

New online tool will promote effective syllabus-building

Karen Casto, Associate Director,
Center for Instructional Innovation

The **Center for Instructional Innovation** is developing an online tool that faculty at Western can use to create, modify, or add to a course syllabus. This tool, a version of which will be ready late this coming summer, will be a time-saving way for faculty to create new syllabi or modify existing ones.

Faculty may have questions about the tool, or about the use of a syllabus, in general (see Q&A on back page). A well-crafted syllabus “provides an opportunity for you to invite students to participate as learners in your course” (Grunert, 1997). A course syllabus can be a powerful tool to promote student learning: It gives a positive first impression of your

course, and makes explicit to students your learning objectives and expectations.

User-friendly online tool

The syllabus-building tool, which will be available from the web, will prompt instructors to include all of the standard syllabus items with ease and flexibility. Instructors will be able to either begin fresh by entering new information, or by cutting and pasting a pre-existing syllabus directly into a form.

Because each syllabus will be stored in a secure database, instructors will also be able to return each quarter to update and improve existing syllabi, without having to re-do the entire document.

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Course proposals sought for new gen ed program

Since the beginning of the academic year, the ACC and GER Committee have been working to implement the requirements of the university’s revised general education program, set to begin Fall Quarter 2005.

Course proposals are needed for courses that fit gen ed course criteria, which was approved by ACC last spring.

Criteria for entirely new and/or revised courses in the areas of CGM (Domestic and Global Perspectives); Quantitative & Symbolic Reasoning (QSR); Second Writing; and First-year Seminars are available on the ACC website. The criteria explain the scope, desired learning outcomes, and what should be included for proposal development for these areas.

According to Rob Stoops, GER Committee chair,

two first-year seminars and one new Communication Block C course have been proposed to date. More course proposals, however, are needed.

In addition, Provost Bodman has designated the following individuals as liaisons to help academic departments and programs with course development in these areas:

◆ **First-year Seminars:** Janice Lapsansky, x/7337, lapsansky@biol.wvu.edu

◆ **Second writing:** Carmen Werder, x/7329, carmen.werder@wvu.edu

◆ **QSR:** Joseph Trimble, x/3058, joseph.trimble@wvu.edu

Course criteria can be found at the ACC website: <http://www.acadweb.wvu.edu/senate/ACC/index.htm> Then click the links to the various criteria. For more details, contact one of the liaisons, above.

EVENTS

JANUARY

Why Bother? Strategies that Motivate Learners

THURS., Jan. 13, 4–5 PM,
Miller Hall 160

Despite an abiding engagement in the work of learning, we likely all have at least moments when we wonder why we should bother. This interactive workshop—facilitated by students—features strategies for renewing energy for learning, including activities and approaches that students say motivate them. This workshop is part of this year’s **First Thursdays Faculty Development Workshop Series** co-sponsored by the Center for Instructional Innovation and the Teaching-Learning Academy. (For more workshops, see pg. 2)

TLA Study Groups will meet every other week, beginning Jan. 12-14: Wed. at 3 PM; Thurs. at 2 or 3 PM; or Fri. at Noon, at Canada House. All members of the campus community are welcome to participate in TLA. For more information, go to the TLA website, <http://www.wvu.edu/depts/tla> or contact Carmen Werder, x/7329, or carmen.werder@wvu.edu

INSIDE

More workshops, events,
& teaching-learning
news ...

WESTERN READS

The Author is Coming! The Author is Coming!

Molly Gloss—the Portland-based author of this year's Western Reads selection, *Wild Life*—is coming to Western on Thursday, February 24.

Gloss's visit was originally set for spring, but was changed to coincide with English professor Nancy Pagh's winter quarter class, which will be using *Wild Life*. Gloss will meet with the students to discuss her work.

Gloss will also do a reading at an all-campus forum and reception on Feb. 24, from 4—5:30 PM, location TBA. Faculty and staff who received a complimentary copy of the novel earlier this year are especially invited to put this date on their calendars. All mem-



bers of the campus community are welcome, whether or not you have had a chance to finish the book. *Wild Life* is available at the AS Bookstore.

Western Reads is a campus-wide reading program designed to promote intellectual engagement among members of the campus community with a particular em-

phasis on bringing new students into the discussion.

Please pass the word to your colleagues and students. For more information about the Western Reads Program and to make suggestions for next year's selection, visit the website: <http://westernreads.wvu.edu> Or contact Carmen Werder, carmen.werder@wvu.edu, x/7329.

"First Thursdays" workshops continue winter quarter

How to Create and Sustain Student Engagement

THURSDAY, Feb. 3, at 4—5 PM, Miller Hall 160

Extensive research shows that students who actively participate in their own learning experience have greater academic success. What can faculty members do to boost student engagement in their own classrooms?



