

Focal Point

Spring 2008/09

CPSE Moving Day – June 1, 2009

As of June 1, the CPSE – including our prized filing cabinet of resources and our lending library – will move to **Moench Hall, room D108** since **Richard Layton** (department of mechanical engineering) will become the next CPSE Director. Please feel free to contact Richard any time after May 31, 2009 for assistance with teaching- or educational scholarship-related issues: 877-8905; richard.a.layton@rose-hulman.edu.

And thank you for the opportunity to serve our community over the past couple of years!

- Kay C Dee



Richard Layton – the next CPSE Director.

Did you know? We offer peer review of teaching.

Interested in peer review of some aspect of your teaching? The CPSE provides review services upon request (no one can "refer" someone involuntarily for review), and these services and their results are confidential. Simply contact the CPSE and describe what kinds of feedback you would like to obtain. We will brainstorm together about the kinds of things peer reviewers could look at, suggest a few peers who might be good reviewers, set up a meeting with peer reviewers and set up a schedule of peer interactions. These interactions could be multiple visits by peers to your classroom, visits by you to classrooms of your peers, discussions with selected peers about how to handle particular teaching issues, having peers look at your course materials and provide feedback, etc. After the peer interactions, the faculty member will receive informal feedback orally, and can also receive formal written feedback, if desired. You can then use the feedback in whatever way you wish. Some people plan to use peer review feedback in their PTR portfolio as part of their continual improvement narrative, and some people just want informal, formative feedback. The feedback/observation results are communicated only to the requesting faculty member.

Won't students in the class automatically think I am a bad teacher if I have someone sitting in my class and observing my teaching?

To date, no one who's had peer observation in their classroom has reported any such student comments or attitude. As a matter of fact, students seem remarkably unconcerned about and uninterested in the presence of another faculty member in the classroom. If your students should ask you why another faculty member is in your class, there are a variety of satisfying answers we can give (which we pre-arrange with you), none of which imply in any way that your teaching 'needs help.'

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Focal Point

● **The Act of Teaching – Theater techniques for teachers**

“Stand up
straight, and
breathe.”

If the idea of someone telling you to “land your energy” on students in your class makes you cringe just a little bit, you’re not alone. However, if the idea of making friendly eye contact with students doesn’t sound like a bad idea, and you’re interested in learning about teaching as a physical performing art – like acting – you will enjoy watching *The Act of Teaching*, from the Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning at Harvard University. This DVD is available for borrowing and viewing from the CPSE.

Part I of this DVD is a 42-minute video of a small, interactive class taught by Nancy Houfek, Head of Voice and Speech for the American Repertory Theatre at Harvard University. At one point in the DVD, Nancy says “Sometimes people ask me, what is my theory of performance... and I say, ‘**stand up straight, and breathe**’... and in some respects, that’s it, but we can work on a little more sophisticated version of that.” This short sentence is a fair summary of the DVD, in which Nancy explains and demonstrates exercises and strategies to help teachers fine-tune their physical and verbal presence. It sounds easy to ‘stand up straight and breathe,’ but it’s not always easy to remember do that while you’re teaching. One thing I appreciate about this DVD is the fact that Nancy’s class consists of university teachers (not drama professors), who occasionally deliver lines from their lectures as they would normally, and then re-deliver them with Nancy’s help. Their improvement is often easy to see.

The topics of Nancy’s class are: landing your energy, naming your objective, overcoming stage fright, taking pleasure in words, using metaphors, and ‘making this work for you.’ I believe many of these topics and many of Nancy’s tips are useful. For example, shifting your focus from “How am I doing?” to “How are the students doing – are they having the reaction I want?” might help someone keep focused on student learning and decrease nervousness. I enjoyed Nancy’s ideas about the effective use of voice. Deliberately and slowly emphasizing key words or ideas in your sentences can be a very effective lecture/learning cue (it certainly worked well for Carl Sagan, didn’t it?). For me, the section on stage fright was least useful. I’m not sure we can always deliberately choose to repattern a stage fright response while we’re having one, but I do believe that we can try to deliberately slow and deepen our breathing when we recognize that we’re dealing with stage fright. The stage fright breathing exercise shown on the DVD could not be done gracefully while speaking publicly, or while in front of a classroom. However, it is possible to pause briefly, make eye contact with (or land energy on) the audience, and take a good deep breath from the diaphragm.

Alarm your
colleagues!

It’s good for
you.

The second feature on this DVD shows Nancy leading the group of teachers in a 15-minute series of exercises designed to wake up the body, open up the voice, and improve articulation. The physical stretches are simple and make sense – you don’t need to be a fitness guru to do them, and they are very likely to limber you up and release some of the stress that accumulates in tight shoulders and muscles. The combination vocal/body and articulation/face warmups will have you making silly sounds (as vocal warmups tend to do) but are classic exercises. **They might alarm the person whose office is next to yours** if you do them loudly, but they are pretty much guaranteed to loosen up your vocal cords and get you breathing.

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● Peer Review of Teaching, continued from page 1

Won't my colleagues automatically think I am a bad teacher if I have someone sitting in my class and observing my teaching?

First of all, what you tell (or don't tell) your colleagues is completely up to you – they aren't going to hear anything from the CPSE. Second, your colleagues are probably too busy to worry about anyone else's classes. Third, we sincerely hope that Rose-Hulman faculty wouldn't be like that. But if needed, be assured that we will help you generate satisfying answers for anyone who 1) notices and 2) inquires.

