



TA Connections

Newsletter for Teaching Assistants ♦ Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center
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Academic Service Learning: Making Critical Connections

Based on its effective integration into the course or curriculum, service learning can powerfully engage students and teachers in the learning process. Service learning is defined by the National Commission on Service-Learning as “a teaching and learning approach that integrates community service with academic study to enrich learning, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities” (2002). Academic service learning is one of the bodies of research that is generating new interest because it involves expanding knowledge about designing curricular experiences that benefit all stakeholders – students, faculty, institutions, communities, and society-at-large. Although there is still a lack of research documenting its effectiveness, a growing body of research is being developed on service learning as part of multicultural education.

Jones’ (2001) view of service learning is one of the few that is breaking new ground because it incorporates key themes such as reflection, active learning, and a sense of social justice. The prospect of designing service learning courses that require students to collaborate with community holds great opportunity for graduate research and teaching assistants who begin to explore the literature.

The use of service learning is increasing in college classrooms and pre-service teacher education programs across the country. However, it is critical that teachers carefully think about their own definitions of service before moving forward. For example, in Jones’ service-learning initiative graduate students were recruited to work as TAs as well as research assistants. The outcomes suggested that students must work as “intercultural collaborators” and teachers must be willing to design courses using the elements of social justice and multiculturalism. As a result of participating in the initiative TA’s had the opportunity to apply concepts in teaching and learning environments and to think about the contributions and differences they want to make in the future (Jones, 2001).

Research conducted by Boyle-Baise (2002) found that service learning or community-based learning can actually help some teachers rethink narrow teaching standards that cause cultural misunderstandings, as well as alert teachers to students’ learning outside school walls. Service learning has also been defined by Rhoads (1998) as a liberatory instructional method that has the potential to transform “monocultural institutions into diverse, democratic communities.”



Academic service learning is particularly effective when integrated with critical multicultural practice that challenges students to become more knowledgeable about the social, political, and economic forces that shape their lives and the lives of others. Although the outcomes associated with service-learning are complex and the transformative potential is not immediately apparent, the long term benefit of actualizing theory and real-life practice is a compelling possibility.

The importance of an “engaged” university has been stressed by NIU President John Peters for the past two years in his State of the University Address. His vision consists of an engaged partnership with organizations and individuals in the NIU service region. It begins with a creative faculty willing to develop new multidisciplinary programs and learning opportunities. The following topics are recommended to help students and teachers make critical connections to larger issues of social change:

- Community participants/voices
- Community agencies and organizations
- Definition of service learning by students of color

In summary, it is important to remember that service learning is a pedagogical model that requires teachers to begin with self-reflection.

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In addition, teachers must design service learning courses and projects that draw students out of their comfort zone and realize that the transformative potential in service learning is not immediately apparent. However, it will ultimately benefit students, staff, faculty, and the larger community. That is the greatest satisfaction.

References

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By Chigozie Achebe

Spring 2007 Teaching Assistant Orientation



Faculty panelist demonstrates an interactive concept at Spring 2007 TAO

The big story at the Spring TA Orientation (TAO) was the record number of participants. Perhaps the mild January temperature was a motivating factor, but whatever the reason more than 50 TAs attended the daylong program held in the Holmes Student Center Sky Room on Friday, January 12, 2007.

The purpose of the Spring 2007 TA Orientation was to present topics of interest suggested by the participants of the Fall 2006 TAO and provide new and experienced TAs an opportunity to network with each other once again. Comments from TAs included, "It's good to have the time to clear your head and get positive input"; and "...informative and helpful..."

A multidisciplinary faculty panel opened the program by demonstrating some creative, yet effective, ways to interact with faculty supervisors. An award-winning professor combined philosophical foundations with new media-generated images and sound to show how TAs can make classes relevant and interesting. A TA panel presented microteaching topics based on their classroom experiences, and a workplace specialist wrapped up the day with stress reliever tools to revitalize TAs.

Each participant received presentation and resource materials, lunch, refreshments, and Certificates of Participation. The Spring TA Orientation would not have been possible without the support of all the presenters who volunteered their time to share their expertise and experience.

