When you envision a perfect class period, your students are probably:
• well prepared for class
• quick to answer questions and participate in discussions
• eager to share their own insights about the topic at hand
• willing and able to complete assignments thoroughly and thoughtfully.

Some days, everything clicks, and we have nearly perfect class periods. If the distance between those exhilarating days stretches out too far, though, we may begin to wonder what we can do to engage students in our classes.

As several articles in this newsletter demonstrate, student engagement is a multi-layered phenomenon. On one level, we can do simple things to spark students’ interest, and oftentimes they work. For example, if we acknowledge the fact that an adult’s attention span wanes after 20 minutes, we can punctuate our lectures with brief active learning activities. (CTE has several books about active learning in our library, and you can access some “Teaching Tips” in the resources section of the CTE web site at www.ku.edu/~cte.) If you’re frustrated with students not reading, John Bean’s ideas listed on page 8 may be useful. Teaching is far more than using basic techniques, but many strategies can engage and benefit our students when they are used appropriately.

On another level, we need to look more deeply into student engagement and recognize it as the complex issue that it is. Professors Dan Bernstein, Sheryle Gallant and Ann Cudd address various facets of it in their articles in this issue of Teaching Matters. Professor Bernstein examines the connection between students’ experiences and the level of their engagement in classes. Professor Gallant analyzes what’s missing in the courses she teaches. Professor Cudd identifies a possible solution to a common obstacle to student engagement. Each author knows that there are no easy answers, and each one comes to different conclusions after exploring it. It is clear that all three professors care deeply about student learning and understand that engagement is a key part of it. That’s why we want our students to be engaged—so they can learn.

Ultimately, we need to balance both the simple and complex sides of student engagement. Doing so best facilitates learning. By considering the theories that underpin engagement and by encouraging students to be active, not passive, learners, we can help make our classes the perfect sessions we want them to be. —JE
There are at least two kinds of engagement important in learning environments: giving focused attention to a topic, and embracing a topic or field of study and considering it in a personally engaging way. As we consider how to promote learning, both forms should be considered.

The simpler of the two issues is generating focused attention. There is abundant evidence that increasing learner time on course activities yields more and better learning. To get students to study more frequently, many teachers use pop quizzes or regular homework assignments to prompt or require preparation, and our collective experience suggests that when those practices are graded, students do focus more attention on our courses. Current electronic versions of this theme abound, and they have the advantage of neither consuming class time nor requiring teacher time for grading.

Teachers who want to capture attention during class time use various techniques, such as hands-on activities, group work and other forms of active learning. Students are more focused when acting than when listening for an extended time. There is also evidence that students who are familiar with a topic (through reading or active learning) are more engaged and retain more from lectures. If our goal is to be assured that students are engaging in activities that generate learning, there are many practices that enhance the level of student focus and energy in and out of class.

It is more complex to consider learning that is deeply connected to first-hand experiences, values and concerns. As noted by Professors Sheryle Gallant and Ann Cudd (in the Perspectives section), teaching techniques do not provide a simple recipe for connecting students’ lives with ideas, skills and information we offer in classes. Many professors make Herculean efforts to show students how course content, no matter how esoteric it may seem on the surface, is richly connected to human experience. Yet still there are reports that connections are not made. It reminds me of nurses I knew in a hospital near the Mexican border. When they spoke in English and patients gave no sign of understanding them, their response was to say the same thing again, but much louder.

Perhaps engaging learners will require more than stating how the material we profess is engaging in our own lives. Perhaps we need to do some amateur anthropology, some field work in the land of the young. Intellectual engagement is at one level fundamentally individual; each person has a history of experiences and styles of thinking developed in the times and places the person has lived. Permit me to stretch my metaphor even further and suggest that university faculty members may be slightly like leaders of a colonial occupation. We have histories and values often acquired elsewhere, frequently acquired some time ago. While not committing the error of “going native,” we might want to consider experiencing the culture of our undergraduates without pathologizing its form and substance. If we can embed our insights in contexts that are meaningful in their lives, perhaps we will generate some of the engagement we seek. Connecting with their experiences may be one path toward engaging students with the intellectual wealth we feel we have to offer.

