A Collection of gifts

Great Ideas For Teaching

16.1 New Faculty Take the Stage

Denise Stephenson

In this issue several new tenure-track faculty go into detail about some of their favorite teaching techniques. From lecture notes to mini whiteboards, from handmade books to the immediacy of sharing a computer screen across cyberspace, this issue of GIFTs brings a wealth of ideas for expanding the ways we teach with a focus on opportunities for students to learn.

Raymond Clark describes in detail how lecture notes tailored for student engagement in the classroom increase critical thinking and provide concept mapping. **Jade Hidle** takes a new twist using the social energy of speed dating to engage students in more complex thinking as they share ideas through simple miniature books they create in class. Staying small, **Nolan Fossum** describes how mini whiteboards provide students a productive activity and provide him immediate classroom feedback.

Beyond face-to-face interactions, **Rick Cassoni's** article demonstrates several benefits of a software program called Zoom, which can be used to archive lectures, provide virtual office hours, and create a method for rich collaboration in class or for student clubs. If you like the idea of group projects because it's valued in your field and perhaps seems like a way to lighten the grading load, but you're not sure how to manage them, **Delores Loedel** provides tips for group projects in the online environment. And finally, **Jeff Murico** explains how e-lectures watched before class and other strategies prepare students to engage in complex peer discussions together in the classroom.

Have a strategy that has you excited to return to the classroom this fall? Share it with the rest of MiraCosta's faculty; publish it in the next issue of GIFTs. 🎁

16.2 The Power of Lecture Notes

Raymond Clark, Biology

Two of the classes that I teach at MiraCosta are Human Anatomy and Human Physiology. Both of these courses are concept-heavy, and students can easily become overwhelmed with information (including from textbooks containing more detail than I can possibly cover in class). Instead of simply relying on a textbook, lectures, and PowerPoints to convey knowledge, I always provide extensive, detailed lecture notes to my students. I find that the lecture notes address several core issues and make class time far more productive (and less stressful for me and the students).

The lecture notes free my students from furious note writing – a state that some students have called "autopilot." One student told me recently, "when I'm taking notes in X's class, I'm just zoned out and copying words – I'll think about what they mean later." This comment was made by my highest performing student in physiology. I don't want my students on autopilot – I want them engaged and asking/answering questions. To change this dynamic, I provide my lecture notes, often with large blanks in them for diagrams or drawings that we will do together during lecture. This allows my students to think more deeply about the topic, and they are much more engaged in dialogue with me (I ask LOTS of questions).

While the material that I leave out varies, most often it is a figure or concept map – something that I will draw with them. Doing this has several purposes: (a) It helps to pace the delivery of my material, (b) it makes students keep paying attention during lectures, and (c) it highlights a way that I want them to visualize or think about a topic. I use this technique most in my physiology course, in which I use very few PowerPoint presentations and instead rely on boardwork (drawing/writing) and the discussion that occurs because of it. The blanks also provide opportunities where we might discuss something as a class for a few minutes.

The spaces for drawings, pictures or notes force me to slow down and provide an opportunity for the students to learn one of the most effective study tools for physiology and anatomy – concept mapping.

The lecture notes also let students know what I find essential, and pretty much eliminate the question "what do I need to know for the exam?" My lecture notes are, essentially, my textbook. I currently refer to the textbook for further explanation, for alternate examples, and for drawings or diagrams. As I developed my notes, while still at Palomar and CSUSM, my goal was to go "textbookless." I spent countless hours finding and evaluating free online resources that, when combined with my notes, could be used in place of a traditional textbook. Although I currently use a textbook as reference (particularly important in Anatomy where my artistic skills simply aren't sufficient), I still rely predominantly on my notes for all testing purposes.

The notes keep me on schedule and pace my lectures. I know exactly what I'm going to cover that day (as do the students), and I always leave room for questions and discussions. In the past 10 years of teaching, I have almost never fallen behind in my schedule.

