Teaching Matters
February 2008

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Center for Teaching Excellence reaches tenth anniversary milestone

The Center for Teaching Excellence was established in 1997 to increase the visibility of teaching at KU and support its tradition of teaching excellence at the undergraduate and graduate level. Two fundamental concepts—teaching as community property and the scholarship of teaching—underlie the Center’s approach. A basic premise of the CTE is that to support and enhance instruction effectively, teaching must move from the solitary experience of teacher-student interaction in a specific instructional setting to include on-going, collegial exchange about teaching and learning. The second premise is that teaching is scholarly, intellectual work based on a body of knowledge reflecting content and process. The Center uses two complementary approaches in implementing its programming. The first approach recognizes that the expertise, experience and insight of faculty from all disciplines at all levels is our most precious resource and that we have much to learn from one another. Two main characteristics of this approach are that there is more than one way to teach and that experience counts a lot. The best way to mine this resource is through continuing exchange and dialog. We accomplish this by bringing faculty members together in settings ranging from small-group discussions to formal presentations by faculty and other speakers. These interpersonal interactions are supplemented through collaboration between faculty and Center staff in the development of scholarly and reflective publications, both in print and online.

Within research universities, it is particularly important to reinforce interconnections between teaching and research and recognize teaching as scholarly work. CTE supports and recognizes faculty members in their role as teachers/scholars within a major research university. In the last ten years, thanks to the KU faculty, the Center has become a focal point for campus dialog on the scholarship of teaching and a resource for teaching innovation. As part of its tenth anniversary, CTE is completing a self-study to evaluate its impact upon KU’s teaching and learning community and to determine best ways to meet faculty interests in teaching. For one facet of the study, faculty members will be asked to complete an online survey; please watch for it this semester.

A welcome invitation

Dan Bernstein, CTE

Six years ago this January I was minding my own business teaching graduate and undergraduate psychology courses at another university. Along with some colleagues from English, history and engineering, I coordinated a few summer sessions about teaching, and we developed a system for faculty members to share the intellectual work in their teaching with colleagues at other research universities. Out of the blue, I got a letter from a search committee chair named Sharon Bass inviting me to apply for a job directing the Center for Teaching Excellence at KU. I thought it a bit odd, since I had never worked in a teaching center, but I recalled the advice of a sage senior scholar who often said, “Never turn down a job you haven’t been offered.”

A couple months later I found myself in Lawrence, spending two days visiting the Center and meeting with faculty members interested in teaching. Since I knew of KU’s faculty primarily from their outstanding research work, I was a little surprised at the energy and intensity of the teaching conversations I participated in. While I had undertaken the interview almost casually, not at all sure that it was the kind of job a self-respecting faculty member might want, the visit to KU made a very favorable impression, and I turned into someone who suddenly really wanted to get an offer.

Next thing I knew it was July and I was moving books into Budig and rearranging the furniture in a new office. This would be the hard test; everyone knows that job interviews are notoriously inaccurate as predictors of actual working conditions in a university. Both candidate and host put their best foot forward, and everyone hopes there is still a marriage after the champagne and honeymoon are forgotten.

I kept waiting for something weird or distasteful to surface, but truth be told everything turned out to be as advertised. I kept waiting for something weird or distasteful to surface, but truth be told everything turned out to be as advertised. The Center is in a prime location and my colleagues are a continuous delight. Many KU faculty members enjoy opportunities to exchange teaching experiences and ideas about promoting learning. Founding Director Fred Rodriguez had established quality programs and built a critical connection with campus through the unit Ambassadors. Jeff Aubé and Judy Eddy made sure plans came to fruition, and there were excellent periodic publications. The advisory board was populated with smart, credible, distinguished faculty members, just as Sandra Gault said it was, and she and the Provost’s Office wholly supported the mission. There were no fires to put out, no crises to manage, and no one was trying to shut down CTE.

What an incredible gift this was—an opportunity to bring additional ideas to a rich intellectual setting without an apparent downside. I embraced this invitation by taking a year to meet people and learn what they were already doing. I met with chairs, with deans, and with the many individual teachers who passed through the Center’s weekly events. I also benefited greatly from the perspectives and questions of the Ambassadors from each unit, who shared their own views and their colleagues’ views twice each semester. Monthly I met with our advisory board, learning from them about the practices and traditions of teaching at KU.