As a final note, I would urge all teachers to remember that engagement is like a two-way street. Students detect teachers who care deeply about the topics they teach (as distinct from caring about their specialized creative work), and they also detect those whose teaching is operating on autopilot. Autopilot systems are a very sophisticated and successful form of artificial intelligence, but teaching in a competent, professional but routinized way may not lead students to push ideas to the limits of their own experience. Being richly engaged in inquiry into the meanings of the material you teach may at least provide a model for what students could do. For the real adventurer, there may be teaching impact to be found by connecting with lives from a community not based on the aesthetics and values of the professoriate. Bon voyage.
This academic year, CTE staff have worked to redesign the KU Summit and the New GTA Conference. Feedback from participants has led us to refine the Summit and revamp the New GTA Conference, as noted below.

**KU Summit—August 19**

The fifth annual KU Summit will be held August 19 from 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. You may pick up conference materials beginning at 8 a.m. inside the northwest entrance to Budig Hall. We will conclude with lunch served on the Wescoe terrace at 12:30 p.m.

The theme of this year's Summit is “The Engaged Learner.” Some elements of past conferences will be retained, such as a brief opening session and the Department Teaching Award presentation by Chancellor Hemenway, three breakout sessions, and lunch. Here’s what will be new:

- Poster session featuring resources for faculty
- Breakout session on teaching at KU with Provost Shulenburger
- Shortcuts session for new faculty
- Special session for department chairs
- Continental breakfast served in CTE until 8:20 a.m.

Participants can choose to attend three breakout sessions on 21 different topics. In addition to those listed above, the topics will include the following:

- Overcoming barriers to learning and student engagement
- Using interactive computer systems to engage students
- Inclusive teaching—Enriching educational experiences for all students
- Engaging international students in the classroom
- Facilitating students’ civic engagement
- Documenting students’ learning
- Using technology to engage students and increase their learning
- Problem-solving in science and engineering courses
- Implementing service-learning in the humanities
- What are students entitled to?
- Meeting and modifying students’ expectations

To register for the conference, contact CTE at 785-864-4199 or cte@ku.edu by August 15. If you would like to help facilitate a breakout session, contact Dan Bernstein at djb@ku.edu by May 15. For regularly updated information about the Summit, access our web site at www.ku.edu/~cte.

**New GTA Conference—August 14**

The fall New GTA Conference will be held August 14 from 8 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Both the format and the content of the New GTA Conference have been changed significantly, based on feedback from faculty, chairs and GTAs. CTE’s graduate assistants, Ann Volin and Pilar Peña, spearheaded CTE’s redesign of the August 14 New GTA Conference.

Pilar Peña and Ann Volin, took the lead on this project.

On August 14, new GTAs will meet for only half a day, rather than all day. This frees up time for departments to meet with their new GTAs in the afternoon, if they wish, and gives GTAs more time to prepare for the semester. We have tightly focused the presentations, so that participants will have the direction they need for a good start. New GTAs will be introduced to the University’s support of undergraduate instruction, see specific examples of excellence in teaching and interact with experienced KU GTAs.

In September, we will offer various follow-up sessions for new GTAs. These sessions will allow participants to study a particular facet of teaching in more depth, after they have had some experience in the classroom. New GTAs will receive details about follow-up sessions on August 14.

More information about the conference is available on the CTE web site, www.ku.edu/~cte. Information about follow-up sessions will be posted this summer.
"The voyage of discovery lies not in finding new landscapes, but in having new eyes."—Marcel Proust

I just reviewed my teaching evaluations from the fall semester, which were better than ever (above the department mean on every dimension)—so why do I feel something is missing? I am having an impact, students are learning in my courses, what more could I want? As I ponder this question, I realize an aspect of my experience in the classroom at KU that falls short of what I think it could and really should be.

I teach Theories of Personality and Intimate Relationships to seniors and juniors. What do I feel is missing? Student engagement in the classroom. Before coming to KU ten years ago, for 14 years I taught first-year medical students who routinely questioned nearly everything I said. While this was frustrating at times, it led to meaningful dialogues with me and among the students—exactly what I have not been able to achieve with students at KU despite my best efforts. These efforts include having small group discussions as part of class (with rare exceptions I observe little depth in them) and assigning reaction papers (a few students put some real thought into these, but many produce a summary rather than their own thoughtful responses).