Over the past few months, I have begun leaving a few more spaces in the notes for a bit more note-taking. This is something students have suggested in my evaluations, and so I'm experimenting yet again, looking for the right balance. ✀

16.3 Bookin' It: A Community-Building and Process-Oriented Learning Activity

Jade Hidle, English

In the classroom, there are few things heavier than when a question is met with silence and a collective downward shift of gazes. Starting on the first day of class, one of the things I do to make students feel more comfortable in conversation is to break down barriers with face-to-face communication and process-oriented learning applicable across disciplines. My students and I introduce ourselves to each other by forming a circle and stating three [Inigo Montoya-inspired](#) lines about themselves, after which they ask questions of each other to determine who they should ask to be part of their "Success Team" for the class. This face-to-face communication and personal connection continues throughout the semester through team teaching activities, a "Speed Dating with Aristotle" rhetorical analysis exercise, among others. However, a new incarnation of this effort to build community and generative dialogue in my classes is the mini-book in-class writing exercise, or ICE for short. Cue the "Ice, Ice Baby" beat and heed the lyrics "Collaborate and listen/ Ice is back with my brand new invention."

My objective with this exercise is to get students to generate discussion topics and potential paper topics through critical reading/viewing and narrating relevant personal experiences, as well as sharing with and learning from one another. In doing so, students develop control over their work and forge more personalized bonds with the text.

I ask the students to fold a piece of paper into four squares so that it forms a small book. On each of the four pages, I prompt students to respond to a specific question about their personal experiences, key passages from our text, or an image or video, all of which revolve around a central theme. For instance, the mini-book ICE for my English 50 class's introductory discussion of Rose George's *The Big Necessity: The Unmentionable World of Human Waste and Why It Matters* prompted students to argue the reasons why a topic like defecation is taboo, explain their own pet peeves about public bathrooms, respond to a Dirty Jobs clip about sanitation engineers, and analyze the effectiveness of one of the author's examples in the introduction.

Students are allotted anywhere between two and seven minutes to answer each question, depending on its depth and purpose. These time constraints facilitate honest brainstorming and has often helped students to jump the hurdle of blank-page anxiety. Any lingering frustration of "not having enough time" gives them more to talk about for the next part of the activity.

I ask the students to get up out of their chairs, which I request they move to the periphery of the classroom. The students then circulate through the open space "musical chairs" style and when I call for them to stop, they turn to the nearest classmate and they have five minutes to share two of the pages from their mini-books. I usually choose one of the pages for them to share, typically the response focused on the text, and they get to choose the other page. When I call time, they rotate to another partner and share a different page.

These discussions are consistently lively and generative. Students are able to talk to classmates that they might not ordinarily group up with and the one-on-one time allows them to

dig more deeply into the subject, especially when they express differing perspectives on an issue. They also have to manage their time within the constraints, and I am also circulating during the rounds, posing additional questions and providing commentary that helps push the conversations to the next level.

After two to three rounds of the "speed dating," I have the students return to their seats at which time I have them open up their mini-book to the blank interior. This is where the students write the "epilogue" to their mini-book, which requires them to reflect on what they learned through the conversations they had with their classmates and how these lessons get them to rethink their initial responses on the previous four pages. These reflections become the basis for our class-wide discussion. More often than not, these class dialogues and debates are initiated by students volunteering to share the insights they gained from their one-on-one conversations.

Not only does this activity enhance students' skills in reading, writing, discussing, and building community, but students cultivate their understanding of and participation in process-oriented learning that are integral to an English course and other disciplines: brainstorming, sharing, listening, questioning, debating, reflecting, revising, and connecting. And it's fun. 🎁

16.4 Mini Whiteboards: A Window Into Students' Thinking

Nolan Fossum, Mathematics

Math students are often reluctant to tell the instructor how it is really going in math class. Blank stares and pursed lips are the most common responses to the instructor's inquiries about whether students are following the lesson or have any questions. Naturally, it is important for students to practice math skills during class time with instructor support, but I have a hard time peeking at their papers as I circulate around the classroom to get a sense of how they are doing.

As a way of inducing more active participation during practice sessions, I sometimes supply the students with mini-whiteboards and markers. I will present a problem to the class and ask the students to work out the solution on the whiteboard. Larger bright colored writing on the boards helps me gather more information about how many of the students are doing with the problem. I can more readily identify common errors or misconceptions or clarify something I failed to illustrate clearly at first.