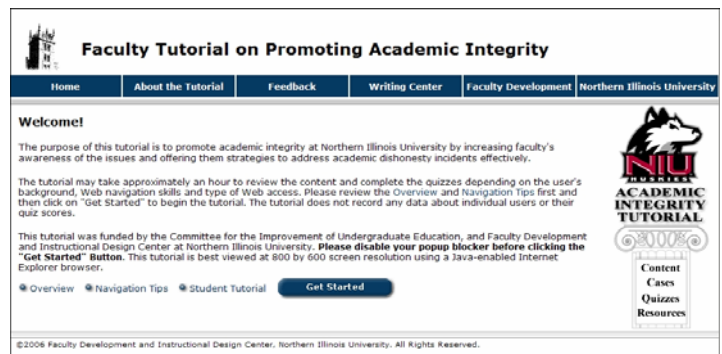
Mark your calendars and plan to attend the Fall TA Orientation on Tuesday, August 21, 2007!

Learning Community Update

The GTA Learning Community has met three times since the beginning of the spring semester. Discussions have included an overview of teaching portfolios, the functions of student feedback, collection of peer feedback through classroom visits, collaboration, dialogue, and mentoring. The cohort-focused group is providing opportunities for TAs to get to know each other on a professional and personal basis by sharing teaching and learning experiences, and reporting on their individual progress toward their teaching goals. The content of the portfolios will include a teaching philosophy statement, syllabi, sample assignments, grading policy, quizzes and tests, summary of student feedback, letters of recommendation, and a professional resume or curriculum vita that contains scholarly work, research progress, teaching experience and accomplishments, and record of academic service. The resulting portfolios will be used to help TAs apply for an academic job and for personal and professional development.

Meeting agendas for the GTA Learning Community are designed to be flexible to meet the needs of TAs who sometimes may have to adjust their schedule at a moment's notice. If you are interested in joining the group contact Chigozie Achebe at (815) 753-0614 or tadev@niu.edu.

Due to the increase in academic dishonesty incidents, a number of universities have developed online resources to promote academic integrity among students. Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center has also developed and published an "Online Tutorial on Academic Integrity" for students at <http://www.niu.edu/ai/students>. However, educating students on academic integrity addresses only one side of the issue and faculty and TAs should also be familiar with strategies for effectively addressing academic integrity in their courses. To address this teaching need, the Center has developed another online tutorial that increases faculty's awareness of academic dishonesty by students, offers strategies for effectively designing course activities to promote academic integrity, and provides tips for protecting students from unintentional accusations of cheating and plagiarism.



The faculty tutorial on academic integrity includes easily readable content organized under eight sections, quizzes, case studies, and resources. The tutorial can be accessed at <http://www.niu.edu/ai/faculty> without any login or password. Similar to the student tutorial, the faculty tutorial was also funded by the Committee for the Improvement of Undergraduate Education's "Project for the Improvement of Undergraduate Education Grant" and Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center. Teaching Assistants are encouraged to go through the tutorial and use the information in their classes.

Call for Nominations, 2007 Outstanding Graduate Teaching Assistant Awards

Purpose: The purpose of these awards is to acknowledge and recognize outstanding graduate teaching assistants for their contributions to the teaching mission of Northern Illinois University.

Awards: Three awards will be given and each recipient of the award will be presented with a plaque and recognized at a reception held at the end of the spring semester. At least one of the awards may be presented to an outstanding teaching assistant pursuing a master's degree.

Eligibility: To be eligible for this award, each 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 one or more semesters, excluding the semester of nomination, during the past 2 years at NIU;
3. have been responsible for teaching a course fully or teaching-related support (example: leading discussions, tutoring, recitation, laboratory development/supervision, etc.) which involved student contact as part of the graduate teaching assistant employment;
4. have not previously received this award at NIU.

Nomination Submission: Each academic or academic support unit that employs graduate TAs for teaching and related activities is invited to nominate one outstanding Graduate Teaching Assistant from its department for the award. Five copies of each nomination should be submitted to "Outstanding Graduate Teaching Assistant Award Committee, Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center, 319 Adams Hall, Northern Illinois University" by **March 23, 2007**.

