Another Exciting Year at CETL

It is hard to believe it is already the middle of fall semester at MSU Mankato. Time flies when you are having fun. At last count we have well over 200 faculty and teaching assistants in our programs (or volunteering to help with a program). We are kept busy with securing rooms, organizing schedules, answering emails and the phone, and generally just trying to aid faculty in any way we can. We are proud of the work we do and of the many professors working to become the best teacher possible. What we do is all about improving student learning. We firmly believe that faculty talking about teaching leads to better student learning. Sharing best practices, receiving support from others, taking time to think through teaching issues all work to improve teaching which leads to students learning better too!

We are now in our fourth year of offering the Faculty Teaching Certificate Program. In the past three years we have “graduated” 180 faculty and teaching assistants and this year we have 56 more participants learning about teaching theories, pedagogy and ideas.

They also each have one peer faculty consultation from our staff and will complete a capstone project to aid their teaching. The six groups meet approximately once per semester throughout the academic year.

We have continued the Communities of Practice (CoP) groups this year and added some new ones. The Department Chairs CoP consists of 18 chairs from across the campus who meets regularly to discuss issues of interest. Currently the groups are creating the agenda for the Provost’s chairs workshop later in the semester. This is the third year we have sponsored this CoP.

Another continuing CoP is for professors who teach online or are interested in learning more about teaching online. With nearly 40 in this CoP, we are co-sponsoring the group with Extended Learning and the group is facilitated by Judith Luebke. They meet face to face each month and also work through D2L.

We have added a number of new CoPs which include the following:

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Talking About Teaching and Learning Workshop:
Friday, January 25, 2008

Each year since it’s beginning, the MSU Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning has sponsored an annual conference to bring faculty from the campus and other MnSCU campuses together to explore some aspect of teaching and learning. This year is no exception with the exciting news that Dr. Todd Zakrjasek will be our presenter. Dr. Zakrjasek is one of the most “in demand” presenters today at teaching and learning conference. He combines a wealth of knowledge with humor that makes every workshop unique, engaging, thought provoking, and fun.

Todd Zakrjasek is the inaugural Director of the Faculty Center for Innovative Teaching at Central Michigan University in Mt. Pleasant, Michigan. Previously, Dr. Zakrjasek was the founding Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning at Southern Oregon University, where he also taught in the psychology department as a tenured associate professor. Dr. Zakrjasek has written two introductory psychology instructor’s manuals for McGraw-Hill and a student study guide for Addison-Wesley. He received his Ph.D. in Industrial/Organizational Psychology from Ohio University and currently teaches The Psychology of Learning and Memory, Statistics, and a Graduate Teaching Seminar. He has published and presented widely on the topic of student learning, including workshops and conference keynote addresses in 25 states, and Canada, Switzerland, and Sweden over the past several years.

Workshops will run from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Details will be available in our next newsletter. For now, make the date!
So What is a Cop? Why Cops at MSU?

Teaching at Minnesota State Mankato can often be a lonely job. Although there are well over 500 full-time faculties, many only get to know those who work in their building or perhaps only those who have offices in their own hallway. Although it is possible to meet other faculty by servicing on IFO committees (and we strongly encourage faculty to do this) it is different when one has time to talk about teaching and learning in a supportive environment. To this end, CETL has dedicated much of their efforts in recent years to creating groups of faculty who come together regularly during an academic year (or beyond) to discuss and learning about issues of interest.

CoP stands for “Community of Practice.” A CoP consists of faculty who are interested in a specific topic related to teaching and learning. Once a topic area is identified (such as teacher education) CETL sends out an announcement of the formation of the group explaining the goal and topic area. Faculties then volunteer to be a part of the CoP.

Once all participants are identified, schedules are sent to CETL and one or more groups are set for the academic year based on availability. Since no CoP is larger than about 12 participants, we sometimes need to divide the CoP into two or more groups. Most CoPs meet about once per month, sometimes a bit more. CoPs meet during the day based on participant schedules. Many CoPs are now facilitated by volunteer faculty who work with CETL as the sponsor. CETL coordinates and does the administrative background work while the facilitators help the CoP members decide what they want to do, discuss issues, and keep the interest going. We have one CoP that is now meeting for the third year with most returning each semester.

The goal of these CoPs is two fold. The first goal is to enable faculty to share best practices, ask tough questions, and look for answers as they try to improve student learning. The second goal is to bring faculty together from across disciplines so that new friendships are possible and silo busting takes place. We all bring with us stereotypes of professors in various discipline areas. Too often these stereotypes developed without us ever meeting someone who teaches in that area! By bring faculty together to discuss topics of interest, we find cooperation replaces competition in many cases. Better yet, we see faculty developing respect for one another that leads to a better teaching/learning environment over time.

