

# TALK

A Newsletter  
from the  
Center for  
Teaching

## In Praise of Lecturing

At times it seems that faculty developers have little use for that venerable approach to teaching, the lecture. Anyone who has taught, however, understands the significance of lecturing as one important—even essential—arrow in the teaching quiver.

The word “lecture” derives from the Latin word meaning “to read.” Few instructors today would actually read pages of notes to a room of students for an entire class period. But many instructors do convey information through the spoken word in one-way communication, whether for ten minutes or the entire class session.\* Particularly when faculty members punctuate their lectures with classroom discussion, small-group work, brief writing exercises, and other activities that require students to become active learners, lecturing remains an efficient and effective teaching tool.

### Among other things, lecturing can:

- communicate the intrinsic intellectual appeal of the subject matter (much like live theatre);
- convey large amounts of information, including facts and generalizations;
- model how professionals in various disciplines approach a problem and present research;
- organize and incorporate material from other sources such as readings or experiential learning; and
- underscore the importance of listening in the learning process. This benefits students who prefer that style of learning.

\*Of course, terminology sometimes is slow to change, and catalogues still refer to courses that employ very little true lecturing as “lecture courses.”

Daily Comics  
September 11, 2007  
I teach effective presentations  
to the Leadership class...



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On the other hand, most of us have sat through classes where learning failed because lecturing was not done well. **The effective lecturer employs creative ways to:**

- engage students actively in the learning process;
- gain frequent feedback from students about what they are learning;
- lengthen listeners’ short attention spans (most minds tend to wander after 20 minutes of a speech);
- help students understand how to take good notes;
- enhance students’ retention of lecture information;
- recognize diverse learning styles and speeds; and
- require students to employ higher-order thinking skills (application, synthesis, evaluation).

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## In Praise of Lecturing

Here are a few ideas to help ensure that lectures are fun for you and engaging learning experiences for your students.

- Take a few moments before class to breathe. Think about your goals for the lecture and envision yourself achieving them.
- Imagine yourself as an audience member (student); ask yourself what it would take for you to become engaged in the lecture.
- Provide a “hook” within the first few minutes of the lecture to pique the interest of your students. Remember that your students are coming to your class from various other activities. An effective demonstration, provocative question, or

brief activity can involve students from the onset of the lecture and set the tone for the remainder of the class.

- Give the students a reason to be engaged. In the theater, conflict is what makes a play worth watching. Similarly, strange, paradoxical or controversial information in lectures can fuel the students’ interest and engagement in the material;
- Avoid the “Stand and Deliver” approach to lecturing. Vary your posture, tone and gestures. Above all, don’t be afraid to step away from the podium and even venture among your students.
- If you are right-handed, make sure you make eye contact with students to your

left, and vice-versa if you are left-handed.

- Lecturing is efficient, but students learn in many different ways (listening, writing, reading, etc.). Intersperse your lectures with short, engaging activities. They often don’t take much time and can be a valuable mid-lecture assessment both of student comprehension and teacher performance.
- At the end of the lecture, come back to the “hook” you presented at the beginning as a way of reminding students that the lecture has a logical trajectory. Summarize—or have students summarize—the lecture’s main points.

Jean Florman and Lynn Maxfield

For more information on these suggestions see the following resources available at the Center for Teaching:

Cashin, William E., “Improving Lectures,” IDEA Paper No. 14, September 1985, Center for Faculty Evaluation and Development, Kansas State University.

Timpson, William M. et al. *Teaching and Performing: Ideas for Energizing your Classes*. Madison, WI: Magna Publications, 1997.

Staley, Constance. *50 Ways to Leave your Lectern*. Belmont, CA: Thomson, 2003.

## Writing Fellows Support Learning

Do you want to give writing more attention in your courses and provide extra writing support for your students?

If so, the Writing Fellows Program can help.

Writing fellows are Honors students trained in peer tutoring. They work with other students to discover the best ways to organize, present, and articulate ideas in writing. Writing fellows also help communicate assignments and learning goals to students in a particular class.

Students who work with writing fellows are less prone to procrastinate and more apt to spend additional time thinking about and revising their work.

Here’s how it works:

- A team of writing fellows works closely with the instructor to understand the course and assignment goals.
- Students provide drafts to writing fellows two weeks before the final drafts are due.
- The first week, fellows read the drafts carefully, provide comments in margins, and write each student a letter addressing issues such as thesis and support and whether students have fulfilled the

requirements of the assignment. They also point out problematic patterns in style and grammar.

