Center Practice Scholarship Education
for the   and   of   of science, engineering, and mathematics students

Focal Point

Contact

Ella Ingram
Email to ingram
X8507, D226
Call or drop by anytime.

In this Issue:

Summer Events

The CPSE remains active during the summer and so can you. Join in the summer book club! Check out any book from the CPSE Library, or the academic-related book of your choice, send in a short summary (possibly for newsletter use), and you'll receive a surprise reward and be entered into a drawing for a larger prize. The Library is bursting with options (see Page 4 for a few recommendations). Entry into the drawing ends August 21.

The Observation Exchange is ongoing. Take the opportunity to see how your colleagues in other departments do what they do. Simply find a partner, sit in on each other's class, and have lunch on the CPSE to talk about it. Email Ella for the code word in the lunch line. Why not try observing an online class?

Mark Your Calendar

Early August: Mentoring Workshop
August 21-22: New Faculty (and slightly used) Teaching Workshop. All are welcome.
August 28: Advanced Workshop with Tom Angelo of "Classroom Assessment Techniques" fame.
August 29: Opening Symposium
September 4: First Day of Classes

More details regarding all events will be coming via email—keep an eye open. Summer is also the major planning time. Have a request for a short workshop, want to share your knowledge, know of a good book, or have some other innovative ideas? Send them along.

"Summer afternoon—summer afternoon; to me those have always been the two most beautiful words in the English language." —Henry James

Free Webinar Series on Cognitive Patterns

Susan Wolcott, Ph.D. produced an information-dense webinar describing steps for better thinking, and posted all materials on YouTube (see them here). The video series is informative for both faculty and students, although faculty are the primary target. The seven-part series is 45 minutes together, and addresses thinking patterns like "confused fact-finding" and "perpetual analyzing" (sound familiar?). The webinar is based on the work of King & Kitchener—their Reflective Judgment Model (explanation here).

Strategies for Handling Student Excuses

Did anyone else have what seems like a hundred requests for special exceptions in the spring term? They are always accompanied by a seemingly reasonable explanation: illness (OK, thanks for not bringing it to class), job interviews (Agreed, very important), athletic activities (Yes, I support collegiate athletics), out-of-town design presentations (Good to have a positive impact in the region), or extracurriculars (Yes, I love *Cats*, too). The challenge for the instructor is multi-fold—which excuses really are reasonable, which are actually true, what response to make, is documentation required, etc. In search of guidance, I turned to Google and various higher education blogs. What emerged were a few solid recommendations for managing excuses.

1. Anticipate excuses at the outset: Dr. John Orlando at Northcentral University recommends a preemptive approach. Make your excuse policy known in your syllabus or on each assignment. Example language might be "As you might imagine, I receive dozens of student excuses each term. I try to be fair to everyone in determining who can makeup assignments or tests. So, I need you to provide documentation of your absence." [1] The key outcome of this approach is to limit the case-by-case assessment necessary.

2. Extend trust: Accept that there are a lot of reasons that students miss assignments or exams. These reasons might seem trivial to faculty, but may be devastating to the student. 20-year-old students don't have the same coping powers that faculty do. Also, some excuses are things I simply do not want to know about students. In the immortal words of Renee Rogge: "Life is about choices; choices have consequences." Allow students to be responsible for their own choices, and allow them to make choices that are good for them. [2] Also know that faculty are probably only hearing about the truly challenging experiences when they coincide with major deadlines. [3]

3. Accept reality: Things will come up. Students today have older parents, and older grandparents [4]. Illness and death happen, both to students and to faculty members (ever had to cancel a class due to serious illness or injury? It's rare but happens). Express regret or condolences, and move on. Also, accept the reality that "lightning rarely strikes twice". [2] The first excuse is probably legitimate, but the second and third are suspect.

4. Provide a "Stuff Happens" card: Dr. Daniela Feenstra of Central Pennsylvania College distributes a one-time get-out-of-jail-free card—not transferrable, but redeemable at the end of the term for some nominal bonus. Students are in the driver's seat regarding which situations merit use of the card. [5] An immediate response to student excuses can be "Would you like to use your card?"