Upcoming Program for TAs

Ethics and Research: Current Questions & Controversies

This workshop by Dr. Timothy F. Murphy, Professor of Philosophy in the Biomedical Sciences, University of Illinois College of Medicine at Chicago will be held in the Heritage Room of Holmes Student Center on **Friday, April 6, 2007** from 1:30 to 5:00 PM. Topics to be covered include: Human subjects research (What's regulated? What's not? Why?); Using existing data and biological specimens; and Writing research (authorship, plagiarism, and publication practices).

All NIU faculty, research staff, and graduate students are welcome to attend. Advance registration is required. To register, please contact Patricia Wallace at the Office of Research Compliance by phone at (815) 753-8588, email at pwallace@niu.edu, or fax: (815) 753-1631. Registration deadline is March 21, 2007. Limited seats are available! This workshop is sponsored by the Division of Research and Graduate Studies.

GTA Listserv! Are you receiving our Graduate Teaching Assistant Listserv messages with program announcements and other useful information? If not, please send an email to tadev@niu.edu to subscribe to this listserv.

Brookfield, S.D. (2006). *The Skillful Teacher: On Technique, Trust, and Responsiveness in the Classroom*, 2nd Edition

In this second edition the author offers a comprehensive guide to new and seasoned teachers that shows how to thrive on the unpredictability and diversity of classroom life. The book also reflects the many changes that have come about since the book was first published and new chapters deal with classroom diversity and teaching in online learning environments.



Conrad, R.M. and Donaldson, J.A. (2004). *Engaging the Online Learner: Activities and Resources for Creative Instruction*

This book represents an alternative for online practitioners who are looking for new ideas to enhance their online instruction, providing another framework to consider when designing and implementing online interaction. Numerous examples of activities are offered that illustrate ways in which engaged learning can be promoted in an online environment, and new ideas on how to make the shift to a collaborative, learner-centered focus occur more smoothly.

Erickson, B.L., Peters, C.B., and Strommer, D.W. (2006). *Teaching First-Year College Students, Revised and Expanded Edition of Teaching College Freshmen*

This book offers concrete suggestions about specific strategies and approaches for faculty who teach first-year courses. The new edition is based on the most current research on teaching and learning and incorporates information about the demographic changes that have occurred in student populations since the first edition was published in 1991. Updated strategies are designed to help first-year students adjust effectively to both the academic and nonacademic pressures of college.

The Arrival of Millennial Faculty

Last semester this column focused on the characteristics and learning style preferences of Millennials, those students born between 1981 and 2000, also identified as Echo Boomers, Nexters, or the Digital Generation (Newton, 2000). As the Millennial generation now moves into adulthood, it is apparent that many of these individuals will soon begin to emerge as college and university faculty members. Their cultural differences, including their level of comfort and experience with technology, will have a great impact on the changing use of technology on campuses, faculty recruitment and development efforts, and collaborative decision making, according to some leaders in higher education.

Research shows that long term planning needs to begin now in order to address the potential issues associated with this new generation of future faculty members. It is predicted that the first wave of Millennial faculty should arrive on four-year campuses by 2013, and perhaps even sooner in community colleges where faculty are often hired to teach without an advanced degree (O'Brien, 2007). However, millennial TAs have already arrived at academic institutions.

One way for academic departments to begin to create an environment that is conducive to millennial faculty is to engage millennial TAs in departmental activities. As academic departments plan for integrating emerging technologies in teaching and creating collaborative learning and work environments, TAs can play an important role in these departmental activities. Millennial TAs understand the needs of millennial students as well as millennial faculty better and can help academic departments create learning spaces, programs, and technological facilities to suit millennial faculty and students.

Millennial TAs should take into consideration the needs of millennial students when planning instruction and course activities. Millennial TAs should also work in collaboration with current faculty members to help their departments meet the needs of millennial students and millennial faculty. This does not mean that academic departments should focus their priorities entirely on millennial students and faculty but that they should be cognizant of the needs of diverse groups of learners and teachers and accommodate their unique needs to help them succeed in academia. This learner-focused academic environment could ultimately attract and benefit all students and faculty.

References

O'Brien, J. (2007). *Now is the time to prepare for Millennial faculty*. *Academic Leader*, (23)2, 1-6.

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