The main product of that first year was a determination to make the teaching work of KU faculty members much more visible. While there were many awards for teaching and a good sense of identity as a campus that values teaching, it was hard to see behind the list of names and understand what these good practices were about. We set out

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Spring schedule to include nine discussion sessions

This semester, CTE is facilitating the discussions described below:

**February 1, 12 - 1 PM**
Lunch & Conversation: Best Responses to Difficult Classroom Situations. There are many ways that a class can be disrupted; Sally Cornelison, history of art, and Catherine Weaver, political science, will share suggestions about how to respond effectively.

**February 15, 12 - 1 PM**
Lunch & Conversation: Using Laptops in the Classroom. Ideas for establishing policies and procedures that ensure best uses of laptops during a class. With Doug Golick, IDS, and Catherine Weaver, political science. Co-sponsored by CTE and IDS.

**February 19, 3 - 4 PM**
Teaching Tea: Designing and Implementing Mid-semester Student Evaluations. Various ways to get and use midterm feedback from students. With Shannon O’Lear, geography/environmental studies.

**February 25, 12 - 1 PM**
Lunch & Conversation: How Do We Know They’re Learning?: Frameworks for Evaluating Student Work. How to develop grading criteria, communicate it to students and use it to assess learning. With Caroline Bennett, civil, environmental and architectural engineering; Sonya Lancaster, English; and Yajaira Padilla, Spanish and Portuguese.

**March 3, 3 - 4 PM**

**March 4, 12 - 1 PM**
Lunch & Conversation: Faculty Funding Options Through CTE. Two CTE advisory board members will discuss the Center’s various funding programs, with a Q&A on the application processes. With Richard Hale, aerospace engineering, and Shannon O’Lear, geography/environmental studies.

**March 10, 12 - 1 PM**
Lunch & Conversation: Directing Theses and Dissertations. Suggestions on advising students who are writing a thesis or dissertation. With Marsha Haufler, history of art, and Mary Lee Hummert, Provost’s Office/communication studies.

**March 24, 3 - 4 PM**
Teaching Tea: Student Evaluation of Teaching at KU. A discussion of issues surrounding student evaluations, as well as information about the new form being used at KU. With Dan Bernstein, CTE/psychology.

**March 25, 12 - 1 PM**
Lunch & Conversation: Advising and Mentoring Graduate Students. How to guide graduate students, from their first day to their final defense. With Joane Nagel, sociology, and Linda Stone-Ferrier, history of art.

All sessions are open to faculty, instructional staff and GTAs. For more information, contact CTE at 864.4100 or cte@ku.edu.

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**A welcome invitation**

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To work with our colleagues to make the learning generated by their teaching visible to the community. We began to provide occasions for teachers to tell how their efforts and energy can add to their students’ understanding and knowledge.

So that’s what the history of the Center has wrought for the present and future. We convene faculty members in conversation about what we learn from teaching. We provide occasions for teachers to get new ideas from colleagues and from the work of teachers elsewhere. CTE is a place to make an efficient connection with the larger world of teaching practice and continuous inquiry into students’ learning. It was a marvelous invitation for me, and it remains a terrific opportunity for KU teachers.
KU teaching evolves: A personal voyage with CTE
Christopher Haufler, Ecology & Evolutionary Biology

In 1990 when I was appointed to the Teaching Commons Committee (TCC), I had no idea this group would play a central role in establishing the Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE). Chaired initially by then Executive Vice Chancellor Del Brinkman and subsequently by then Associate Vice Chancellor David Shulenburger, the TCC promoted a culture that valued and celebrated teaching excellence. We issued newsletters and distributed funds for innovations; we spent many hours contemplating initiatives that would engage KU faculty members in making creative ideas about teaching visible. Although we felt good about the work we did, the goal of raising faculty awareness about teaching remained out of reach.