If you are not currently in a CoP, please consider joining one in the future. If you have a topic that might work well for a CoP please contact CETL and we will attempt to sponsor such a group.

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Dr. Todd Zakrajsek in Two Workshops

Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning At Minnesota State University, Mankato

Presents

Dr. Todd Zakrajsek in Two Workshops

Friday, January 25, 2008

Centennial Student Center [CSU] 284

Workshop I: “Overcoming Apathy In the Classroom”
9:30-Noon

Workshop 2: “How Students Learn: Strategies For Teaching From The Psychology of Learning”
1:00-3:30 p.m.

Todd Zakrajsek is the inaugural Director of the Faculty Center for Innovative Teaching at Central Michigan University in Mt. Pleasant, Michigan. Previously, Dr. Zakrajsek was the founding Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning at Southern Oregon University, where he also taught in the psychology department as a tenured associate professor. Dr. Zakrajsek has written two introductory psychology instructor's manuals for McGraw-Hill and a student study guide for Addison-Wesley. He received his Ph.D. in Industrial/Organizational Psychology from Ohio University and currently teaches The Psychology of Learning and Memory, Statistics, and a Graduate Teaching Seminar. He has published and presented widely on the topic of student learning, including workshops and conference keynote addresses in 25 states, and Canada, Switzerland, and Sweden over the past several years.
Join Us For An ITV Workshop on

“Critical Thinking”

The CASTL Leadership Project

When: November 14, 2007 from 2-4 p.m.

Why: To learn more about ways to increase critical thinking skills for undergraduate students

What: The ITV presentations will consist of four IPESL grant recipients:

1. Dr. Charles Lewis: Professor of Mass Communications—“Turning It Off: Teaching Media Criticism Through Ethnography.” The project purpose was to increase student engagement in the media criticism part of a key senior-level Mass Communications core course titled “Ethics and Press Criticism.” The idea was to have students conduct honest, disciplined and rational self-studies — studies meant to build insight regarding how media use can affect people’s values, beliefs, actions and relationships. Hypothesis: through the observation and analysis of their own media use and through the self-experiment of eliminating for a time electronic-media use from their lives, students will develop a deeper understanding of a range of media effects.

2. Dr. Steven Kipp: Professor of Astronomy—“Did we learn anything? Evaluating the effectiveness of physics, psychology and philosophy courses designed to improve critical thinking in the sciences.” While students are asked to take courses to improve their critical thinking skills, little information is available as to these courses’ effectiveness. The aim of this research was to evaluate the effectiveness of three critical thinking courses in Philosophy, Psychology and Physics.

3. Dr. Marie Pomije and Dr. John Thoemke: Professors of Chemistry—“The redesign of general Chemistry II to promote critical thinking and long term learning.” The purpose of the project was twofold. First, development of online materials was completed by the researchers to motivate and guide students to review topics from General Chemistry I, as required for success in Chemistry II. The second focus was the creation of “workshop days” in which the students worked in groups to solve application problems designed to create multi-dimensional critical thinking skills (both conceptual and mathematical).

4. Dr. Cathryn Bailey: Professor of Philosophy—“Incorporating critical thinking through media literacy in global perspectives on women and change.” Based on observation it seemed clear that not enough has been done to creatively incorporate revision strategies to best exploit revision’s potential to develop critical thinking in philosophy classes. The project proposed to explore how professors in other disciplines understand and utilize revision. From this information new revision strategies were developed and implemented in a writing intensive course titled “Philosophy of Race, Class, and Gender.”

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“There is nothing wrong with lecture as long as the choice is intentional and is the best way to aid students learning.”
IPESL (which is short for Initiative to Promote Excellence in Student Learning) was a grant opportunity from the Minnesota State Legislature for faculty to improve student learning. Each of the seven state universities in Minnesota were asked to develop their own prospectus for their own campus. At MSU it was decided that the most important need was for faculty to infuse courses with critical thinking through one or more of the following areas:

- new instructional or curriculum materials to improve critical thinking (development, implementation, and assessment)
- new support mechanisms to improve critical thinking
- new assessments of critical thinking (development and implementation).

A total of 38 faculty received funding for 22 different grants to develop projects during the spring semester 2007. Areas of study included the following disciplines with some projects completed by teams of faculty: Philosophy, Speech Communication, English, Music, Mass Communications, Physics & Astronomy, Modern Languages, Nursing, Accounting & Business Law, Mathematics & Statistics, Chemistry, Women's Studies and Urban & Regional Studies.

For more details about IPESL please go to the following website: http://www.mnsu.edu/grants/ipesl