A recent article in the Chronicle of Higher Education, Advisers Cultivate Top Students for Plum Prizes (November 29, 2009), may have caught your attention. It focused on the role of fellowships advisors and the growing trend among colleges and universities to provide a designated office for students applying for nationally-competitive scholarships.

The scholarships themselves often require students to work with an advisor, upon whom they rely to ensure that submitted applications are complete and meet the institution’s highest standards. The Fulbright, for example, asks the fellowships advisor to recruit a faculty committee to review all applications, interview applicants, and evaluate candidates; the advisor is then required to prepare campus evaluations before submitting applications. This procedure is typical of major scholarships.

The Fellowships Office assumes primary responsibility for overseeing these applications, including administrative tasks. In addition to helping students identify scholarships that match their academic credentials and career goals, the advisor works closely with students as they prepare personal essays and proposals, and also helps review letters of recommendation. Faculty can offer valuable assistance by reviewing research proposals, drafting strong letters of recommendation, and reviewing applications that require university endorsement.

As the Chronicle article points out, one of the biggest challenges facing a fellowships advisor is reaching students who would be good candidates for major scholarships. Here is where faculty play a crucial role, by identifying students who show great potential—even as first years—and encouraging them to visit the Fellowships Office. The goal is to introduce students to opportunities long before they might be in position to apply, giving them a sense of what will be required for a successful application: a strong academic record, detailed letters of recommendation, extra-curricular activities relating to their discipline, and demonstrated leadership skills. Internships and research experience are also desirable.
A competitive application typically takes a couple of months to complete. This is especially true if the student has a busy schedule and little discretionary time. Many applications require research that can be time-consuming, and essays require multiple drafts to perfect. A student should expect to invest about 40 hours in preparing a solid graduate fellowship application.

Because several of the most prestigious graduate scholarships, such as the Fulbright, have deadlines at the beginning of our academic year, juniors are strongly encouraged to begin work on these applications at the beginning of spring quarter.

To assist both students and faculty, the Fellowships Office launched a new website that provides more information about available scholarships, criteria for competitive candidates, and services provided by the Fellowships Advisor: [www.wwu.edu/fellowships/](http://www.wwu.edu/fellowships/)

The site distinguishes between undergraduate and graduate fellowships, and lists scholarships by discipline, broadly defined. In the section “How to Apply,” students will find guidelines for drafting personal statements, research proposals, and resumes and for assisting faculty whom they have asked to write recommendations. This section also includes guidelines for faculty who have yet experienced writing recommendations for nationally competitive scholarships, which differ from those typically written in support of graduate school applications.

It would be impossible to over-emphasize the importance of faculty recommendations. Students who apply for nationally competitive scholarships are all outstanding, and foundations rely heavily on the letters from faculty to distinguish among the candidates and select winners.

Fellowships Advisor Chris Compston is available to meet with anyone interested in knowing more about scholarship and grant opportunities.

Contact: Christine.Compston@wwu.edu or 650-4241.

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**Instructors Selected for 2009-10 Innovative Teaching Showcase**

*By Justina Brown*

> Many professors can teach 15 students effectively, but when you do it with 100 or more you know you’ve really accomplished something.
> —Richard M. Felder, Ph.D., North Carolina State University

The Center for Instructional Innovation and Assessment is pleased to announce the following nominees will be featured in the next Innovative Teaching Showcase, to be published in June, 2010.

- **Jason Kanov**, Management
- **Larry Symons**, Psychology
- **David Shull**, Environmental Sciences

This year’s Showcase theme, *Planning for Large Classes*, seeks to honor faculty who take on this sometimes daunting task and do so with a passion for engaging their students, no matter the quantity.

Higher education instructors are facing burgeoning course enrollments, all the while keeping an eye on student learning outcomes, course evaluations, and retention. Some instructors rise not only to meet the external demands, but to hone in on the intensity—and specific character—of the large class experience. These instructors work to engage students by any and
all means necessary and the pay-off is simple: every quarter, thousands of students enthusiastically learn disciplinary essentials, gain profound philosophical or scientific reasoning, and become, even en masse, better future citizens.

Watch for more details about the “Showcase Learning Event” when the Innovative Teaching Showcase will be published and celebrated during the first week of June, 2010.