Then, in 1993, Associate Vice Provost Sandra Gautt became the TCC chair. Sandra was a visionary and effective leader who made us realize that having a CTE was not only important but also essential for a major university. As part of her strategy, I visited the University of Colorado to report on its Faculty Teaching Excellence Program. I was impressed by the way such a facility could rally and empower faculty to advance the quality of teaching, and I was convinced that KU needed a similar resource.

In 1997, I was on the search committee that chose Fred Rodriguez as the first director of KU’s CTE. Fred was an obvious choice. He saw CTE as faculty-owned and operated, and he established components still in place: the CTE advisory board (TEAM, for Teaching Excellence Advisory Members) and the Ambassadors (faculty members who consult with CTE on initiatives and carry messages from and information about CTE back to colleagues).

... CTE [became] a resource and rallying point for creative ideas about teaching.

As a member of TEAM, I saw CTE blossom as a major campus resource. Fred created ways to honor teaching achievements, including awards to individuals and departments and programs to bring faculty members into CTE to conduct projects. Rather than allowing CTE to gain a reputation for “teaching improvement” (for those having problems), Fred’s programs established CTE as a resource and rallying point for creative ideas about teaching. He made CTE a comfortable place for educators to visit, a central resource for innovation, and a valued facility for faculty development.

When Fred assumed administrative responsibilities in the School of Education, Jeff Aubé stepped in for a year as interim director. Jeff skillfully maintained CTE’s programs while we conducted a national search for a director. The search committee, chaired by Sharon Bass, brought several strong candidates to campus, and all were impressed with the quality of CTE’s facility and programs. One candidate fit particularly well with the faculty-centered orientation of the KU CTE. It was clear that Dan Bernstein, then a professor of psychology at the University of Nebraska, was the best match for our position. That initial impression proved to be accurate; Dan brought new energy and ideas and ensured that CTE would continue to develop as a valuable component of the KU experience. Dan also brought the KU Center into the spotlight nationally and internationally because of his status as a leader within the scholarship of teaching and learning community.

Thus, I have watched this campus centerpiece evolve: from Del Brinkman’s recognition that teaching at KU deserved more attention; through Sandra Gautt’s strategic plan and the hiring of Fred Rodriguez, which established CTE as a faculty-centered resource; to the current leadership of Dan Bernstein, who has ensured that CTE continues to be an intellectual nucleus, supporting faculty members in attaining their teaching goals and benefiting the learning environment at KU and beyond.
Exploring new roles and responsibilities for CTE

Caroline Bennett, Civil, Environmental & Architectural Engineering

I first became involved with CTE a couple of months after I began my appointment as an assistant professor at KU, due largely to the kindness of a mentor in my department, JoAnn Browning. At CTE, she introduced me to a world of collegial discussion centered around teaching. Since then, I have participated in and gained much insight from CTE’s Best Practices Institute and Faculty Seminar. With such meaningful experiences as these already available, it is difficult to imagine how the Center might do more. Nonetheless, it is worthwhile to contemplate how CTE might take on new and different roles in the coming years.

CTE is a strong community of teachers who value good teaching. The fact that involvement with CTE is entirely voluntary, coupled with the fact that it is filled with the input and thoughts of gifted educators, makes the Center a destination for those who value excellence in teaching. However, new faculty members might be passionate about teaching practices and not aware of the wonderful community available to them. Placing increased emphasis on introducing new faculty to the wealth of resources that CTE encompasses could greatly influence their development at KU. Whether through Ambassador outreach or personal invitations, introducing new faculty to the Center is a possible method of expanding new colleagues’ visions of excellence in teaching, as well as leveraging the Center’s positive influence across KU’s campus.

Another role that CTE might foray into over the coming years is increased outreach to departments. Two issues in particular that seem to consistently generate interest are implementation of peer evaluation and general assessment. Both of these areas encompass complex issues, but they are of amplified importance now more than ever. New suggestions for peer evaluation of teaching are an important evolution towards meaningfully accounting for the importance of teaching in the promotion and tenure process. These new guidelines will advance the philosophy of teaching as scholarship at KU by a great deal. However, the new suggestions have left many department chairs and P&T committees at a great loss as to how peer evaluation might be conducted. Leadership that the Center could provide departments concerning the reasons for the new peer evaluation guidelines would help immensely. Additionally, many departments struggle with assessment techniques—within courses they teach, teaching and research grant proposals, and self-studies for outside agencies. CTE could provide a service to departmental leadership by offering workshops aimed at exploring effective methods of assessment in traditional and non-traditional applications.

