Welcome to PRAXIS
Kris Bulcroft
Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education

What is PRAXIS? PRAXIS is a new, quarterly publication from the Office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education, dedicated to exploring teaching and learning at the undergraduate level. It is designed to provide faculty and student support professionals on Western’s campus with both in-depth looks at issues and thumbnail sketches of upcoming events, links to local and national resources, and, most importantly, serve as a forum for the exchange of ideas on all facets of teaching and learning.

Scholarly teaching requires that we move from theories of learning to practice. The recent emphasis on assessment of student learning often fails to consider how students learn or ways in which the practice of teaching can facilitate learning outcomes. It is our hope that PRAXIS will become a valuable resource for members of Western’s campus community in this regard, helping us expand our information base about best practices in teaching, advising, first-year programs, general education, and a host of other learning-centered issues and initiatives.

We want to make PRAXIS a publication that meets your needs, however, so please contact us with your ideas for content for upcoming issues. If you have suggestions, an article you want to contribute, or events you want to publicize, contact Ann Carlson at X/2345 or send an email to praxis@wwu.edu

PRAXIS will also be available online at: http://pandora.cii.wwu.edu/vpue/praxis

CAMPUS STARTS DIALOGUE ON GEN ED REVISIONS

Campus dialogue about the proposed changes to the general education requirements has begun and is planned to continue into early March 2003.

In October, the Task Force on General Education released to the campus community two draft models of a general education program and a statement of purposes of general education. It is the Task Force’s hope that it will hear from as many different voices as possible on the models and statement of purposes during this critical, information-gathering phase. The feedback that is gathered will be summarized and will help inform the Task Force’s final recommendation for a revised general education program, which will be given to the Academic Coordinating Committee at the beginning of Spring quarter.

For more information on how to participate in the discussion, see the box to the right or go to the web: http://pandora.cii.wwu.edu/gened

Contributing to the gen ed conversation

Schedule a time with Task Force representatives. Departments and programs (including Student and Academic Affairs) are encouraged to schedule a meeting with Kris Bulcroft and others who have been part of the General Education Task Force. To schedule a meeting, contact Jan Lee, X/3917, or by email: Jan.Lee@wwu.edu

Go to the Gen Ed Reform website: http://pandora.cii.wwu.edu/gened

The gen ed proposals are available at this site for downloading and printing; comments and concerns may be posted to an online discussion board or sent to the Task Force by email: gened@wwu.edu

DECEMBER
Looking Back, Looking Ahead—Wed., Dec. 4, at 4-5 PM, HH 345. (See article on pg. 2)

JANUARY

Undergrads as Learners: A Deeper Look at The Perry Scheme, Special Workshop with Dr. Moore—Thurs., Jan 9, at 9:30 AM - noon, WL 268. (See article on pg.3)

FEBRUARY
Oh, THAT’S What I Was Doing!—This session takes a look at some Western professors’ successful classroom practices, and links them to the underlying theory. Thor Hansen, Scott Brennan, Karen Casto, Justina Brown, Ann Carlson. Wed., Feb. 5, at 4-5 PM, HH 345.

MARCH
The Course Portfolio: A Reflective Space Where Teaching & Learning Come Together —This presentation is recommended for faculty who want to reflect on a course they have already taught at least once. Carmen Werder. Wed., March 5, at 4-5 PM, HH 345.

Events are free & need no registration. For more information go to: http://pandora.cii.wwu.edu/cgi & click “workshops & events.”
QSR Assessment Committee pilots measures

Edoh Amiran
Math Department, and Chair of the QSR Assessment Committee

Western’s Committee on the Assessment of Quantitative and Symbolic Reasoning (QSR), now in its third year, is refining measures for the assessment of student learning in QSR. If pilot studies of these measures are successful, the QSR committee will recommend adoption of the assessment criteria to the wider campus community.

Quantitative and symbolic reasoning (QSR) encompasses the knowledge of numbers, associated relations and symbols, and graphs of data and of relations among variables. A more important component is the ability to reason carefully and correctly in the quantitative context. Assessing Western’s efforts and success in teaching QSR involves measuring students’ starting knowledge and understanding, measuring students’ learning in this domain, identifying (and sometimes promoting) efforts in the development of methods and courses aimed at increased learning of QSR, and identifying courses and programs in which QSR is learned.