- The following week, fellows conference individually with students about strategies and options for revision.
- Each writing fellow works with 8-13 students in classes of 15-45 students.

During the office’s first four years, fellows have worked with more than 1,400 students and 36 professors in more than 20 departments and programs.

If you are interested in participating in the Writing Fellows Program, please contact Carol Severino, Associate Professor of Rhetoric at [carol-severino@uiowa.edu](mailto:carol-severino@uiowa.edu). For more information on the program, see <http://www.uiowa.edu/~writingc/fellows.html>

Also, if you know Honors students who write well and can support their classmates’ writing efforts, please encourage them to apply to be fellows, or send Carol Severino a note, and she will contact them. The program will be recruiting in October for the spring semester.

### Do colleges have the right to ban extreme speakers?

- Overall agreement that colleges have the right to ban extreme speakers:
  - ✓ 24.1% of all students agreed in 1986
  - ✓ 40.5% of all students agreed in 2006
- Today
  - ✓ 55.1% of conservative students agree
  - ✓ 28.5% of liberal students agree

Hurtado, S., & Pryor, J. H. (2007), “Looking at the past, shaping the future: Getting to know our students for the past 40 years.” Retrieved on September 20, 2007 from [http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/heri/PP/PR\\_TRENDS\\_40YR\\_NASPA-ACPA\\_04-07.ppt](http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/heri/PP/PR_TRENDS_40YR_NASPA-ACPA_04-07.ppt)

# Drawing on Experience

Recently, we sent postcard reminders about two October events regarding inclusive teaching and service learning. Many people asked about the artist whose drawing was featured.

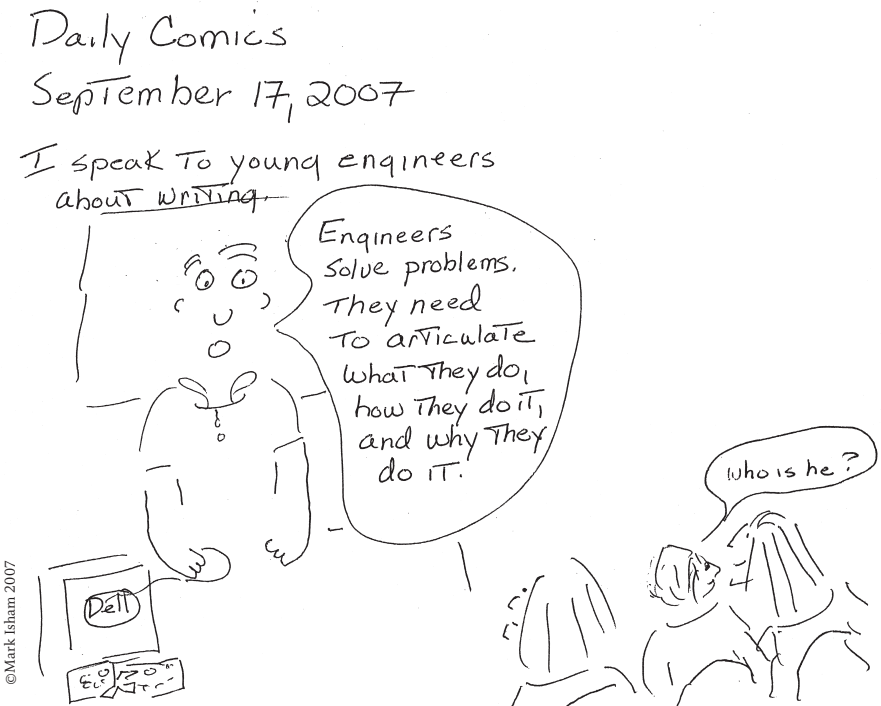
Mark Isham is a visiting faculty member in the Department of English and a writing consultant for the Hanson Center for Technical Communication in the College of Engineering. On January 1, 2007, he began drawing a cartoon every day to record and reflect on his life in general and teaching in particular.

## TALK: Why cartoons?

MARK: While teaching a service-learning course, I met Cody Gieselman at the Bike Lending Library. We both enjoy comic books, and one day when I was in the Main Library on my way to the Center for Teaching, I noticed one of her 'zines in the first-floor 'zine machine. I'd been thinking a lot about how reflection reinforces good teaching and learning, and I became intrigued by the idea of doing reflection through both drawings and words--cartoons.