Finally, CTE could consider partnering faculty across disciplines for fresh ideas concerning teaching techniques, peer evaluation and implementation of teaching as scholarship. This could be as simple as two faculty from different, but related, fields (i.e., engineering and physics or English and history) observing and discussing each others’ classes as part of a larger conversation started at CTE. This could be as complex as two or more faculty members working together across disciplines to make related work visible in a joint effort. Regardless of the scale, it could serve to make CTE a more unified community and open an interdisciplinary avenue of teaching as scholarship at KU.

As CTE continues to evolve in the coming years, I am certain that this community will uncover new needs that the Center can fulfill. It will truly be an exciting time to participate in CTE as it advances and expands to new pursuits.
Like a milestone birthday or another New Year’s Eve, the tenth anniversary of the Center for Teaching Excellence is a good time to look back and consider how things have changed and what we might learn from those changes. In the area of instructional technology, a dizzying array of products and services have appeared (and also, in some cases, disappeared) in the past ten years, promoting change and promising benefits.

One type of change we’ve seen are improvements or alterations to already existing tools and resources in ways that made their use in education desirable, or at least viable. Some examples are wireless student response systems, mobile computing, podcasting and flash memory drives. Student response systems have been around for decades, but until they were improved with low-cost, wireless transmitters, few schools could afford to use them. Mobile computing, and concurrently, wireless networking, increased the flexibility of computer usage and helped the laptop computer (and smaller devices) become a routine part of learning for students and faculty alike. Until it became easy and inexpensive to create digital audio materials for internet distribution, audio was confined to listening labs, music libraries or an occasional correspondence study course. Ten years ago, the idea of storing huge amounts of digital information on a device the size of one’s pinky finger would have amazed most of us.

Another type of change that we’ve seen in the past ten years has been the introduction of tools and resources that provide us with new capabilities for teaching and learning. One example of this would be wiki software that allows users to create digital files (documents, typically) collaboratively and asynchronously. Not only is it easier for students to work together on a project, but the instructor is able to monitor remotely their progress throughout the activity. Another example is streaming video. By providing access to video clips via the web, classroom time can be dedicated to discussion after students have watched the video on their own time. Finally, we’ve seen the development of virtual worlds, such as Second Life, where participants can, by manipulating their on-screen avatars, interact with others and experience things otherwise impossible in a traditional learning environment.

The “big picture ideas” in educational technology have not changed, even as hardware and software speed ahead of our skills. Although there have been many additions and improvements to our teaching-with-technology repertoire, the “big picture ideas” in educational technology have not changed, even as hardware and software speed ahead of our skills. Last year I reviewed a book that was recently re-issued as part of a series of classics in educational technology literature. This particular volume summarized seminars held at Lake Okoboji from 1955 to 1974. In the section detailing issues of concern to these educational technology experts, four themes emerged as critical: assisting faculty to use technologies effectively, focusing attention on teaching and learning rather than machinery, providing equitable access to technologies, and designing classrooms and other learning environments to facilitate innovative teaching and learning strategies. Not surprisingly, these topics consume our attention still.

Finally, a caveat is in order. If we allow ourselves to become too entranced with new technologies, we may inadvertently turn away from the more important task of reframeing our teaching efforts to take advantage of those tools and resources. Doing the same things faster or in multiple locations at once may provide some benefits, but the real payoff will come from rethinking our strategies altogether.
Redesigned course engages students in research methods

In the last few years, CTE has begun publishing electronic teaching portfolios on its website, in a section called the Gallery. These portfolios give faculty members an opportunity to share the background, implementation, results of, and reflection on a teaching project.

Last semester, a project by Dena Register was added to the Gallery. She described this work in a Teaching Matters interview.