To date, the QSR Committee (composed currently of Edoh Amiran, Richard Frye, Pamela Jull, Jeff Newcomer, Joseph Trimble, and Karen Casto) has identified basic competencies in QSR and the context in which these can be promoted and measured. The committee began first by establishing a QSR infrastructure of which one of the components, a test to measure students’ starting QSR knowledge and understanding, is currently being calibrated. A second piece—soon to be reviewed by the appropriate curriculum committees—is a new path to Math 107 (one of the courses satisfying the GUR in mathematics).

In addition, several avenues for assessment of QSR remain open. These include assessment of courses and programs for QSR learning; portfolio and comment assessment through students; guided self-assessment through reported abilities; and reports from graduates and their employers. The QSR Committee continues to examine the options.

Assessment Background

Establishment of assessment criteria for student learning among state institutions of higher education was spurred on when, in 1997, the Washington State Legislature established, for the first time, specific performance measures for higher education. Western’s QSR Committee was formed in Fall 2000, following a joint meeting among Washington’s six baccalaureate institutions. In 1999, QSR was one of four areas (others are Writing, Information/Technology Literacy, and Critical Thinking) identified by these institutions as areas for defined student learning outcomes to be considered along with accountability efforts. In 2000, the Legislature formally approved Information/Technology Literacy as a student learning outcome, along with a timetable for its implementation.


Three deans lead faculty workshop, Wed., Dec. 4

On Wednesday, Dec. 4, three WWU deans present “Looking Back, Looking Ahead,” an interactive panel that addresses the overarching question: What effective strategies exist for beginning and ending courses? This session is geared toward presenting and exchanging ideas on strategies for these times in courses, which can be especially challenging for faculty. The panel, which is part of the First Wednesday professional development series, is from 4 - 5 PM in Haggard Hall 345, and is free for faculty and staff.

Western, Elon launch national institute for student involvement

Karen Casto
Center for Instructional Innovation

Western - in collaboration with Elon University in North Carolina - has launched the National Institute of Student Involvement (NIUI), an organization to inform and enhance undergraduate students’ involvement in institutional change and curricular revisioning.

Western and Elon were identified by the American Association of Higher Education (AAHE) as National Leadership Sites for their work on involving undergraduates in institutional change. The NIUI’s purpose is to provide explanations and examples of how undergraduates can advance scholarly teaching and learning, participate in institutional change agendas, and also to help identify potential funding sources that can further campus efforts to involve students. More information about the NIUI can be obtained on the web at: http://www.niui.org

CII showcases community-based learning

Justina Brown
Center for Instructional Innovation

Four Western faculty who incorporate community-based learning into their courses will be featured in this year’s Innovative Teaching Showcase, an online publication of best teaching practices created by The Center for Instructional Innovation (CII).

The showcase — now in its fourth year — was created by the CII as a way to highlight and share exceptional and innovative teaching practices of WWU faculty with the campus community. It includes multimedia, course portfolios, and explanations of how featured courses meet institutional goals of assessment.

The Showcase is a result of the CII’s mission, to enhance teaching and learning on Western’s campus, provide support to faculty in instructional innovation and course development, and help nurture a culture of educational innovation and instructional excellence across disciplines.

The 2002 -’03 showcase, From Classroom to Community, will be published at the end of this academic year. Check out past showcases online: http://pandora.cii.wwu.edu/cii/showcase/
Bill Moore talks about the place of the Perry Scheme in the post-modern era

—Dr. William S. Moore is the Coordinator of Assessment, Teaching and Learning for the State Board for Community & Technical Colleges (SBCTC) in Washington. Since 1982 he has coordinated the Center for the Study of Intellectual Development, designed to facilitate research on the Perry Scheme of Intellectual Development. Here, he explains why the scheme, developed more than 30 years ago by William Perry at Harvard, is still useful to educators today.

PRAXIS: What, succinctly, is the Perry Scheme of Intellectual Development?

MOORE: Originally based upon a series of open-ended interviews done by William Perry and colleagues on Harvard undergraduates during the late 1950’s and through the 1960’s, the Perry scheme emerged from exhaustive qualitative analysis of the ways in which students described their experiences and transformation during their college years. The scheme, which has been replicated since then among a wide variety of students and institutions, posits that students move through nine distinct stages—or what Perry likes to call positions—from which they view the world. This educational journey, so to speak, traces a fall from a world of absolutes and truths, into a world of contexts and commitments, in which one must make stands and make choices. In the broadest sense, the Perry scheme reflects the ways in which students cope with and make meaning out of the diverse perspectives and uncertainty they encounter, in college and in their lives.

PRAXIS: Why do you believe the Perry scheme is still important to educators today?

