

A Collection of gifts



Issue 11 Spring 2012

Great Ideas For Teaching

11.1 In This Issue...

Deborah Paige

Whether seasoned or new, all instructors can appreciate the importance of classroom community. Such community promotes goodwill among students, providing a safe environment in which they may freely ask questions and offer ideas without fear of failure or ridicule. Maybe you've watched the TV show, *Community*, set at fictional Greendale Community College. The show features a group of unlikely friends, ranging from age 20 to late-60's, with little to nothing in common other than their desire for academic success. While this is an implausible premise in most settings, real-life community college classrooms provide similar opportunities, oftentimes leading to surprise friendships or, at the very least, a sense of camaraderie, both of which foster student success. As instructors, we strive to nurture such an atmosphere.

In keeping with this goal, this semester's *Collection of GIFTS* features a theme of community. **Christina Hata** shares a big corporate secret that has resulted in immeasurable successes, and amends it for the classroom. Her appropriation of FedEx Days is one that requires student research, invites creativity, and demands presentation within a professional, hospitable environment, a byproduct of healthy communities. **Jim Sullivan's** GIFT suggests three tips—bridge-builders to classroom community—for engaging both introverted and extroverted students in brief, yet meaningful, nonthreatening discussions that extend beyond “right” or rote answers.

Tom Severance takes community beyond the physical classroom, to the MCC portal, where he has established a gateway to faculty community that includes teaching resources, a discussion-based blog and wiki, and numerous educational and informational links designed to raise faculty

11.1 In This Issue...

Deborah Paige

11.2 FedEx'ing the Final

Christina Hata, Business

11.3 All Aboard the Holiday Express: Three Strategies for Fostering Engagement in Class

Jim Sullivan, Letters

11.4 Building a Department Portal

Tom Severance, Business

11.5 Using Conversation Cards to Review Class Materials and Build Classroom Community

Eli Clarke, Noncredit ESL

Submissions

Submissions are always welcome. There is rolling on-line publication and print distribution during FLEX week.

Please submit work to M/S 9 or dstephenson@miracosta.edu



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Academy

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www.miracosta.edu/StudentServices/WritingCenter

awareness. Tom's GIFT will enhance campus and classroom communities across the disciplines. Finally, **Eli Clarke** offers a multipurpose idea—adaptable to all disciplines—engendering student learning while also building classroom connections. At first glance, some of these GIFTS may appear as dissimilar as *Community's* Jeff, Pierce, Abed, Troy, Britta, Shirley, Annie, and Señor Chang, yet, like Greendale's study group, all of them work together for a common and beneficial cause: learning that thrives within community.

Speaking of community, special thanks for this issue go to **Leola McClure** as lead of the Lodestar program, a group of faculty-mentors that offers support to first-year faculty who are learning the ropes. Leola marshaled the spirit of gift-giving, asking this year's lodestars to present GIFTS to new faculty near the end of last semester. By all accounts, it was a huge success, a great way to end the semester, and a demonstration of community in action. In this issue we present a few of these generous GIFTS, with more to follow in fall 2012. 🎁

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11.2 FedEx'ing the Final

Christina Hata, Business

End of semester research papers used to be something I looked forward to. I loved reading them because I felt like I had a window into my students' minds and was able to see how they perceived my discipline. Then came Wikipedia, and Google, and myriad other places and sources where words can be appropriated rather than created. In what seemed like an overnight shift, genuinely good, well thought-out and constructed research papers turned into a potpourri of cut-and-paste sentences and paragraphs. These papers were depressing and disappointing to read and grade.

Then I heard about FedEx days.

FedEx days are based on 20% time. Google pioneered the concept of 20% time—where employees are allowed to spend 20% of their time working autonomously—on anything they want. This is how Gmail, Google Calendar, and many other Google applications were created. An Australian company, Atlassian has taken it up a level. At Atlassian, 20% time has turned into a FedEx day where, once a month, employees present the ideas they have developed during their 20% time. Employees get complete autonomy and frequently develop projects or ideas that become products, patches, or a combination of both. As an experiment last semester, I decided to replace the mid-term and final paper assignments in my management class with a FedEx day. Students were given a simple instruction:

Develop an idea in an area that interests you, tie it to management, and make sure the class will experience value-add from it. If you try something and fail, make

your presentation about that failure and what you learned. One more thing: it's a competition.

On FedEx day, students are allotted 15-20 minutes to present their FedEx project. The day is structured like a professional conference. They submit a proposal, presentation plan, and short paper to ensure there has been research, planning, and preparation for their presentation. Students rate their peers' presentations, and I rate their presentations. They also complete an evaluation for themselves and their teammates. These scores are added to rank the first-, second-, and third-place presentations.

