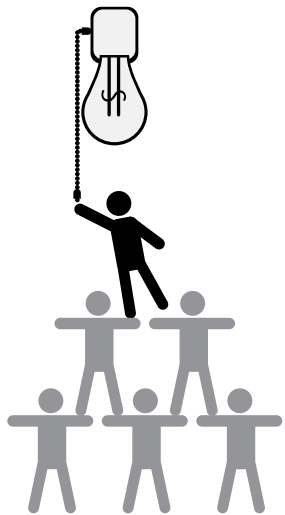


TALK

A Newsletter
from the
Center for
Teaching



Transforming Students

Jean C. Florman

Consider the light bulb as metaphor. A graphic shorthand for learning, the light bulb hovers above the head, an explosion of dashed lines arrayed around it to indicate not simply knowledge absorption, but inspiration, the sudden synthesis, the “Ah ha!” moment. If we assessed ah-ha moments using this symbol, the chemistry student who memorized the 102nd element in the periodic table would not get the gold-sticker light bulb. But the student who grasped the very organizational principles and predictive significance of this arrangement of elements—now that’s a light-bulb moment.

As teachers, we hope light bulbs often turn on in our students’ minds, and we do our best to help them throw the switch. Creating transformative learning experiences requires more than passing along facts and figures; good instructors also provide the critical thinking skills, intellectual challenges, freedom to fail, and time for reflection that enable students to actually think in profoundly different ways and to different ends.

Although light bulbs go on in an instant, transformative learning is a process. And while that process can be linear, more often it circles back on itself or expands and contracts in multi-dimensional directions. The process transforms the assumptions through which

students understand and interpret their experiences, including classroom experiences.

Scholars point out several elements that are key for students to experience transformative learning.

- A **disorienting dilemma** highlights a discrepancy between what the student has always assumed to be true and what has just been experienced, heard, or read.
 - Engaging in problem solving or debate can challenge students’ assumptions and make them take risks.
- The opportunity to engage in **critical reflection**. A disorienting dilemma lacks meaning unless students are required to become aware of and assess the validity of their prior beliefs and assumptions in the light of their new knowledge and experiences (Cranton, 2002).
 - Well-thought-out guided reflection questions—in-class discussion, written assignments, and exams—ensure that students use their knowledge base not as an end unto itself but as a springboard for transformative learning.
- A teacher who fosters **independent thinking and self-directed learning** in students is willing to shift power, control, responsibility, and decision making to them.

(continued next page)

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

ITS teaching support	2
4CAST 2008	3
Fall CfT workshops	3
Faculty learning communities launched	3
The neon paper trail	4

(continued from cover)

Transforming Students

→ Requiring students to articulate and periodically evaluate their progress toward personal learning goals can help them take responsibility for their own learning. Some instructors even invite students to help design the course itself, collaborating on syllabus construction, assignment creation, and learning assessment.

• A **community of learners** offers a “safe” intellectual space.

→ An instructor can teach and model the methods of respectful critical discourse by helping students to design a taxonomy of critical thinking skills and a set of principles for classroom discussion.

Instructors who strive for transformative learning in their students do more than just hope for those magical “ah-ha” moments, they ensure them. Symbolizing more than knowledge acquisition, the light bulb-as-metaphor indicates the figure beneath it has achieved something profound, expansive, contextualized, and exciting. Indeed, the image itself is transformed from light bulb as source of mere illumination to light bulb as intellectual exclamation point.

Visit the Center for Teaching lending library to check out resources on transformational learning, including Cranton, Patricia (2002). “Teaching for Transformation,” in *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, J.M. Ross-Gordon, ed., no. 93, Contemporary Viewpoints on Teaching Adults Effectively, San Francisco, CA, Jossey-Bass.

New Name, Same Great Teaching Technology Support

Sam Van Horne

A recent *Educause* study of undergraduate students and information technology found—not surprisingly, perhaps—that students were more likely to report that information technology (IT) had a positive impact on their learning if their instructor used it well. At Iowa, ITS Instructional Services (formerly Academic Technologies) offers a number of resources devoted to helping instructors integrate technology effectively into their teaching.

• Student Instructional Technology Assistants, or SITAs, are undergraduate and graduate students who collaborate with instructors on a variety of projects related to instructional technology. For example, SITAs recently worked with several Rhetoric Department instructors to develop assignments requiring students to record audio essays. Students in Betsy Loyd’s rhetoric course wrote essays about their service-learning projects in the local community. With help from SITAs, the students learned to use the Apple Computer audio-editing program, GarageBand, to create and edit their recordings. The SITAs also helped the students publish their work on websites they created using Adobe Contribute, an application that simplifies the design of websites.