MOORE: To me, the simplest answer I can think of is that coping with a complex world requires complex thinking, and I believe it’s our responsibility as educators—especially as “higher” educators—to do the best we can to prepare our students for understanding and making judgments about this increasingly complex world in which we live. I believe the vast majority of faculty, when asked about what they really want their students to gain as a result of taking their courses or attending their colleges, will focus less on content per se and more on the deeper and more complex learning outcomes related to reasoning about and using the content of the course. The difficulty, of course, is that as faculty we are trained in our disciplines, not in facilitating these complex outcomes. The Perry scheme provides a powerful heuristic tool for helping faculty improve their teaching, learning, and assessment in ways that promote this kind of deep learning more effectively for our students, both while they are in college and as they continue their journeys after college.

PRAXIS: What do you believe makes the Perry scheme so useful as a developmental framework?

MOORE: What I particularly value about a framework like Perry’s are three key elements. One, it re-frames the learning process as being about qualitative shifts in thinking and underlying world views—transformations in understandings about core concepts, disciplines, one’s self, etc. It’s not simply about the accumulation of content or the acquisition of discrete, generic skills. Second, it focuses specifically on the intertwining of intellectual and identity issues, on the inherent and unavoidable relationship between knowing and a specific knower. And flowing from the first two points, I think the scheme makes it clear why real learning—deep learning—involves loss, which explains in part why such learning is so difficult for most of our students...and most of us, for that matter.

PRAXIS: What are some of the ways you’ve observed that having an understanding of Perry’s work has an impact on how faculty teach?
Teaching-Learning Academy: Just Talk?
Carmen Werder
Director, Teaching-Learning Academy

The Teaching-Learning Academy (TLA) at Western is a university-wide forum for faculty members, student affairs personnel, classified staff, administrators, and students. The TLA meets informally, and regularly, to study issues related to teaching and learning. This year, the object of study is general education, in broad terms, and the General Education Task Force’s draft models, in particular. Currently, the TLA has about 75 active members, 40 of whom are tenure-line faculty of various ranks. Fifteen of the members are students, who participate in the discussions and by being enrolled in Univ 397, Learning Reconsidered.

The scholarship of teaching and learning

In the language of current educational jargon, TLA participants work at “the scholarship of teaching and learning,” which assumes that teaching and learning are complex processes that are not easily observed, measured, or improved and are ones that require scholarly study. In other words, the nexus between teaching and learning is viewed as a legitimate site of inquiry that needs a scholarly community and infrastructure to support its investigation of teaching-learning problems - along with occasions for a public exchange of ideas, habits of peer review, and professional rewards.

It differs from scholarship in the discipline of education because it is approached as an aspect of individual practice. Instead of third-party researchers studying the practice of others, this is work undertaken by individuals studying and theorizing their own practices. This kind of investigation also alters the role of students, “making them more active agents in shaping and examining the processes of teaching learning...as co-investigators and agents, rather than as objects” (Hutchings, 2002).

The place of the TLA in the academy

In a time of limited resources, how can we justify creating and developing a structure such as the TLA? Many faculty members (especially in lower division general education courses) talk about the increasing number of students in their courses, along with increasing work loads. Many students talk about the challenges they face in working two-three jobs (often not to pay for ski trips but for rising tuition) while they struggle to find time and energy to engage with their courses. In an age of technological access, we all are able to move more quickly and do more than ever before. But the downside of such an accelerated pace is that, in our busy lives, we have less and less time for creating places for reflecting on where it is we’re going so quickly.

A shared language, an institutional commons, and a space for hope

Perhaps the impulse behind the TLA is the need to have some kind of shared language in order to communicate. As Kegan and Lahey (2001) acknowledge in their study of “how the way we talk can change the way we work”: “Work settings are language communities,” so we need to ask if there is a mother tongue. In order to understand each other across differences, we need to talk together. In higher education, where the structural and intellectual boundaries of our disciplines and departments tend to isolate us from each other, it seems particularly critical that we have some kind of institutional commons where we can come together to establish a shared language. As Robert Holyer (2002) contends, “the renewal of faculty culture may be more central to the vitality and success of general education than the current and long-standing focus on the curriculum.”

TLA participants say that the dialogue nourishes them and gives them energy to keep on keeping on. Maybe, in a broader sense, we’re desperate for a place simply to believe in the power of reasoned discourse. It may well be that, as David Harvey points out, we simply need to carve out a “space for hope”? Maybe the whole point of the TLA talk is just that: the talk.

Works Cited