The mid-term FedEx results are pretty inelegant. Students are not used to being encouraged to be creative and to apply their research. They see what their peers do; we talk about what specifically value-add means (there must be some take-away that makes the activity meaningful and relevant to students' lives), and they get better. Therefore, the stakes are higher at the final than the mid-term.

The results have been awesome. What is presented is original; many topics are highly creative and they all tie to management. This semester one group did their FedEx on how microexpressions and "tells" commonly used in poker can inform a manager looking at an employee's non-verbal communication. They provided the class with a handout highlighting key points and a short bibliography where students could learn more. Another group took five of the concepts studied in class, did some research about how those concepts are applied at model organizations, and presented that research in a very creative presentation that culminated with a business card-sized handout that students could reference anytime they experience a management challenge.

Students enjoy the opportunity to create something that is meaningful to them. And they love the competition aspect and really step up to the challenge. I love seeing them take concepts

we discuss in class and make them their own. I've been truly amazed at the research, creativity and the content of these presentations. 🎁

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11.3 All Aboard the Holiday Express: Three Strategies for Fostering Engagement in Class

Jim Sullivan, Letters

Like all of us, I long for lively classroom conversations and discussions. But even on the best days, when hands are up and groups are ablaze with ideas, I can always find a small but significant minority of students lurking quietly outside of the discussions. They may be listening, but if I don't do something quickly, they might turn to the alluring bliss of their cell phones. Here are three quick strategies I have used lately that have helped increase the percentage of students who are sharing their thoughts and ideas with their classmates.

Pick a Passage, Any Passage

I choose four or five passages from our text that I would like students to discuss. I print those out—one set for each group in the class. And then I cut the quotes into separate slips (or attach them to separate cards) and put them into a box, hat, envelope or other mysterious container. In other words, each group ends up with a box containing five quotes or passages from the text.

One by one, students pick a

passage from the hat, read it to their group, and then share their thoughts on the passage to the group. (I always include page numbers so the rest of the group can find the passage in their texts.) The reader must share her or his thoughts first, then the group jumps in and shares their ideas.

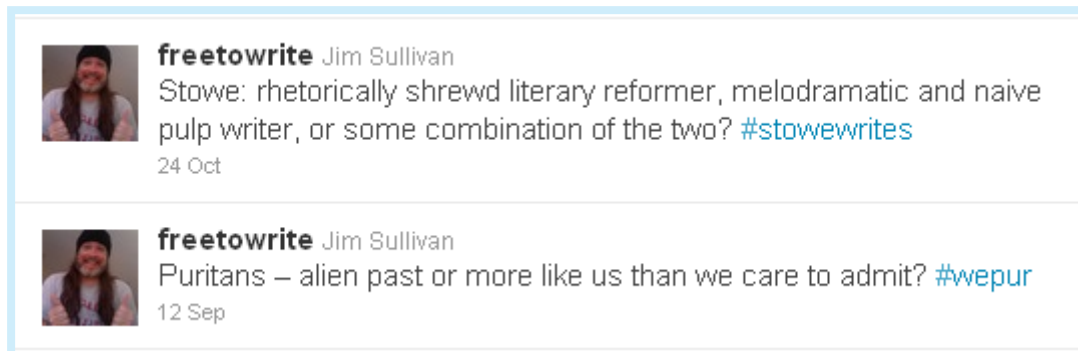
This works on two levels for me. First, I can make sure that the conversation gets to the key ideas I want covered. Second, everyone shares in a small group setting.

While the groups work through the passages, I float from group to group, listening and taking notes. Sometimes I make suggestions to groups about pacing or give them a follow-up discussion idea, but mostly I am collecting quotes and ideas to share with the class as a whole at the end of the discussion.

Twitter Me This

Ask students to establish twitter accounts, and ask them to “follow” your twitter account. Then, every week or two post a “Twitter Me This” prompt for the class to respond to (use hash tags so that you can aggregate everyone's tweets).

I try to make these prompts a little provocative—give the students something to argue with and about—always remembering that the students have only 140 characters to craft a response:



Sample Twitter prompts from Jim Sullivan provoke student responses of 140 characters or less.

- Thoreau—radical agent of change or intellectual poser?
- California cars—icons of status and liberation or mobile prison cells?
- Kevin Starr’s examples—persuasive, pompous, or puerile?

Of course, I encourage students to ignore, explode, or innovate upon these false binaries.

I usually have a brief class discussion of these tweets at the beginning of class, and invariably I find myself calling on some of the students who are traditionally a bit quieter. I am not sure how that happens but...

Twitter’s compressed format seems to draw in students who will otherwise sit out a conversation—perhaps because it liberates them to be pithy and not have to worry about competing with the eloquence of some of their more enthusiastic peers, or perhaps the written word opens up some space for the spoken word. Either way, “twitter me this” has helped some quieter birds tweet.