• ITS-Instructional Services also offers the assistance of instructional designers who can help instructors enhance student learning by reaching into the UI instructional technology toolkit. Instructional

designers can help TAs and faculty members design an ICON site well-suited to a particular course, strengthen the learning impact of a specific assignment, or explore the use of personal response systems (“clickers”) in a course.

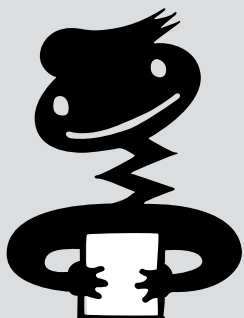
• The Digital Media Services group helps instructors find meaningful ways to incorporate audio and visual media into courses. These experiences help guide instructors to create multimedia projects related to teaching, including using older videos in courses. The Digital Media Services group helps UI instructors not only learn the technology but also practice effective pedagogy.

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Sam Van Horne was a SITA in ITS-Instructional Services before he became coordinator of IT support for the Offices of the President and Provost.

See *Educause* (2006). “ECAR Study of Undergraduates and Information Technology.” Retrieved December 5, 2006 from <http://connect.educause.edu/Library/ECAR/TheECARStudyofUndergradua/41172?time=1207748345>.

ITS-Instructional Services welcomes inquiries and visits from TAs, faculty members, and other instructors on campus. The office offers training on both Macs and PCs with the full complement of high-end software for developing and enhancing instructional-design projects. Even without a specific project in mind, contact them to learn about the possibilities. 384-0800 or Its-academic@uiowa.edu.



A large lecture class can be daunting to prepare. But once you have your script and your audiovisual materials selected and cued, and you teach the course over and over again for a few years, it starts to feel like a long-running theatrical production. The more practiced you are and the more comfortable with your material, the freer you can be and the better engaged with the students in the audience. Then teaching the class becomes really fun.

Kim Marra, Professor of Theatre Arts and American Studies

4CASTing the Impact of Social Networking

In January, the Center for Teaching and ITS-Instructional Services launched 4CAST, a new annual event to provide faculty members and other UI instructors an opportunity to discuss effective use of new teaching technologies. The acronym stands for Campus Academic Strategies and Technologies, and symbolizes the partnership between four partners: the Center for Teaching, ITS, the University community, and this year, the staff from the University of Iowa Libraries.

Topics will change each year. The 2008 event examined "Social Networking: Opportunities & Impact on Teaching & Learning," and despite a sizable snowfall and miniscule temperatures, 60 faculty members, adjunct faculty, and staff instructors attended the daylong activities, which were held in the new ITS facility at University Capitol Centre.

Associate Professor of Art and Art History Jon Winet presented the keynote address on his innovative use of teaching technologies, and eight faculty and staff members served as "roundtable wranglers" to guide small-group discussions about how technology

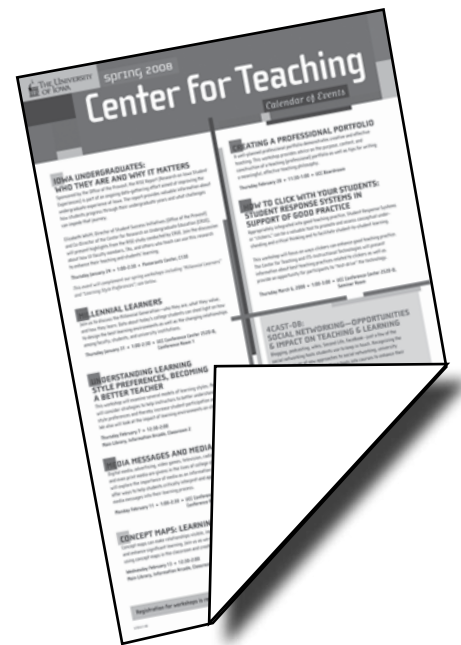
can underscore the Seven Principles of Good Teaching (see Chickering and Gamson 1987).

4CAST resources can be accessed on the Center for Teaching website: <http://www.centeach.uiowa.edu/4cast2008materials.shtml>.

Rather than sponsor a one-time event, the Center for Teaching and ITS expect 4CAST will encourage and support on-going conversations and efforts to enhance effective use of teaching technology at Iowa. To that end, we offered to revisit a subject that a number of faculty participants expressed a desire to pursue. Participants gathered on a warm April afternoon for 4CAST Redux, a discussion and hands-on training in the use of wikis in teaching.