Joyce Hammond

This workshop, which is co-facilitated by faculty member Joyce Hammond and other faculty and students, offers creative, effective and straightforward approaches, techniques, and assignments for enhancing an interactive dynamic for student learning inside and outside the classroom. Workshop participants will practice strategies to promote community within the classroom and discuss effective methods to help create good interactive dynamics in a variety of learning situations.

Because Wisdom Can't Be Told: Using Case Studies in the College Classroom

THURSDAY, MARCH 3, at 4—5 PM, Miller Hall 160

"It can be said flatly that the mere act of listening to wise statements and sound advice does little for anyone. In the process of learning, the learner's dynamic cooperation is required." — Charles I. Gragg

Case studies are stories that have an educational message. Because the best cases are often based on contemporary problems that may be encountered in other settings, using them in the classroom can make learning more relevant to students. Cases are used extensively in the disciplines of business, medicine, education, and law, although they can be used effectively in any discipline. During this workshop, a panel of Western faculty who use case teaching will share ways that all disciplines can effectively use cases to motivate, engage, and involve students in their own learning.

—For details and updates of all workshops, go to the CII website, <http://pandora.cii.wvu.edu/cii/>, and click the link to "workshops & events."

Civic Engagement Begins at Home: TLA Continues Dialogue on Ethical Considerations

Carmen Werder
Director, Teaching-Learning Academy

The study agenda for this year's Teaching-Learning Academy focuses on ethical consideration, centered on an overarching question: *What role, if any, does/should the University play in the development of ethical reasoning or civic engagement?*

TLA members, including faculty, staff, and students, spent fall quarter examining some of the assumptions that we bring to foundational terms such as "ethics" and "ethical reasoning." The Winter 2005 TLA agenda calls for continuing this dialogue, but with a greater emphasis on the nature of civic engagement, particularly in understanding better what civic engagement is, and where it is happening both individually and collectively on this campus. Students—who participate through Communication 397 ("Civil Discourse as Engagement for Learning")—will conduct discourse-in-action projects designed to facilitate civil discourse in contexts outside the classroom.

Action projects for winter quarter feature four collaborative projects with liaisons on and off campus: The Campus Community Coalition (with Pat Fabiano); Outdoor Learning Spaces (David Engebretson); the Peace and Justice Center (Jamie Donaldson); and On-site Classroom Visits. (Note: Faculty members interested in having a trained panel of TLA students visit their classrooms to observe the learning dynamic and record their impressions can contact Carmen Werder, x/7329, to set up an appointment.

AMERICAN DEMOCRACY PROJECT UPDATE

Western participates in international democracy conference in Hungary



Kris Bulcroft
Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education

Editor's note: Kris Bulcroft, Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education, is currently on leave from her position, serving as a Fulbright Scholar in the Slovak Republic. While there, she attended the 15th annual conference of the Alliance of Universities for Democracy (AUDEM) on behalf of Western. AUDEM was held in Pecs, Hungary in early November.

For the first time, Western Washington University was part of the AUDEM coalition of colleges and universities, all sharing the common goal of educating students to become active and informed citizens in their respective democratic societies. Faculty and administrators from Ukraine, Poland, Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, Russia, Lithuania, Czech Republic and the U.S. attended the three-day conference, hosted by AUDEM and the University of Pecs.

Pecs is a beautiful and old city, located in southern Hungary. It enjoys one of the warmest climates in the country, and fruit is grown in the surrounding areas. There are many specialty shops, good food, and designer clothing and leather goods produced right in the city.

The AUDEM program covered a broad array of topics, all based on the conference theme, "Educating for Democratic Citizenship." The plenary session provided an overview of the American Democracy Project, sponsored by the American Association of Schools, Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) and the *New York Times*, of which Western is a part.

AUDEM also featured the work of colleges and universities in Central and Eastern Europe in education for democratic citizenship as well as outlined the educational goals of the new EU countries. My presentation on Western's ADP efforts was well-received. However, many of the universities do not feel they can provide the kind of mosaic of support for their students (e.g., first-year programs, co-curricular opportunities, residential life options) done in the U.S., because

they are grossly under-resourced.

One of the concluding conference recommendations was to develop a joint project between AUDEM, AASC&U, and the *New York Times/International Herald/Tribune*. Western was asked to help actualize this recommendation, and the prospects for long-term relationships in a variety of ways with AUDEM universities in Central and Eastern Europe are good.

Next year's AUDEM conference will be held in Yalta in the Ukraine.

—Western is one of 180 campuses nationwide committed to promoting student involvement in public life through the American Democracy Project initiative. Both existing and new events and programs at WWU are part of ADP efforts. Go the ADP website for more information on events, including an upcoming documentary film & speaker series: <http://www.wvu.edu/depts/adp/>

NEW YORK TIMES READERSHIP PROGRAM BEGINS JAN. 18

As part of Western's involvement with the American Democracy Project (ADP) initiative, free copies of *The New York Times* will be available at various campus locations for most of winter quarter.