Read Me Mine

This is a strategy I used to employ regularly but had forgotten about until a former student who

is now a writing consultant in my class reminded me about it just last week! According to Jamie, this is a technique now regularly practiced in the Writing Center.

During peer feedback workshops, I shake up the dynamic a bit by having students read each other’s papers out loud (a variation on the more typical technique of having students read their own papers out loud).

My original motivation for this switch was to help students hear how their essay sounded to their readers. But as I watched students perform this exercise, I was surprised to see how much more engaged the student reader was in the peer review process. After reading a piece out loud, a student reader was much more likely to make substantive critiques and speak up about what she or he thought of the piece.

The law of unintended consequences seems to have applied to this activity, and the reader was benefitting in unexpected ways while also helping the writer. I have since used this exercise in humanities, literature, and composition classes and enjoyed watching how it draws even the quietest students into a valuable conversation. 📖

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11.4 Building a Department Portal

Tom Severance, Business

Part of my job as Chair of the Business Department is to assist both full-time and associate business instructors in improving their teaching and class management. I want to make things as efficient for them as possible, lead them to the right resources, and help them capitalize on the experiences, resources, and techniques of other instructors. One way I have tried to accomplish some of the above goals is by using the MiraCosta Portal as a resource for all instructors in the MiraCosta Business Department (which consists of the Accounting, Business Administration, and Real Estate programs) by sharing creative teaching techniques and good classroom practices.

My first step was to have Chad Woolley in AIS set up a separate Portal page with a direct URL for the Business Department: <<https://portal.miracosta.edu/Departments/Business>>

Then, I looked at what tools are available on the Portal. Because I wanted to keep it relatively simple, and easy to explain and use, I decided that there would be four main sections to our Portal: documents, blog, wiki, and links. I also decided that our site did not need to limit user access. Therefore, as long as someone has a MiraCosta email address, they can access all materials and make submissions.

The four sections of our Portal can be briefly explained as follows:

Documents: I set up separate file folders for each program: ACCT, BUS and REAL, so that if a document or form applies only to that program, it can be located more easily. We can also create file folders for each course within a program.

(Business Administration colleague Christina Hata uses this part of our Portal to encourage faculty to share SLO assessments and ideas.)

I searched through my class materials for documents, projects, handouts, or anything else that might be useful to other instructors, and uploaded them into these folders. I did the same with general information on teaching or administrative duties that were relevant. Generally, if a document or form does not need to be changed for a particular course, I will save it and upload it as a PDF. If it is something that might need to be interactive or changed, I will upload it as a Word document, Excel spreadsheet, etc. It is up to the submitter to decide what makes the most sense. To implement this, set guidelines and show clear examples.

Blog: I wanted the blog to serve as a discussion board for interchanges between faculty members. Any participant can set up a new category. I jump-started it by using these general categories with an example in each:

- 1) **MiraCosta Issues & Questions**
Example: 4800 Building Atrium: What are some good suggestions for improving the function and the look of the 4800 building atrium? If cost is substantial, how do we get the funds?
- 2) **Teaching Tips, Strategies, Questions**
Example: Teaching Tips: Who's tried a new teaching technique in class this semester with good results?
- 3) **Everything Else**
Example: Books, Podcasts, TV, and Websites: Does anyone have any business-related books, TV shows, podcasts or websites to recommend?

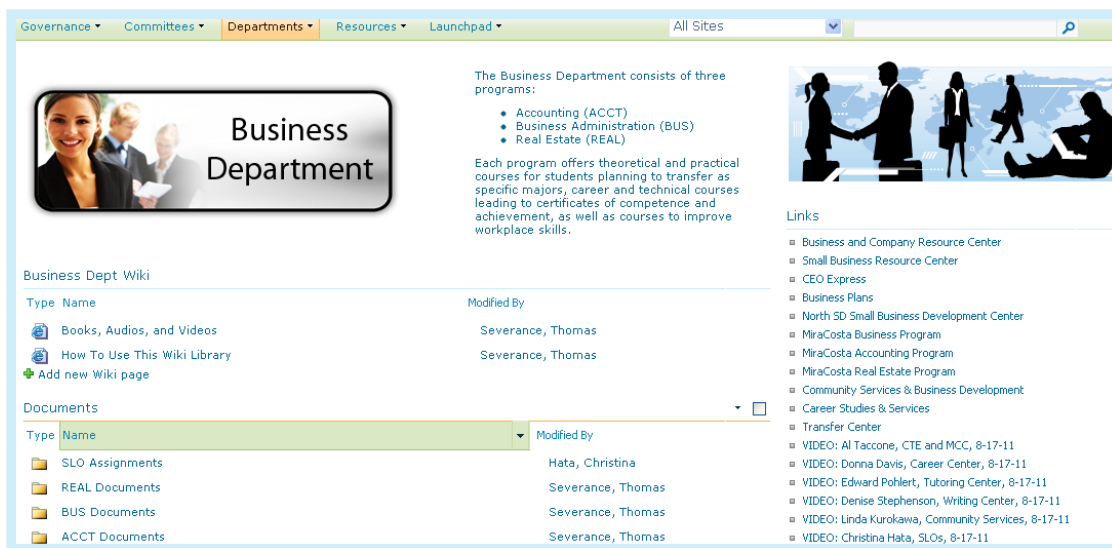
Wiki: The wiki is set up for all to contribute to an interactive database. I set up one example: a list of books, audios, and videos that instructors can view and then physically check out from Donna Blanton, Instructional Division Secretary. There are some items related to our discipline and some items related to teaching in general. I hope other faculty will add their materials. I suggest that the listings follow this format for consistency:

