Blackboard Overview**  
**Wednesday, January 19, 2005 from 11:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.**

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

**Mastering the Control Panel in Blackboard**  
**Thursday, February 3, 2005 from 9:00 to 10:30 a.m.**

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

**Finding Funding for Graduate Teaching Assistants**  
**Thursday, February 10, 2005 from 12:00 to 1:00 p.m.**

Join Kristian M. Veit from NIU's Graduate Student Grants and Fellowships Office for a hands-on demonstration of the Illinois Researcher Information Service (IRIS), a user-friendly online database of over 8,000 external grant and fellowship opportunities. Participants will receive training on keyword searches of this extensive database and will also learn how to set up their own email funding “alert” system through IRIS. Advanced registration is required.

**Presidential Teaching Professor Seminar**  
**Monday, February 14, 2005, HSC Heritage Room, “Why Teaching Would Be So Much Nicer If Not For Students”**  
**11:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. Refreshments; 12:00 p.m. to 1:00 p.m. Presentation and Q&A**

This series offers stimulating questions and ideas from Dr. Jim Thomas, one of NIU's Presidential Teaching Professors from the Department of Sociology. In this presentation, Professor Thomas will address a simple question for teachers: “Why bother?” Sponsored by the Office of the Provost. No registration required and everyone is welcome.

**Conference on Portfolio Integration: Connecting Learning and Assessment**  
**Friday, March 4, 2005 from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.**

Graduate teaching assistants will find this conference beneficial for increasing their awareness of how the reflective process of portfolio is fundamental to teaching and learning. Students can register online for \$25, which includes refreshments, lunch, choice of conference sessions, demonstrations and exhibits.

**Blackboard Overview**  
**Monday, March 7, 2005 from 1:00 to 4:30 p.m.**

This hands-on workshop will be repeated for participants who missed the first session in January. Participants will be provided with the same overview of course layout, navigation and the opportunity to place materials in a sample course. Knowledge of web browsing is necessary. Advanced registration is required.

**Mentoring After Hours**  
**Tuesday, March 22, 2005 from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m.**

This informal session is designed to provide an after-work networking opportunity for graduate teaching assistants, faculty, professional staff and administrators, as well as inspire GTAs to become mentors themselves. Refreshments will be provided. Advanced registration is required.

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**Registration Information:** These programs are open to all graduate teaching assistants at NIU. To pre-register for a program please contact Chigozie Achebe at the Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center at 815-753-0614 or email at [tadev@niu.edu](mailto:tadev@niu.edu) and provide your full name, department, email address, phone number, and the title of the program you wish to register for. Program locations will be made available when you register. If you register for a program, please make every effort to attend. If you are unable to attend, please notify the Center at least two working days in advance so that others on the waiting list can be accommodated. Visit our website at <http://www.niu.edu/facdev/ta/index.htm> for a current schedule of TA programs and other information.

More than 50 enthusiastic graduate teaching assistants attended the spring 2005 Teaching Assistant Orientation, coordinated by the Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center (FDIDC), on January 14, 2005. Morning sessions included the following presentations:

- “Creating and Organizing Effective Lesson Plans” by Agnes Conway, Counseling, Adult and Higher Education
- “Establishing Productive Group Activities” by Lisa Yamagata-Lynch, Educational Technology, Research and Assessment



Dr. Carol Scheidenhelm (Assistant Director, FDIDC) presents a certificate of participation to Mei-loc Chan

Afternoon sessions covered the following topics:

- “Time Management Techniques” by Deborah Haliczzer, Employee Relations, Human Resource Services
- “Teaching With Technology: Best Practices” by FDIDC Staff

Participants who attended the morning sessions were actively engaged in the lesson planning process. Conway’s presentation emphasized that the steps to effective lesson planning begins with the end in mind. She encouraged GTAs to begin the process by: 1) listing the objective(s) for the lesson, 2) deciding how to reinforce and test learning, 3) choosing materials and learning activities, 4) identifying roles for teacher and learner, and 5) selecting appropriate instructional events. Yamagata-Lynch demonstrated a popular software called “Inspiration,” to show GTAs how technology can support group activities. She stressed that one of the most important things that GTAs can do to promote effective group activities and participation among students is to assign group roles and talk to students about effective and ineffective group dynamics.

Haliczer began the afternoon session with an overview on the basics of time management techniques. She advised GTAs to realistically revise and prioritize their Daily List of Things to Do, such as creating outlines for use as an organizer, and advance planning and organizing their personal style and space (notebooks, bags, etc.). A team of experts from the FDIDC summarized the use of four different technology techniques to enhance teaching (Blackboard, group presentations using PowerPoint, Short Focused Tutorials, using Apresio for PowerPoint, and PDF Acrobat).

The TA Orientation could not have been possible without the support of all the presenters who volunteered their time to share their expertise and experience with graduate teaching assistants during the daylong program. All participants received presentation materials, lunch and refreshments. Certificates of Participation also were presented to the participants at the end of the program.