In the first class, I tell students that an important part of my job is to keep current in the area and present material in an informative and interesting manner. One of their major responsibilities is to reflect on material, not just read the text, listen and take notes in class, and study for tests. I emphasize that they should have a reaction to every idea. They each have a personality and have close relationships, so everything they read or hear should spark a response—agreement, disagreement, puzzlement, wonder. When I ask for comments, reactions or questions, they should take that opportunity to be engaged. All these attempts have essentially failed to draw students into deeper thinking/involvement in the classroom.

Is my experience idiosyncratic? I don’t think so. Although I haven’t done a formal survey, when I mention my experience to colleagues, I learn it is far from unique. One colleague told me that on her most recent evaluations a student wrote, “Don’t ask us questions; we don’t know the [emphasis added] answers, we are here to learn.” While this may be an extreme example, it goes to the heart of the way education is conceptualized from a consumer orientation. From this perspective, it makes sense to regard learning as something I (the student) am entitled to and that you (the professor) should provide me, as the product I am paying for rather than a voyage we engage in together, where students put in as much effort as teachers.

Findings from the KU goals assessment surveys support my position. Of the 35 institutional goals, students rated these as most important: stimulating intellectual curiosity and innovative thinking in students, and teaching students to think critically and integrate knowledge. However, they rated KU as most successful in maintaining a varied program of extracurricular activities, providing students an in-depth understanding of at least one specialized area of knowledge, and providing opportunities for adults over 25 to earn degrees. The discrepancy between ratings of importance and success for stimulating intellectual curiosity, innovative, integrative, and critical thinking were some of the largest.1, 2

Students say we are falling short in this area—why?

- The entitlement/consumer mentality obscures an appreciation of the dialectical process that is the core of learning to think, critically, creatively and deeply.
- Most students don’t read material before coming to class. With no preparation, it’s hardly a wonder students think that they have nothing significant to ask or say.
- The box structure of the typical classroom is not conducive to dialogue with classmates.
- The Internet hardly requires any analytical thinking to organize a search—just type a few words, and volumes of information appear. This is also a venue where students can express themselves anonymously; freedom from personal identification and accountability may hinder students developing confidence in expressing themselves when a professor and other students can scrutinize them.
How do we engage students in class discussions? Sheryle Gallant diagnoses the problem in several ways and offers an interesting possible solution. I would like to focus on one of her diagnoses—that students don’t read material before coming to class—and the solution that is suggested by the epigraph to her essay: that the voyage of discovery requires/develops “new eyes.”

Most students think that they know how to read when they come to college. Reading to them is a technical skill that consists of decoding letters sequentially on the page, beginning at the upper left and ending at the lower right. But reading is a much more complicated skill, one that requires readers to develop new eyes. Reading is a multilayered skill and must be actively pursued. To do well the reader must see the text within the right contexts and focus on the right things. Reading must be approached differently for different kinds of texts. You don’t read a novel the same way you read a philosophical essay or a mathematical proof or a poem. Students have to be helped to realize this and then to develop the new eyes they need to see the kinds of texts you assign them. Students often are frustrated by the readings that they are assigned. College texts are difficult, unfamiliar, forbidding. When students believe that reading is easy, they think either that they are failures for failing to get anything out of the readings, or that the texts are to blame. Teachers need to help them see that reading is a truly complex skill, that they can master it, and that it is worth mastering.

I consider my main task as a teacher to be simply to teach students how to read and write. In my classes I try to teach students first to read texts as I do, and then to see how they might read a text differently, but with the same kind of engagement. Just as painting follows from seeing, writing follows from reading. Not directly, of course; painting and writing involve additional technical skills. But once one has the eyes of a reader of a kind of text, the ability to write such text will soon follow.

Class discussion is the means by which students learn how I read, how their fellow students read, and how they might read differently but well. We work through ideas together, posing and answering questions to bring out the context and the significance of the texts. By seeing how others read, and learning to see that some ways of reading are better than others, students can set out on their own voyages with new eyes.

So what can we do about this? Embrace a new model of teaching. We can explore new ways to transfer our knowledge outside of class time to use time in class to develop the level of engagement we seek. I suggest that for some upper-level undergraduate courses, we deliver course content in virtual mode and use real-time class meetings for discussion. Students would be given CDs with lectures and would be responsible for reading text material, going to class “on CD” and coming to discussion sessions. Participation in these would not be just an intellectual exercise but a journey of discovery, structured to help students gain a deeper understanding of material and of themselves—what they think and feel about the issues and ideas they are encountering, as well as an appreciation of other’s perspectives. If deep engagement is what we want, then we need to focus our time with students on engagement.