- **Title:** Author (Donor)
- **Example:** *Active Learning: 101 Strategies:* Mel Silberman (Severance)

Links: During our Fall 2011 Business Department meeting, I videotaped some of the presentations (by Donna Davis, Denise

Stephenson, Edward Pohlert, etc.) on various MCC programs and services and put links to these videos here. I also inserted Web links that might be useful to department members.

The MiraCosta Portal is a great resource that is certainly underused. I have done my best to make our Department site valuable to my colleagues. I periodically remind them it is there and hope for more activity and contributions. I haven't quite figured out how to best accomplish this, but I keep trying. Perhaps another GIFT will have the answer. 🎁



The Business Department portal page provides a variety of resources to instructors.

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11.5 Using Conversation Cards to Review Class Materials and Build Classroom Community

Eli Clarke, Noncredit ESL

In our English as a Second Language (ESL) courses, we constantly practice the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. When I have surveyed my students about what they want more of in class, they always ask for extra “speaking” practice. Therefore, I looked for an activity that would reinforce speaking, and I discovered “Conversation Cards.” This activity not only allows me to reinforce my students’ speaking skills, but it also permits me to review class materials, as well as to build community among students. The majority of our ESL classes meet 12 hours a week, and I use the conversation cards at least once a week—and my students are always asking for more!

How does this work?

- You need a set of cards with 5-10 questions targeting a subject (vocabulary,

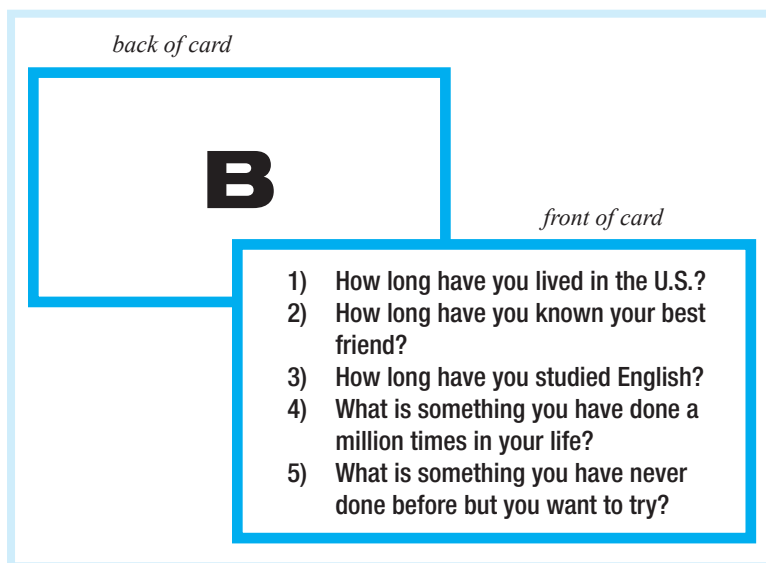
grammar, culture, etc.)

- Give a card to each student and tell them to ask their partner one question from their card.
- After both students have asked a question, they must exchange cards and look for a new partner.
- Students need to repeat this at least 3-4 times, depending on how much time you allow for this activity.

Instructors can create their own questions; however, questions shouldn’t elicit a “yes/no” response. They should produce interesting answers/conversation. In addition, this activity can be modified to suit the needs of any class:

biology, auto mechanics, nursing, music, etc. Just target the subject you want to review, create the questions (conversation cards), and voila!

I encourage my students to write on the board any new word/ expression found in the cards. Each card is labeled with a letter on the back and each



Conversation Card example.

question has a number, so if they found a new word on card B question 3, they write B3 and the word on the board. As a class, we discuss

the meaning of new words and expressions. If time allows, I ask several students to read some questions from their cards and to ask a question to

anybody in the class. The instructor can also write some words or grammatical errors that he/she finds while monitoring and assisting the students. 🎁