Excuses are an inevitable part of the college experience for both faculty and students. Try a few of these strategies and report on your success. Did you get fewer excuses? Was your experience with student excuses less stressful?

[1] Student Excuses: Faculty Need to Be Discerning but not Cynical. January 8, 2011. Thoughts on Teaching blog.

[2] Tips for Handling Student Excuses. May 5, 2014. Faculty Focus newsletter.

[3] Excuses, Excuses, Excuses: Why People Lie, Cheat, and Procrastinate. May 18, 2010. Psychology Today blog.

[4] The Dead Grandmother Syndrome Reconsidered. Worthwhile Canadian Initiative blog.

[5] A Smart Way to Handle Student Excuses. October 1, 2009. Faculty Focus newsletter.

The LearnWell Projects

Dr. Leonard Geddes, Associate Dean of Co-Curricular Programs at Lenoir-Rhyne University in North Carolina, got stuck on the question "Why do good students do bad in college?". The result of his work to answer that question is the LearnWell Projects, a learning approach that combines metacognition, Bloom's Taxonomy, and learning outcomes to increase learning quality and efficiency (main website here). Dr. Geddes's essays about teaching and learning are thoughtful, provocative, and actionable. Take some time to read one or two: Professors are from Mars, Students are from Venus (I would have said Pluto!); Transforming Good Students into Great Learners; Adjusting to Rigor: Changing Students' Default Settings; Leading and Lagging Indicators in Learning; and several more on the LearnWell Projects blog here.

● Celebrating Great Teachers

Congratulations on the completion of another year. May you have a wonderful, productive, and restful summer.

● What Do College Professors Do All Day?

Anthropologist John Ziker of Boise State turned the research focus onto his colleagues to answer the question. He summarized his findings in the article "The Long, Lonely Job of *Homo academicus*" (available on The Blue Review here). Using self-reported data from personal interviews, Ziker discovered that the typical time distribution of his colleagues included almost 17% of a workday in meetings, and 13% of time devoted to email. Although Ziker acknowledges that his 30-faculty sample is not representative, the data he generated are a window from the outside in, and a mirror for self-assessment.

Other key highlights:

1. All ranks of faculty worked nearly 60 hours per week.

2. Most faculty worked about 10 hours over the weekend.

3. Instruction and class preparation accounted for about 25% of a typical workday and about 40% of total work time.

4. Faculty work alone most of the time, and work on campus most of the time.

5. Professional activities like primary research and manuscript writing accounted for about 15% of work time.

The analysis of faculty time use has a rich history. Past analyses are confirmed by Ziker's core findings in the broad strokes. Link, Swann, and Bozeman (2008) found for faculty at research-extensive universities that time allocation is the same regardless of family status of the faculty member, although women spent more time on service than men (with men spending more time on research activities than women). Time spent on service increases through a career, although actual workload in terms of hours spent working is relatively constant through time [1]. Data from small colleges (almost always noted as liberal arts colleges) are scarce, and many other analyses focus on demographic variation almost exclusively.

Ziker's detailed analysis is sure to spawn follow-up studies from a variety of institutions. Such data are clearly needed to address both the original question, and one posed increasingly by stakeholders: "Do college professors work hard enough?". David Levy's op-ed piece in the Washington Post says "the notion that faculty in teaching institutions work a 40-hour week is a myth" [2]. Responses to this statement included assertions that it was in fact a myth, just in the opposite direction as Levy implies.

[1]   Link, Swann, Bozemann. 2008. A time allocation study of university faculty. Economics of Education Review 27(4): 363-374.