Proust’s quote, which prefaces this article, speaks to my deepest yearnings as a teacher. Having students join me on a voyage of discovery, rather than obtaining a product, would fulfill what’s missing in my classes. A new model of teaching may entice students to come with me.

The innovative teacher who wants to integrate technology into instruction often ends up with two strikes working against his or her efforts, at least in terms of how acceptable such activities will be to colleagues, department chairs or promotion/tenure committees. The first strike arises from the not-so-great record of technological devices that have been introduced and touted as having the potential to dramatically change teaching and learning as we know it. The second strike has more to do with our cultural expectations regarding technology as a passive entertainment medium, requiring little in the way of cognitive functioning.

Fortunately, several KU faculty have overcome these obstacles and are using a variety of technological tools to engage students in learning, in ways that would be difficult (maybe even impossible) otherwise. From creating attention-getting videos to online homework, these faculty are disproving the notion that technology is synonymous with passivity.

Although a library orientation can be extremely informative and helpful, it’s unlikely that many freshmen would consider it particularly interesting. Lea Currie, Watson Library, hopes to change that with a video spoof, based on the popular Matrix films, that illustrates the basics of library research. Currie is working with KU film student Chris Martin on this production, and plans to use the brief (under ten minutes) program during this summer’s student orientation. The value of catching—and more importantly holding—learner attention cannot be underestimated, and Currie hopes that this project will help counteract the stodgy image that libraries often struggle against.

Dan Breslauer doesn’t make his own videotapes, but he knows how to use instructional video programs to help students grasp the core concepts of his religious studies classes. Breslauer posts questions on Blackboard about each of the videos he shows in class that focus the students’ attention and help them identify the significant thematic ideas from each. “The contrast between ‘enthusiastic’ religion and ‘polite’ religion is dramatized well in the video, and comes alive in ways that merely reading or hearing about that contrast cannot do,” he says. The questions help students retain key ideas and keep the videos from being an excuse to catch some shut-eye.

Students taking a music class on conducting may not expect to have an online component to the course, unless they’ve worked with Jim Daugherty before. Daugherty has been utilizing online forms (sort of like electronic worksheets) for several years, and finds that, while the forms are certainly convenient, their value extends beyond mere efficiency. Students are able to complete the handouts and get feedback much more quickly than they would otherwise, enabling them to attend class better prepared than with paper-based forms. In addition, online worksheets can hyperlink to video or audio files, as well as other types of online resources that can supplement traditional texts. This combination provides students with a rich array of materials from which to choose, reinforcing students’ abilities to apply newly-learned skills, synthesize concepts and evaluate information.

Streaming audio files also supplement one of Patrick Frank’s classes on Latin American art, linking the visual images one would expect from such a course to the music of that era. This course web site is intended to enrich the learning experience for students by providing an overview of the social and cultural milieu that produced these works, and to “give the students a more direct experience of the art work we’re studying,” Frank says. Student reaction has been favorable and questions about the various works help to enliven class discussions.

These examples are only a tiny percentage of the many ways in which technology is being used in classrooms all across campus. For more ideas, call IDS at 4-2600 or e-mail us at ids@ku.edu.
English receives Department Teaching Award

The Center for Teaching Excellence is pleased to announce that the recipient of the 2003 Department Teaching Award is the Department of English. As part of the award, the department will receive $12,000 next fiscal year and will be honored at the KU Summit on August 19.

English was chosen by CTE’s advisory board, TEAM, after members reviewed portfolios from four large department semi-finalists. Other semi-finalist departments were chemistry, ecology and evolutionary biology, and psychology. Next fall, small departments will be invited to participate in this program.

In its call for nominations, CTE noted that KU faculty members and departments have a long tradition of pride in the quality of their instruction. As a result, the foundational level of achievement by KU teachers is quite high, and many departments can bring forward a rich historical record of excellent student ratings and individual faculty teaching awards. To recognize a single department from among these many high performing groups, it was necessary to look at accomplishments beyond those factors. The advisory board considered the following areas to distinguish among the accomplishments of the very best:

1. Department-wide cooperation to create and nurture specific programs or initiatives that connect faculty members in support of teaching and student learning;
2. Broadly based reflection on and consideration of the department’s teaching goals and objectives, including goals for student understanding that reflect meaningful connections among courses;
3. Recent innovations and sustained, department-wide efforts to implement the department’s educational vision, including how the vision and teaching practices have been refined through examination of their results.