Mini whiteboards work great for students individually or in small groups. They can collaborate on more involved problems; considering alternate possibilities is as simple as erasing and beginning again. Students seem happy for the change of pace, the instant feedback is invaluable to me, and everyone likes to doodle in between examples. 🎁

16.5 Zoom, Zoom, Zoom, Zoom: Zoom Four Ways!

Rick Cassoni, Computer Science

Background

This Great Idea For Teaching (GIFT) serves as a follow up to a GIFT that was authored Fall 2014, GIFT 14.5, Issue 14 - *Using Archives as a Means to Enhance Lectures Coming to a Theater Classroom Near You!* In GIFT 14.5, I explained the use of technology, specifically using Blackboard Collaborate via CCC Confer as an effective way to archive classroom sessions. Using this archives provided the following student successes: (1) Allow students who missed class to not fall behind (2) Means for English as a Second Language (ESL) students to repeat the lesson on demand and (3) On demand recordings able to be viewed on desktop and mobile devices.

Why Zoom

I was introduced to Zoom in Fall 2014 during a California Community College's (CCC) pilot to try Zoom. What I quickly discovered was that Zoom was much simpler to use compared to Blackboard Collaborate and included all of the key features of Blackboard Collaborate including: (1) Ability to record lectures for archive (2) Free of charge (3) Screen sharing and (4) Ability for students to use on PC, Mac, and mobile devices. Additionally, Zoom (1) does not have a delay for conversion of videos into .mp4 format for posting to YouTube (2) allows students to host Zoom outside of an instructor hosting a session including recording of sessions (3) ability to request remote control of a student's workstation.

Zoom Four Ways

1) Archiving Lectures

Archiving lectures continues to be a big hit with students so that students can go back over material in class. But, more importantly, if one teaches both on ground and online courses across different sections, the in class archives can be shared with online students. This provides an on demand way for online students to have a classroom like experience. Here is a lecture example.

2) Virtual Office Hours

This is especially useful for online students including those that do not have the ability to come to campus as well as students unable able to come to traditional office hours. Having the ability to see a student's screen and take over remote control of their workstation saves significant amounts of time. I have experience using 1 minute Zoom sessions to explain a line of programming code or how to do an Excel formula or function that potentially would have taken hours to resolve without seeing or being able to control a student's screen.

3) Creating Weekly Kickoffs for Online Courses

What better way to kick off each week for online courses than a video presentation. I create 5 – 10 minute videos that show myself in a video super imposed along with Blackboard to provide community, go over the week's assignments, and offer feedback from the previous week's assignments on what went well and what did not go well.

4) Online Students Collaborating with Each Other

Zoom has been a break through allowing online students the ability to communicate with each other for assignments and group work. In fact, I

now have my students use Zoom to record final group projects that are the same as on ground students.

5) Beyond the Classroom
As the Club IT advisor for MiraCosta's Club IT student club, we use Zoom to allow members to participate live or virtually. In fact, for the 2nd and 4th meetings each month, members are encouraged to participate remotely. This is only one example of beyond the classroom use. There are a myriad of others.

What's on the Horizon
Based on the success of using Zoom for Club IT remote participation, I plan to experiment with Zoom Spring 2016 / Fall 2016 to allow online students to remotely participate in on ground lectures using Zoom. Stay tuned to hear the results of this experiment! 🎁

16.6 Managing Group Projects in the Online Environment

Delores Loedel, Accounting

In the world of accounting, as in many professions, accountants frequently work in teams across multiple departments to achieve a common goal for the business. Often times these teams originate from multiple business units which can include different cities, states, and even countries. Prior to the rise of the internet, teams were forced to communicate in the only means available at the time; telephone and via floppy disks snail-mailed between business units. With the increased use of the internet and technology, teams now have enumerable ways of communicating with one another. However, even with all of the advances, the ability of individuals to work within a group continues to be a challenge. Problems due to lack of coordination, planning, inclusion, and conflict management skills can wreak havoc with the team dynamics. In the current work environment, employers are increasingly looking for individuals who are flexible and are able to work well in a very dynamic environment and with many different types of people from various backgrounds and cultures. It is for this reason that many faculty members choose to include at least one group assignment in their syllabus requirements.

Once a faculty member has decided to add this component to their repertoire, the difficulty of assigning this task becomes clear. This is especially true in the online environment. Having taught in the online environment for approximately seven years and worked with groups in this environment, I can certainly attest to this fact. After careful planning and consideration of the elements and nuances of the group dynamics in the online environment and having tweaked the assignment details over numerous semesters, I have come up with a system that works well and is consistent with the goals that I have for the groups. I will now describe these goals and the steps taken to achieve them.