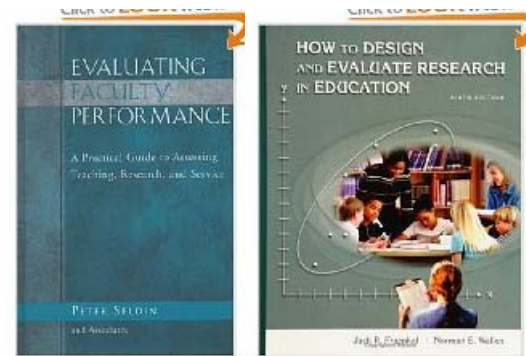
● Books Gone AWOL: Have You Seen Us?

The CPSE has books and resources available to borrow, stored outside of Moench Hall room D217. Simply fill out a book's library card, place it in the envelope provided, and the book is yours until you are done with it (or someone else requests it). Please help us find two books that have gone missing:

Evaluating faculty performance: a practical guide to assessing teaching, research and service, by Peter Seldin

How to Design and Evaluate Research in Education, by Jack Frankel and Norman Wallen.

Please check your bookshelves...



Images shamelessly stolen from amazon.com.

● Thermal and Transport Concept Inventory

If you are an instructor in thermodynamics, heat transfer, or fluid mechanics, have you ever wondered what misconceptions your students have about these important disciplines? If so, you are invited to consider using the Thermal and Transport Concept Inventory (TTCI) to collect on-line data for your students. The TTCI website is available at: <http://www.thermalinventory.com/>

If you would like to see the actual inventory instruments (separate surveys for thermo, heat, and fluids) or have questions about using the TTCI, please contact Ron Miller at rmiller@mines.edu. A password is required to see survey questions and Ron will be happy to provide one. Survey data are confidential and are only shared with qualified engineering faculty members. The instrument allows for pre-post testing using identification codes provided by the course instructor.

▶ *(The Act of Teaching, continued)* Fundamentally, I think it might come down to this: stretching feels good. Relaxing your muscles feels good. Getting oxygen into your body and brain helps you feel good. Feeling good (and limber, and energized) is likely to help you give a lecture that's relaxed and energetic at the same time... and is likely to help you better enjoy the experience of teaching your class. Full disclosure: I use some techniques similar to the ones on this DVD (especially to help me get ready for class when I'm having a bad day), and they work well for me, so I recommend this DVD if you'd like to learn more about physical performance aspects of teaching.

If anyone is interested in viewing this DVD in a small group during finals week some time, let me know – the CPSE would be happy to host such an event.

● News Flash: Some students feel entitled to good grades

It was surprising enough to report in the *New York Times*: some college students feel that if they've worked hard, they are entitled to good grades. A senior at the University of Maryland expressed this point of view to the *Times* as quoted below from the February 18, 2009 issue:

“**I think putting in a lot of effort should merit a high grade,**” Mr. Greenwood said. “What else is there really than the effort that you put in? If you put in all the effort you have and get a C, what is the point?” he added. “If someone goes to every class and reads every chapter in the book and does everything the teacher asks of them and more, then they should be getting an A like their effort deserves. **If your maximum effort can only be average in a teacher's mind, then something is wrong.**” ”

(Quick – as an educator, what is your blood pressure right now?)

The *Times* article was based on a recent report from Greenberger, *et al.* in the *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* which explored correlations of “academic entitlement” (defined by the authors as expecting high grades for modest effort and having demanding attitudes toward teachers) with personality and parenting factors. The student population surveyed was an ethnically diverse group of 466 undergraduates at a large public university. The authors found that academic entitlement was only moderately correlated with narcissism, and surprisingly, the association between academic entitlement and self esteem was modest and negative – *i.e.*, students with lower self-esteem reported higher attitudes of academic entitlement. Academic entitlement was modestly correlated with students' perceptions that their parents compared their academic performance to that of others. Would you hypothesize that academic entitlement was correlated with more, or with fewer (self-reported) incidents of academic dishonesty? How would you hypothesize that feelings of academic entitlement were associated with overall grade point average?

The full *New York Times* article is accessible here:

http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/18/education/18college.html?_r=1

The full research article is available from the CPSE.

● New CPSE Resources Available to Borrow

The Skillful Teacher: On Technique, Trust, and Responsiveness in the Classroom, 2nd edition. Stephen D. Brookfield. The section on “Getting Students to Participate in Discussion” includes practical techniques very likely to be useful in the classroom.

Educating Engineers: Designing for the Future of the Field. Sheri D. Sheppard, Kelly Macatangay, Anne Colby, William M. Sullivan. This book reports results from a multi-year study – the engineering portion of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching's ‘Preparation for the Professions’ program – and advocates rebuilding engineering curricula to increase the focus on professional practice. A couple of quotations from the book:

“In the engineering science and technology courses, **the tradition of putting theory before practice and the effort to cover technical knowledge comprehensively, allow little opportunity for students to have the kind of deep learning experiences that mirror professional practice and problem solving.**” (pg. xxii)

“**The lab is a missed opportunity:** it can be more effectively used in the curriculum to support integration and synthesis of knowledge, development of persistence, skills in formulating and solving problems, and skills of collaboration.” (pg. xxii)