Scheduled for next January, 4CAST 2009 is already in the planning stages. The topic and registration page will be unveiled during the fall semester, so stay tuned.

Chickering, Arthur W. and Zelda F. Gamson (1987). "Seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education" *American Association of Higher Education Bulletin*, pp.3-7.



The Fall Lineup

Look for the list of events on our website during the summer and on our poster, which will be mailed to the campus mailboxes of all TAs, faculty members, and other instructors by the Wednesday before classes begin.

We are now mailing posters in bulk to departments, which are responsible for distributing them to the mailboxes of all instructors. If you have a **departmental mailbox** and did not receive a copy of the spring 2008 poster in mid-January, please check with your departmental secretary, who can then contact us with an accurate number of instructors for the department.

If your mailbox is in a **non-departmental office**, and you want a poster, please ask the Center for Teaching (Cassandra-potter@uiowa.edu) to be included on our mailing list.

We will launch the new academic year with workshops on a variety of topics, including **how to effectively handle difficult classroom situations; engage students in large-lecture courses; encourage peer instruction; and use learning spaces effectively.**

Talking Teaching, Creating Community



Instructors often express a desire to talk together about college teaching and its role in shaping new generations of scholars, practitioners, and citizens. Unfortunately, the daily press of life can make it difficult for UI faculty members and other instructors to explore the Big Picture issues related to higher education, let alone to share their questions and ideas with their colleagues.

We want to help. This summer, the Center for Teaching will launch the first in a series of **faculty learning communities** designed to provide an engaging, relaxed setting where a dozen participants can share ideas about higher education and their role in it. The summer 2008 discussion will use Ken Bain's

extremely popular and readable book, *What the Best College Teachers Do* as a springboard for conversation. We will provide a copy of the book to each member of the learning community.

The fall semester faculty learning community topic and book will be announced in May.

The group is open to all tenured, tenure-track, clinical, and adjunct faculty members on a first-registered, first-served basis. For more information and to register, check our website.

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THE NEON PAPER TRAIL

Allison BrckaLorenz

Center for Teaching staff members try our best to be environmentally responsible. Although our office uses a lot of paper, we recycle all paper products through the UI, and Graduate Assistant Rebecca Hix sorts and hauls home (on the bus) our glass, cardboard, plastic, and metal containers to recycle.

During a September TA training workshop, a graduate student in the Department of Geoscience asked why we use neon paper for our handouts. The answer, “Because it looks nice,” led him to explain that neon and dark papers cannot be recycled. We decided to investigate.

Initial sleuthing revealed that the Iowa Department of Natural Resources considers neon paper to be a contaminant¹ and that the environmental organization ForestEthics² recommends the use of pastel-colored paper only, due to the difficulty in recycling neon paper. We also found that other campuses, including the University of Oregon³ and the University of Colorado at Boulder,⁴ have initiated campaigns to ban the use of neon paper on their campuses.

Intrigued by these results, we decided to follow our paper trail through the recycling process. Dave Jackson, UI Assistant to the Associate Vice President of Facilities Management, confirmed that all of our paper ends up at City Carton Recycling. City Carton of

Iowa City does not recycle neon paper because the dyes are bad for the environment and also make recycling paper very difficult for the mills that make waste paper useful again. Brightly colored paper ends up in the landfill, and if it has been mixed with white or pastel paper, the company first must sort it.

Our trip along the paper trail led us to decide that the Center would no longer purchase neon, dark, or other brightly colored papers. Look forward to future Center for Teaching handouts on white or pastel paper—not as eye-catching as neon, perhaps, but a lot more environmentally friendly.⁵

¹ The Iowa Department of Natural Resources. (n.d.). IowaDNR waste management: Iowa recycling directory instructions. Retrieved on April 9, 2008, from <http://www.iowadnr.com/waste/recycling/instructions.html>

² Sarantis, H. (September 2002). Business guide to paper reduction: A step-by-step plan to save money by saving paper. Retrieved on April 9, 2008, from <http://foresthethics.org/downloads/BusinessGuidetoPprRdctionl.pdf>

³ University of Oregon. (n.d.). UO campus recycling program. Retrieved April 9, 2008, from http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~recycle/site_map.htm

⁴ University of Colorado at Boulder. (October 28, 1999). CU recycling: Recycling bulletin. Retrieved April 9, 2008, from http://recycling.colorado.edu/get_involved/recycling_bulletin/07.html

⁵ Although first we'll use up the bright paper we already have.



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