The Department of English demonstrated exemplary cooperation, reflection and innovations, particularly in these areas:
- A comprehensive GTA preparation program, begun in the late 1950’s and updated regularly.
- New faculty mentoring program.
- Department workshops and informal discussion groups that meet to talk about teaching.
- Curriculum innovation with the addition of a number of courses in non-traditional literature.
- Community outreach programs that include conferences, classes for inmates at the Douglas County Jail, and the addition of service-learning to several courses.

Join us in congratulating the Department of English at the KU Summit next August.

Faculty participate in spring programs

This semester, many faculty have participated in CTE programs:

**Faculty Seminar**—Fourteen faculty members met this spring to explore the intellectual work they do in their teaching: Sharon Bass, journalism; Janet Bond Robinson, chemistry; Thomas Creese, mathematics; Paul Friedman, communication studies; Reva Friedman-Nimz, teaching and leadership; Lisa Friis, mechanical engineering; Richard Hale, aerospace engineering; Caroline Jewers; French and Italian; Peggy Kuhr, journalism; Cheryl Lester, American studies; Margaret Marco, music and dance; Kim Roddis, CEA engineering; Kelli Thomas, teaching and leadership; and Andrew Whitford, political science. Representations of these faculty members’ work will be posted on the CTE web site this summer.

**Faculty Fellows**—Three CTE Faculty Fellows were named this spring: Diane Fourny, French and Italian; Pamela Gordon, classics; and Andrew Whitford, political science. Information about their work will be on our web site, too.

**Teaching Grants**—Eight faculty members received Teaching Grants this semester: Shannon Criss, architecture; Dorice Elliott, English; Robert Gregory, HSES; William Johnson, geography; Craig Martin, EEB; Holly Storkel, SPLH; Kelli Thomas, teaching and leadership; and Sara Wilson, mechanical engineering.

For information about participants in the Best Practices Institute 2003 and a list of teachers honored at the Celebration of Teaching banquet, access our web site at www.ku.edu/~cte.
### Strategies to help students become better readers

Judy Eddy, CTE

In his book *Engaging Ideas*, John C. Bean identifies problems that students have reading college textbooks and suggests strategies for teachers to use to address them:

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<tr>
<th>Students’ Problem</th>
<th>Helping Strategy</th>
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<tr>
<td>Poor reading process</td>
<td>• Help students practice reading: give tests or writing assignments on readings that you don’t cover in class.</td>
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<td>• Show students your own reading process.</td>
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<td>Failure to reconstruct arguments as they read</td>
<td>• Assign summary writing.</td>
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<td>• Have students make outlines, flowcharts or diagrams of readings.</td>
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<td>• Help students write “gist statements” in margins that summarize main points.</td>
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<td>• Go through a sample text with students, writing “what it says” and “what it does” statements for each paragraph.</td>
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<td>Failure to assimilate the unfamiliar; resistance to uncomfortable or disorienting views</td>
<td>• Explain this phenomenon to students so they can watch for it; point out instances in class when students resist an unfamiliar idea; draw analogies to other times when students have had to assimilate unfamiliar views.</td>
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<td>• In class, draw contrasts between ordinary ways of looking at the subject and the author’s surprising way.</td>
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<td>Limited understanding of rhetorical context</td>
<td>• Create reading guides with information about the author and the context.</td>
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<td>• In lectures or reading guides, set the stage for readings, especially primary materials.</td>
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<td>• Have students ask these questions: Who is the author? To whom is he or she writing? What occasion prompted this writing? What is the author’s purpose?</td>
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<td>Difficulty with complex syntax</td>
<td>• Have students “translate” complex passages into their own words; also have students practice rewriting particularly long sentences into several shorter ones.</td>
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<td>Failure to adapt to different kinds of discourse</td>
<td>• Explain your own reading process: when you skim, when you read carefully, when you study a text in detail, and so forth.</td>
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<td>• Explain how your own reading process varies when you encounter different genres of text; for example, how to read a textbook versus a primary source, how to read a poem, how to read a scientific paper.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Failure to interact with the text</td>
<td>• Use reading logs, summary/response notebooks, guided journals, marginal notes, or reading guides (see <em>Engaging Ideas</em> for more information about these strategies).</td>
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