

Letter from the Editor-in-Chief

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We are pleased to bring the academic community *The Journal of Effective Teaching* in its new format with this special issue on *Student Learning*. *The Journal of Effective Teaching* (formerly called *Effective Teaching*) has been in existence since 1996. Originally the journal was one of the first to highlight a forum for discussing teaching by providing an online journal with multimedia content. However, the journal was ahead of its time and there was little interest in providing such content at that time.

We are now entering an era in which information is commonly transmitted through the web and publications in many fields are provided under open source environments. In this spirit we have decided to change the format of the journal and to offer authors a new avenue to publishing their findings in a readily available format. While there are now several other such journals, we hope to expand our services to accommodate those seeking a place to describe their experiences in the classroom, highlighting effective teaching in undergraduate instruction.

The first article in this issue is about rubrics. Wolf and Stevens argue that rubrics can be just as important in higher education as they are for schoolteachers and their students. So, "what is a rubric?", you may ask. I know colleagues who have never run into the term "rubric", even though they may be using them without knowing it. Some detest rubrics, thinking that they may be too restrictive in the learning process. Others may reply, "we do not want to lead students by their hands". Wolf and Stevens make the case that rubrics do advance student learning, improve teaching and are important for assessment. In their article they describe how to design effective rubrics for higher education.

Technology is continually changing and the students of today are more comfortable with technology (computers, cell phones, podcasting, etc.) than students were a decade ago. Therefore, the technology in the classroom and its impact on student learning must be assessed continually. In the second article, Teeter et al. relay their investigations of the paperless accounting classroom. In particular they provide an account of the use of student response pads (or, clickers), course management systems and instructor use of Tablet PCs in content delivery. One of their main concerns is that the business world has adapted to the use of technology faster than the academic world. We need to be preparing students for that world. In attempting to do this, how do accounting students respond to these changes when they are not used to a "high tech" approach? The authors present findings based upon the perceptions of their students as expressed in journals and surveys.

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In recent years we have seen the growth of learning communities. These have taken many forms, all incorporating shared experiences in the classroom amongst students taking linked classes and often living inside the same physical walls. There have even been virtual classrooms. In their paper, McDougall and LaMonica make the case that many linked classes involve coupling what they call "content" and "application" courses. They are instead interested in linking two content-based courses. In particular, they describe their experiences with linking courses in history and religion and how to approach curricular activities and goals thematically. While some students greatly benefit from such linked courses, the authors are quick to point out some lessons that they wish to pass along to others.

Many educators link the success of learning to critical thinking. There is an ongoing struggle in academia, or even inside each instructor's mind, as to how to balance content-based learning and critical thinking skills. However, how much does learning rely upon creativity? Gomez reviews the literature on the various types of creativity. Is creativity linked to intelligence? Are creative students better learners? Does cooperative learning help, or hinder, creativity and the development of critical thinking skills? If creativity is a desirable thing, then how can we nurture it? Educators are always looking for ways to tap into students minds to turn on that key, winding up the creative thinker inside. Would understanding creativity lead to strategies to unlock these eager minds?

On the other hand, Klemm investigates learning through memorization skills. While acknowledging the importance of creativity and critical thinking, Klemm emphasizes the need to have a base of known ideas and skills. The process of thinking consists of mentally moving around chunks of information. Klemm is careful to separate out from the process of memorization what we often call rote memorization. Such memorization does not promote student learning. So, what does the literature tell us about memory so that we can help students retain what they have learned as a basis for becoming better problem solvers? Klemm provides some insights as to how one might structure teaching methods to take advantage of how students digest information.

Finally, Courtney gives us our first featured book review on *Rewriting: How to do things with texts*, by Joseph Harris (2006). In this book we are reminded that one of the most important aspects of writing is recognizing that it is not just important for students to communicate their first thoughts, but should also have the opportunity to revisit their first thoughts and spend time rewriting their own work and learning how to use sources to support their arguments.

These are not all of the issues affecting student learning. I expect that additional voices will want to be heard. Our vision for future issues of *The Journal of Effective Teaching* is to allow a place for these voices. We are seeking articles on teaching in which authors share their insights in pedagogy, innovations in teaching and learning, and classroom experiences in the form of a scholarly communication. We hope that you have enjoyed these articles and we look forward to working with new authors and reviewers. For additional information, feel free to explore the journal web site: <http://www.uncw.edu/cte/et/>.