For more information, please contact the Center for Instructional Innovation and Assessment at 650-7210, or see: pandora.cii.wwu.edu/cii/showcase/

Are You Taking Advantage of Writing Instruction Support (WIS) Services?
by Carmen Werder

Western has two programs that support writing across campus:

The Writing Center provides services directly to students.

Writing Instruction Support (WIS) provides services directly to faculty teaching and using writing. Besides maintaining a website (www.edu/depts/wis) that offers resources on such topics as Creating Writing Assignments, Writing in Large Classes, Responding to Student Writing, and Editing, WIS sponsors a number of development opportunities, as listed below.

Writing (Instruction) Opportunities at Western (WOW) are quarterly symposia on writing instruction-related topics. Although the 2009-10 season has been completed, kudos go to our presenters:

Wayne Robertson (film maker and composition specialist): Reading Beyond Written Accents: A Working Session on Responding to Second Language Writers.

Barbara Miller, Julia Sapin, Carol Janson, and Erin Hazaard (Art History): What One Department is Doing to Build Writing Proficiency in a Liberal Arts Context.

Bill Smith (English), Maria Timmons Flores (Elementary Education.), and Geri Forsberg (English): What We Mean by Academic Literacy.

Writing Research Fellowships enable faculty and student research teams to study writing instructional practices and share their findings with the campus community. Faculty partners will share their research in brief presentations on Wednesday, March 10, from 4-5:30 pm, as part of the Celebrating Writing at Western Information. Student partners will present Monday, May 17, during Scholars Week. Here are this year’s research teams, their departments and topics:

From Human Services, Raine Dozier (faculty) and Kathryn Frazier (student): Peer Review Skill Development in a Writing Proficiency Course: Can Peer Review Really Improve Writing Skills?

From English, Margi Fox (faculty) and Jennie Jacobs (student): Examining and Enhancing the Effectiveness of Peer Review/Editing Workshops.

From Secondary Education, Ray Wolpow (faculty) and Jody Bault (student): Assessment of Reflective Writing to Meet Standards for Certification.

From Education, William Lay (faculty), and Shanyese Trujillo and Annemarie Curd (students): Efficacy of Interactive Journaling as an Undergraduate Teaching/Learning Device.

The Writing Instruction Support Retreat provides faculty with a three-day working session that serves as a foundational experience for those teaching writing. This year’s retreat is scheduled for September 8-10 at Western’s Shannon Point Marine Center. All Western faculty of any rank who teach designated writing courses, or any course with a substantial writing component, are invited to join colleagues to gain ideas and practices for enhancing writing instruction. Sessions include presentations, dialogue, and demonstrations, as well as time to work on individual course materials in the company of colleagues. Members from the same department are encouraged to participate together.

The Writing Series Residency offers Western faculty a collegial opportunity to advance their own academic writing projects. Drs. Carmen Werder and Karen Hoelscher
facilitate the monthly meetings and the three-day September writing residency, which this year will be held September 1-3, also at the Shannon Point Marine Center.

This year’s faculty writers include Don Burgess (Secondary Education), Shirin Deylami (Political Science), Diana Gruman (Psychology), Diana Jones (Human Services), Jason Kanov (Management), John Korsmo (Human Services), Molly Lawrence (Special Education), Tara Perry (Communication), Judy Pine (Anthropology), Mary Sass (Management), Elizabeth Stephan (Library), and Bob Thomas (Library). Another cohort of faculty writers will be convened in January, 2011.

Consultations with WIS Director Carmen Werder are always available for faculty, chairs, and deans to confer on specific writing instructions practices as well as on curricular models for General University Requirements and Writing Proficiency classes.

To pre-register for the Writing Instruction Support Retreat in September, or for more information about any of these services, contact Carmen Werder at: carmen.werder@wwu.edu ~ 650-7329

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Teaching-Learning Academy Responds to Cult of Busyness in the Academy
by Carmen Werder

Want fast-acting relief? Try slowing down. ~Lily Tomlin

In response to what seems to be an ever increasing refrain at Western, the Teaching-Learning Academy (TLA) has developed a 2009-2010 question that focuses on how to “stop the runaway train” of busyness: What do we mean by a sustainable, reflective learning culture? Numbering over 170 participants who meet across four dialogue groups every other week, the winter quarter TLA members are addressing this overarching question that fall participants crafted, and spring participants will continue to study.