## T: What were you trying to accomplish?

M: Drawing a cartoon helps me think about different aspects of what I did in class that day. I'm not trying to be funny; I want to be a good reporter. The humor just emerges from the captured moments. In the process of seeing the cartoons, readers can discover their own humorous meanings.

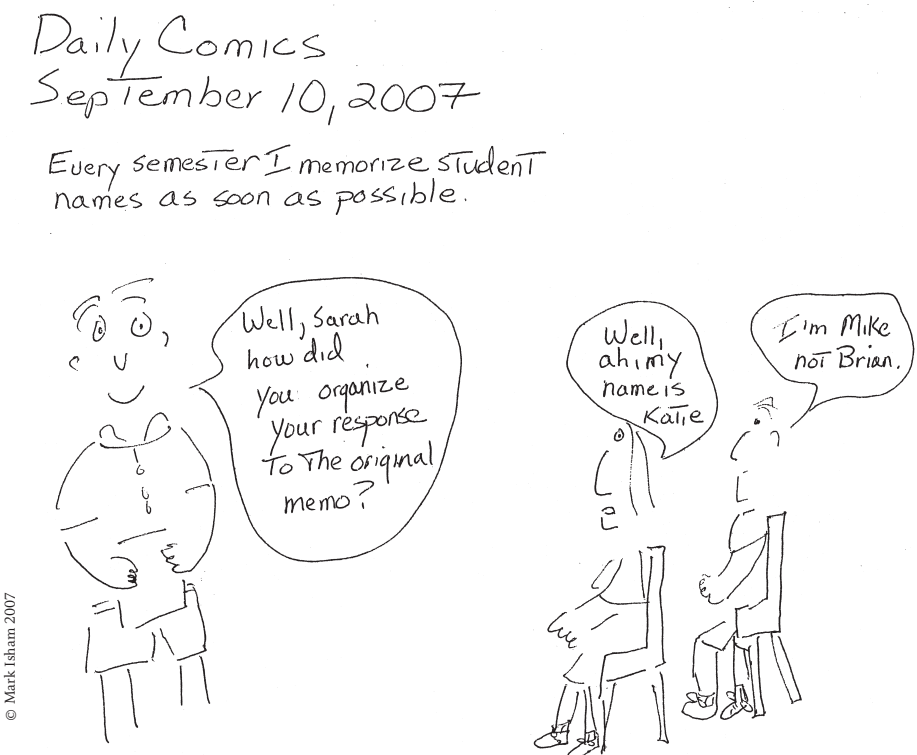


## T: Did you learn anything about teaching from the project?

M: I've always been intrigued by the rhythms of the semester, but creating the cartoons made me realize that teaching is not always a continuous narrative. There are many discrete moments that don't necessarily connect to others. On the other hand, I'm also struck by the repetition of certain patterns in college teaching that become typical moments familiar to all of us. And there are surprises. Sometimes the surprise unfolds when I look at what I've drawn or reflect back on a moment and realize it wasn't necessarily funny at the time, but now it is.

## T: Will you ask your students to draw cartoons as a form of reflection?

M: I need to think more about whether that would work for them. I'm a little hesitant because I wouldn't want to be like the teacher who made his students learn to juggle because they would have so many things to juggle in their lives.



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*I feel most successful as a teacher when I have learned something new and share both this new knowledge and the learning process through which I acquired it. Students' questions and insights often stimulate my own learning about how to integrate new technologies into the mathematical enterprise, apply new fundamental ideas in geometry research, or gain new understanding about how people learn. Whether the classroom is composed of university students, faculty colleagues, PK-12 teachers or their students, my experience is that the most engaging teaching and learning dialogs occur when fresh ideas are incorporated into subject matter.*

**Walter Seaman**, Associate Professor of Mathematics,  
<http://www.math.uiowa.edu/~wseaman/>



## The Center Welcomes a New Staff Member

We're delighted to introduce a new member of our staff, Cassie Potter.

Cassie earned her BA in Business Administration from The University of Iowa in 2000. She and her husband recently welcomed a new daughter to the world. You probably will speak to Cassie first when you call or drop in, so please welcome her!



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