Beginning Tuesday, Jan. 18, and continuing for eight weeks (through Friday, March 11), 500 copies of the *Times* will be available Mon.-Fri. for students, faculty, and staff.

Papers will be available at: Biology Building; Bond Hall; Wilson Library (north entrance); Viking Union (market); Ridgeway Commons; Fairhaven Commons; The Haven; Rock's Edge; Carter Sub Connection; Underground Coffeehouse; and Viking Commons.

Readership program sponsors are: AS Students, University Residences, Office of The President, and Office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education, and *The New York Times*.

Special events on social justice will commemorate Martin Luther King Jr.

SAT., JAN. 15:

—MLK Jr. Conference, 9 AM—5 PM, Sehome High School

Engage in dynamic discussions and workshops about pressing social justice issues such as globalization, environmental justice, poverty, racial justice and gender equality.

—MLK Jr. Celebration 7—10 PM, Sehome High School

Sponsored by The Whatcom Human Rights Task Force and the WWU Ethnic Student Center.

MON., JAN 17 :

—MLK Jr. Day Read-In, 11 AM—5 PM, Village Books

WED., JAN 19:

—Celebrate through Stories! 11 AM—1 PM, Wilson Library Reading Room

WWU faculty Rosemary Vohs and other storytellers will tell stories with social justice and civic engagement themes. Campus-based tutoring and mentoring service-learning programs will host information tables to encourage WWU students to tutor and provide literacy support to children in Whatcom County schools.



WWU faculty member and storyteller Rosemary Vohs and others will tell stories with civil justice themes, Jan. 19 at Wilson Library.

For more information (and for students, to sign up for the read-in) contact: Dave Newell, Center for Service-Learning, x/6515. Service Learning events sponsored by: Vice President for Student Affairs & Academic Support Services, New Student Services, Center for Service Learning, Residence Life, Ethnic Student Center, AmeriCorps & The American Democracy Project. To see more details on these and other events, go to the ADP website: <http://www.wvu.edu/depts/adp/>

PRAXIS is published quarterly throughout the academic year by the Office of the Vice Provost of Undergraduate Education. Created as a forum for faculty and student support professionals on Western's campus, PRAXIS promotes the exchange of ideas and provides information on upcoming events and topical issues in teaching and learning at the undergraduate level.

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Online syllabus-building

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Once the syllabus has been created, it can be downloaded to the instructor's computer. It can also be made "web-friendly" so it can be used with Blackboard or posted on a course website.

Built-in calendar

The syllabus tool includes a unique calendar function that will generate a course schedule based on each quarter's potential class meetings. For example, an instructor could select *Fall Quarter 2006* from a drop-down list; *Tuesday Thursday class meetings from 12-1:50* from another drop-down list; select preferred column headings such as *readings* or *assignments due*; then click the "generate my schedule" button.

The calendar tool will automatically generate the schedule of class meetings, and will not include days when university classes do not meet due to a scheduled holiday. This tool will be a definite time-saver, and will be set up so that faculty can use just this portion of the tool if they so desire.

Eventually, a feature may be added that will enable faculty to select from a menu of learning objectives that may work well with certain types of courses. The CII will also hold some hands-on workshops for those wishing to learn how to use the tool most effectively.

Testers wanted

The CII is interested in working with faculty who are willing to test this tool and provide feedback during next summer and fall. Even if you don't wish to formally be a part of the development process, please let us know what you think should be included in such a tool. Please contact CII Associate Director Karen Casto at karen.casto@wwu.edu or x/4943.

—For more information on creating a syllabus, see the CII's Teaching Tips resource page:
http://pandora.cii.wwu.edu/cii/resources/teaching_tips/

References:
Grunert, J. (1997). *The course syllabus: A learning-centered approach*. Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing Co.

Syllabus Q & A

Do I even need a course syllabus?

Your syllabus is a way to invite your students to understand the connections among your course, your discipline, and their own major course of study. Without a written document, it is much more difficult to be sure that you have effectively communicated your expectations to your students. If students miss class days, they may also miss the communication that you wish them to receive. This makes your course less effective for them *and* for you.

What should be included in a syllabus?

Contact information, office hours and location, your course objectives, course schedule, assignments, university policies and accommodations are among the items that are commonly included.

My students don't read their syllabus.

Why should I take the time to include all this information?

Even if you feel that your students don't carefully read their syllabus, creating one can still be a good exercise for you as an instructor. Syllabus-creation can allow you to implement new course objectives, redesign a course, or just add a new assignment to an existing course. As you work through your redesigned course, you often put more reflective time into the process. You may even look at old objectives in a new light or create new objectives based on the new material that you have added.