Which course is profiled in your portfolio? Why did you focus on it for your project?
I redesigned Introduction to Research in Music Education and Music Therapy (MEMT 366). It introduces undergraduates to educational and clinical research and research techniques. Although the course is required for music therapy and music education majors, most students don’t see its importance. My challenge has been getting students motivated and engaged. I’ve wanted students to apply what they learn in class to relevant research experiences while they’re learning research methods. To meet that goal, I added a research project that included a paper and poster presentation, but students’ work wasn’t at the level I wanted it to be.

What did you do differently in the course?
I wanted to break down the research paper, to scaffold students’ learning and result in a better finished product. Students still wrote a research paper, but it was broken down into smaller assignments during the semester. I also gave students an opportunity to critique another student’s poster based on what they had learned, as a critical thinking exercise. To further improve student work and to more objectively assess it, I used rubrics, which were given to students before project deadlines.

I also made sure to integrate assignments better with class time, to facilitate learning by making a stronger connection between the project and the course materials. To improve student engagement, I decided to add more opportunities for participation. I required students to participate in in-class writing assignments to encourage students’ preparation and reading of course materials. Throughout the semester, there were online or in-class writing assignments and discussions. Students were expected to complete all reading assignments by the day indicated on the calendar, in order to participate in the discussion conducted in-class or online.

What were the results?
Students were invited to design a study that was of interest to them based on the reading that they did in the initial weeks of the course for their review of literature, as well as the lectures that covered various types of research. Students demonstrated a lot of growth and initiative.

The mastery approach and using scaffolding improved their work. Student work from that semester was generally better than it’s ever been. I attribute this to the way assignments were broken down into various steps necessary to complete the entire paper, with time allotted for instructor and peer feedback.

What’s next?
I find that my students are still hesitant when asked to apply knowledge and ideas they’ve learned in class, to come up with proactive strategies for the clinic or classroom setting. While they seem to enjoy experiential learning, they’re not always able to transfer and/or synthesize experiential and didactic information. I’m now thinking about what additional changes I can make that will increase the efficiency and accuracy of course goals.

See www.cte.ku.edu/teachingInnovations/gallery/visibleknowledge/register
Thirty faculty members serve KU through TEAM

Between 1997 and 2007, thirty faculty members served on CTE’s Teaching Excellence Advisory Members (TEAM) board. Members are selected based on their campus perspective, commitment to quality instruction, and recognition as effective teachers and scholars. TEAM advises CTE on practically every matter related to the function of the Center. We are indebted to each of them:

- Chris Haufler, ecology & evolutionary biology (1997-present)
- Sandra Gault, Provost’s Office/special education (1997-2006)
- Fred Rodriguez, CTE Director/education (1997-2001)
- Don Green, chemical & petroleum engineering (1997-2000)
- Ray Hiner, history/education (1997-2000)
- Stan Lombardo, classics (1997-2000)
- Dick Schowen, chemistry (1997-2000)
- Annette Stanton, psychology (1997-2000)
- Nona Tollefson, psychology & research in education (1997-2000)
- Larry Davidow, pharmacy practice (1997-99)
- John Ginn, journalism (1997-99)
- Dan Spencer, business (1999-present)
- Sharon Bass, journalism (1999-2006)
- Dennis Prater, law (2000-03)
- Paul Willhite, chemical & petroleum engineering (2000-03)
- Jim Woelfel, humanities & western civilization (2000-02)
- Tony Rosenthal, history/CTE Distinguished Teaching Fellow (2001-03)
- Dan Bernstein, CTE Director/psychology (2002-present)
- Ann Cudd, philosophy/women’s studies (2002-present)
- Linda Stone-Ferrier, history of art (2003-present)
- Chuck Epp, public administration (2004-present)
- Bob Goldstein, geology (2004-present)
- Rick Hale, aerospace engineering (2004-present)
- Mary Lee Hummert, Provost’s Office/communication studies (2006-present)
- Keith Diaz Moore, architecture (2007-present)
- Shannon O’Lear, geography/CTE Faculty Fellow (2007-present)
- Catherine Weaver, political science/CTE Faculty Fellow (2007-present)