The following participants received \$25 gift certificates from the NIU Bookstore in door prize drawings conducted during the TA Orientation:

David C. Daniels – Counseling, Adult and Higher Education  
Meagan Smith – Literacy Education  
Omer Avci – Literacy Education

Jasmeet Mago – Literacy Education  
Nick Concepcion – Foreign Languages and Literatures  
Sarah Pope – Art

For those who could not attend the spring 2005 TA Orientation, a few copies of the materials are still available and can be obtained by contacting Chigozie Achebe at (815) 753 0614 or [tadev@niu.edu](mailto:tadev@niu.edu).

## Programs (cont’d)

### **Blackboard: Communication Tools**

**Friday, April 8, 2005 from 1:00 to 2:30 p.m.**

The hands-on session covers the features of asynchronous and synchronous discussion, groups and electronic file exchange, including the digital drop box. Participants should have an understanding of basic computing skills and have taken a basic Blackboard workshop or have previous experience with Blackboard. Advanced registration is required.

### **Developing Your Teaching Portfolio, Part II**

**Friday, April 15, 2005 from 12:00 to 1:30 p.m.**

This is a follow-up to the Fall 2004 semester workshop. Participants will learn how to select and organize work samples for development of a teaching portfolio that will showcase their accomplishments for prospective employers. Advanced registration is required.

**Mark your calendars and plan to attend the Fall 2005 TA Orientation on August 16, 2005!**

# Call for Nominations for the '05 Outstanding Graduate TA Awards Page 4

The purpose of the Outstanding Graduate Teaching Assistant Awards is to acknowledge and recognize the contributions of graduate teaching assistants to the teaching mission of NIU. To be eligible for this award, the candidate must:

1. be enrolled as a graduate student in good standing at NIU during the semester the award nominations are due,
2. have been employed as a graduate teaching assistant for at least two complete semesters (excluding the semester of nomination) during the past two years at NIU,
3. have been responsible for effectively teaching a course, or for effective teaching support (example: leading discussions, tutoring, recitation, laboratory development/supervision, etc.) that involved student contact, and
4. have not previously received this award at NIU.

The head of each academic unit or academic support unit, or a designee, that employs GTAs for teaching-related activities are invited to nominate one Outstanding Graduate Teaching Assistant for the 2005 award. The nomination form can be downloaded and printed from <http://www.niu.edu/facdev/>. The nomination package should include supporting documents and submitted by March 1, 2005 to Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center. Contact Chigozie Achebe for more information at 815-753-0614 or [cachebe@niu.edu](mailto:cachebe@niu.edu).

## Technology in Teaching, Q & A

- Question: How would I present a large amount of statistical data to my class using Concept Maps?  
Answer: By "chunking" or "collapsing" those data into key concepts which become the primary nodes that are linked and connected to sub concepts. Concept mapping provides an alternative method of visual communication to students who prefer to learn with visual cues.
- Question: How can I reinforce an abstract concept presented in a previous class using online Short-Focused Tutorials?  
Answer: The short focused tutorial provides an opportunity to communicate with students in a very flexible manner. You might consider adding voice/video to an existing PowerPoint slide show to review the concept that was discussed in class and provide additional material to further enhance the discussion. Students can have access to the online multimedia presentation 24/7 and replay it as often as needed.
- Question: How can I efficiently enter a large number of student grades using the Blackboard Gradebook?  
Answer: Enter your Blackboard course and go to the Control Panel. Open the gradebook and double click on the title of the item/column you wish to add grades to. Select Item Grade List from the options. This will bring up a window that will allow you to add multiple grades. Be certain to Submit the page after entering the grade. If you use an Excel spreadsheet for grades, you can upload a column of grades into Blackboard. Online instructions can walk you through the process at: <http://www.blackboard.niu.edu/blackboard/gradebook.htm#VII>
- Question: How will teaching with Blackboard change my course(s)?  
Answer: Blackboard tools are flexible, so you can customize the online component of your class to fit your teaching style and instructional needs. The majority of courses offered on Blackboard are blended courses, or classes that meet regularly in the traditional classroom but offer materials for online access. You can also teach a complete distance learning course using Blackboard, or use only the discussion or assessment tools. Using Blackboard can reduce the need to make paper copies of handouts and tests, and it also offers instructors the opportunity to incorporate multimedia content into their lessons.
- Question: How can I create and distribute course material for my online classes?  
Answer: You can make course materials available for students in Blackboard in a variety of different formats. Some common file formats used in Blackboard include Microsoft Word (.doc), PowerPoint (.ppt), Excel (.xls) as well as Adobe Acrobat (.pdf). When selecting a file format, it is important to consider how you want your students to use the information and what software the students have access to. It's a good idea to include links to the available viewers for any file formats you choose. Check <http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/assistance/HA01044981103.aspx> for links to Microsoft viewers. The free Adobe Acrobat Reader for PDF files can be downloaded at: <http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html>

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