Description of the Group Project:

Students in each group must read an article from the assigned Kiplinger textbook describing some business or finance case or issue. The article will include a statement that the students must either accept or reject; then they write a paper using the article as their main source of information, using other sources of information as needed to adequately defend their stance. Their group deliverable is a team-developed paper. In addition, individuals must post a discussion to the discussion board which is a constructive critique of each other's group papers.

Goals of the Group Project:

• To plan, coordinate, and complete a group project from start to finish in the online environment.

• To be placed in a team with differing views and backgrounds and have them choose a common ground to work from. Some of them may not agree with the position that their group took, but they may need to go along with the majority, or collegially convince the group to change their stance, to get the project completed on time.

• To utilize technology to communicate with one another.

• To create a paper that is concise and to

the point while at the same time giving adequate information to back up their point of view. In the article, there are many issues, facts and figures to sort through, digest, and decide what to include and what not to include.

> •To read an opposing point of view and gain information from someone else's viewpoints.

> •To post an intelligent critique of another group's paper.

> •To self reflect. Did they put their best efforts into this project? If not, why not? What were the tripping points along the way? How can this experience benefit them in their careers in the future (and academic and personal life as well)?

Tips for Assigning and Managing Group Projects in the Online Environment:

> •Assign the project well in advance of the ultimate due date and include numerous reminders throughout the process.

> •Be extremely thorough in the explanation of the group project and the requirements.

> •Allow students to approach the instructor first if they are having problems with their group so the instructor can assist them in getting back on track.

> •Although I have always sent out a list of Netiquette rules to the students, I still had problems with some group dynamics. I began posting the "Golden Rule" (treat other people as you wish them to treat you) on the Announcement page. This had an amazing effect, and I have not experienced any more rude behavior since adding this detail.

> •Help students navigate the group tools available to their group on Blackboard including email, discussion board, file exchange, blogs, journals, and wikis.

> •Utilize Turnitin for the document submittal so that students learn more about plagiarism.

> •One of the most important details of

group projects is the grading criteria. I require all students to complete an anonymous peer review of each of their team members. Students will grade each of their team members from 0% to 100% related to how much effort that team member put into the project. I tally the totals from the individual peer reviews, and the student will then receive this percentage of the overall grade. This has worked out extremely well as students who work diligently on the project (in whatever capacity) are rewarded by their peers and those that may slack off or do not participate at all will be reflected in their peer review scores and ultimate grade on the assignment. While this is a lot of work to coordinate, in the end it creates a more fair and equitable distribution of grades.

> In the end, I upload all of the group's completed papers and students have the opportunity to review each other's work and make constructive comments on the discussion board as the final piece of their grade. Based on the comments, I can tell that they have learned a lot from the process. Students learn how to better work on teams in the online environment. They assign leaders, editors, and submitters. They utilize the wiki and other group area tools to share files, discuss, and email with team members. They converse with one another in a civil way to produce the required output. By combining the elements of team work, rigorous academic reading and writing, critique, and self-reflection, the group project works as a capstone for the course. 🎁

16.7 Flipping Isn't Flopping

Jeff Murico, Religious Studies

I have had the pleasure to teach a number of online courses over the past few years, which has forced me to rethink how I approach the traditional classroom. In short, it became glaringly obvious that I lecture too much; the majority of class consisted of my presenting students with mounds of content while I watched them struggle to document every last word. This part of class, I realized, need not take place in the classroom. Like my online class, I could deliver this material as a form of homework, thus not having to sacrifice the lecture altogether.

It is for these reasons that I created an archive of "e-lectures" that students are required to watch before we meet. I created a YouTube channel for World Religions so students can easily access these lectures from just about anywhere. Since implementing this strategy, the majority of our time in the classroom is spent clarifying complex concepts, engaging in informed peer-to-peer discussions, and addressing a number of student-generated questions. I was initially worried that this method would have a negative impact on attendance, but that has not been the case. I have implemented a number of classroom attendance incentives, such as participation credit for in-class discussions and assignments, unannounced quizzes, and frequent mandatory one-minute student presentations on "religion in the news." I have found that students are more excited to come to class and thus I have not seen any noticeable change in attendance.

Students are then required to complete the assigned reading after our classroom meeting has taken place. It is important to note that the e-lectures are relatively short and basic; the purpose is to get the ball rolling, so to speak. In my experience, students have been much more prepared to tackle the detailed and often complex readings after having been exposed to the e-lectures and class activities. The homework I assign is based on the reading, which is how students are held accountable. All in all, this has led to a much more fun, engaging, and informed classroom experience. 🎁