[2]   Levy. 2012. Do college professors work hard enough? Washington Post, March 23.
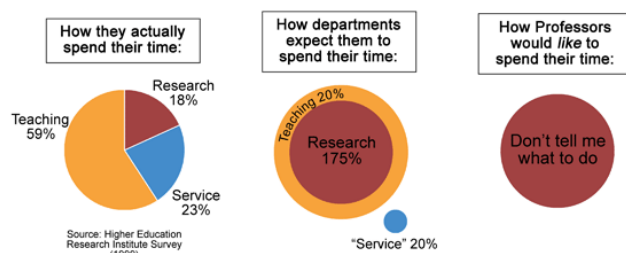
● Blogs

Interesting blogs on innovation from around the web (not limited to academia): Jeffery Baumgartner; Innovation Excellence; Shipulski On Design; Heart of Innovation; Innovation in Practice; & Innovate on Purpose.

● Highlights from *Journal of Engineering Education*

Assessing Information Literacy Skills Demonstrated in an Engineering Design Task (Wertz et al. Oct. 2013): In this work, the authors investigated how first-year engineering students gathered information for a design assignment, using memos submitted as part of the typical class work. Most memos included 2-5 sources, of which 82% were web resources (not online journal articles or repositories), representing mostly commercial sites, government sites, or personal webpages. Only 12% of web resources were high-quality as determined by the authors. Only 11% of the citations were complete and error-free. The authors suggest the need for strategies to help students acquire information gathering skills, to help students learn better evaluation approaches, and to help students demonstrate appropriate documentation.

Sustainability as a Route to Broadening Participation in Engineering (Klotz et al. Jan. 2014): This piece examined how the disposition toward different types of sustainability challenges was associated with choosing an engineering major among first-year college students. The authors survey students nationwide in freshmen English courses. Students in engineering majors were more interested in energy resources, climate change, environmental degradation, and water supply issues than were students not in engineering majors. In contrast, students in engineering majors were less interested in disease, poverty/resource distribution, and opportunities for women & minorities than were students not in engineering majors. The authors found that students in engineering perceived a wide variety of issues to be related to engineering: creating economic growth, improving quality of life, saving lives, caring for communities, protecting the environment, and more. The authors suggest that recruitment to engineering could focus more on what engineers CAN do rather than only what they DO do.

● New CPSE Resources Available for Check-out

Overwhelmed: Work, Love, and Play When No One Has the Time. 1st edition, 2014. Brigid Schulte. Continuing the theme of time studies for this newsletter, Schulte's work begins with her failed attempts at a time diary and continues through her examination of time management strategies, co-parenting, effective work scheduling, and more. Written in a very personal style, this book is heavy on anecdote with some humanized research thrown in for balance. Schulte doesn't have the perfect solution, but she reports on her success with various imperfect solutions. I read this book and enjoyed it.

Conceptual Blockbusting: A Guide to Better Ideas. 4th edition, 2001. James Adams. Adams' classic work in creative thinking explores the typical mental blocks that hinder our creativity. Then, he present exercise and other strategies for overcoming these blocks. The exercises are a bit wacky, by are intended to foment true originality. With insights for individuals, teams, and organizations, most readers will find nuggets of true utility in this book's pages.

Thanks for the Feedback: The Science and Art of Receiving Feedback Well (even when it is off-base, unfair, poorly delivered, and frankly, you're not in the mood). 1st edition, 2014. Douglas Stone and Sheila Heen. The authors—famous for *Difficult Conversations*—return with another work emanating from the Harvard Negotiation Project. By framing the ubiquity of feedback between two competing desires (to learn and grow, and to be accepted as is), Stone and Heen give solid recommendations for taking in feedback in all forms with "curiosity and grace".

Positive Academic Leadership: How to Stop Putting Out Fires and Start Making a Difference. 1st edition, 2013. Jeffrey Buller. Although seemingly targeted at academic administrators, this work is applicable to a wide academic audience—e.g. faculty leading competition teams, faculty mentors for undergraduate research, etc. The positive approach Buller advocates focuses on strengths and possibilities as a way to manage challenges. Example language and practical strategies are included.

...and many more. Search for the CPSE collection on Fusion using the acronym CPSE and limiting to Rose-Hulman and printed material in the right-hand panel (or click here). You can also visit the collection in person on the first floor of the library near the Large Conference Room. Please recommend additional resources we should acquire.