As a dialogue forum that brings together students, faculty, and staff from across campus with several community educators, the TLA provides what one faculty participant has called a “safe, honest, and stimulating” space to talk about teaching and learning issues at WWU. This conversation also leads to individual and collective changes in practices inside and outside the classroom, as well as formal proposals that TLA forwards to various administrators and campus audiences for consideration.

This quarter, about 100 students are participating, some as part of an EDUC 109 course for students exploring careers in education, some for communication practicum credit, and a number who come without credit saying they appreciate being part of the lively exchange and like being heard, especially when their voices help influence institutional change initiatives. One fall first-year participant said, “TLA helped me feel welcomed [at WWU] and like I had a voice.” Another upper-class student noted, “I thought this was a great experience. Not only could I study the use of dialogue but also felt that I could actually make a difference in my school.” Regularly, students report in closing surveys how pleased and surprised they are to observe how much faculty and staff care about their learning and how knowing that positively influences how they behave in the classroom.

Also participating this quarter are another 70 faculty, staff, and administrators, plus community educators, many of whom say they enjoy the interaction with colleagues from across the campus and the community and because they appreciate hearing what students are really thinking. In explaining why he keeps coming back, one long-time faculty member remarked that TLA helps him “understand students’ concerns better through listening to them in a setting other than the classroom.” While a big part of TLA is attending to student voices that might not otherwise be heard, the ultimate goal is not to defer to students’ every wish, but rather to make Western an even better place to teach and learn—for everyone.

The Teaching-Learning Academy is open to all members of the Western community. Dialogue groups meet in the
Canada House every other week. Upcoming sessions include:

- Wednesday, March 10 @ noon
- Thursday, March 11 @ 2p.m.

If you want to step out of the daily rush of the academy to reflect on what’s happening in that busyness, consider joining the TLA dialogue where slow talk is encouraged. And watch for some specific proposals on strengthening a reflective learning culture at Western, where slow learning, like slow food, can be way better.

To sign up for a regular TLA dialogue group, contact Megan Otis: megan.otis@wwu.edu.

For more information see www.wwu.edu/tla, or contact TLA Director Carmen Werder: carmen.werder@wwu.edu

Effective Grading is Theme of CIIA’s Assessment Week

by Karen Casto

The Center for Instructional Innovation & Assessment is sponsoring its third annual “Assessment Week” on April 12-16, 2010. This year’s workshops and speakers will focus on effective grading practices and evaluation of student work. According to Barbara Gross Davis, in Tools for Teaching (1999): “There are no hard-and-fast rules about the best ways to grade...All faculty agree, however, that grades provide information on how well students are learning.” As classes get larger, and time gets tighter, being able to more effectively and efficiently grade student work becomes even more important.

On Tuesday, April 13, from 1 to 2 p.m., there will be a faculty workshop on Using Small Group Instructional Discussion (SGID). SGID is an open-ended feedback process to provide anonymous mid-course formative feedback to instructors. This workshop is a follow-up to last year’s SGID informational workshop, and resulted from faculty requests to learn more about how a SGID session actually works in the classroom. The CIIA has facilitated several SGID sessions for faculty at Western since last year. Interested faculty can get more information about SGID on the CIIA’s website at: pandora.cii.wwu.edu/cii/services.asp.

On Wednesday, April 14, from 4 to 5 p.m., a panel of distinguished teaching award winners will discuss Ways to Effectively Evaluate Student Work. This one-hour panel discussion will be facilitated by Sheila Fox of Woodring College.

The following day, Thursday, April 15, from 1:30 to 3:00 p.m., Robin Jeffers, the Assessment Coordinator at Bellevue Community College, will lead a workshop on Effective Grading Practices, exploring ways to use grading to improve teaching, and to make grading more time efficient. This interactive workshop will include a faculty Q&A following the presentation.

All faculty and staff are invited to attend any or all of these assessment week activities.

For more information, please contact Karen Casto: Karen.Casto@wwu.edu ~ 650-4943.

More details will be posted on the CIIA’s website at: pandora.cii.wwu.edu/cii/events/

Resources relating to assessment and grading are also available on the CIIA’s website at: pandora.cii.wwu.edu/cii/resources/teaching_tips/assessment/grading.asp