

# News from the Center for Research on Teaching Excellence

University of  
California, Merced

Center for Research on  
Teaching Excellence

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## UC Merced's E-Portfolio Initiative: To Improve Learning and Teaching

The Center for Research on Teaching Excellence is exploring ways to employ electronic portfolios to enhance learning and teaching at UC Merced. In general, e-portfolios provide a framework for the collection, selection, reflection, and presentation of various learning outcome artifacts.

For students, these artifacts may include their homework assignments, essays, journal entries, group projects, and other course-related materials. Students use the e-portfolio tool not only to critically assess their own academic progress over time but also to showcase their achievement of certain skills and learning outcomes.

Faculty creating teaching e-portfolios typically include original course materials, samples of students' work, and various teaching artifacts that highlight their pedagogical practices and teaching effectiveness. Increasingly, teaching e-portfolios are used in hiring, academic reviews, professional development, and career advancement.

In the fall, half a dozen Writing Program faculty participated in the first pilot group to use the new e-portfolio tool on CROPS in their

courses. While portfolio keeping isn't novel to students taking writing courses, the new tool offers students a "new playground" on which to showcase their work. Moreover, the e-portfolio tool gives students full control over what materials gets included, how they are presented, and most importantly, who gets to see it.



This semester a new group of faculty from Arts, Literature, and the Writing programs are participating in a second pilot group. In the next year or so, the Center hopes to encourage more faculty, especially those in the Natural Sciences and Engineering, to consider using e-portfolios not only in their courses but also for themselves to document their teaching effectiveness. If you're interested in learning more about the e-portfolio initiative, please contact Mike Truong ([mtruong@ucmerced.edu](mailto:mtruong@ucmerced.edu)).

## Faculty/TA/Undergraduate Relationships

### *Effectively Teaming with Faculty*

This semester's offerings for Teaching Assistants began with a panel of experienced TAs discussing how to team with faculty. Panelists stressed the importance of meeting with faculty on a regular basis and informing faculty about students' responses to lectures and reading. The audience and panel also agreed that defining the TA's role at the beginning of the course is key. Suggestions for faculty about how to team with TAs can be found at a U.C. Berkeley website: <http://gsi.berkeley.edu/faculty/index.html>. The Center website also has a handout for TAs: <http://crte.ucmerced.edu/node/19>.

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### *Scaffolding Assignments: Teaching the Way the Brain Learns*

To an audience of about a dozen Teaching Assistants, Dr. Shirley Kahlert and Ms. Pam Gingold offered an overview of brain development theory, focusing on the value of cognitive dissonance as a learning moment. The presenters acknowledged their training in the humanities and social sciences, connecting with those in the Natural Sciences and Engineering by emphasizing how scaffolding is built into the scientific method. Conversation about how to engage students in self-assessment followed, with a focus on how to encourage students to attend office hours and ways to maintain an open classroom environment. The presentation concluded with an emphasis on the value of explicit criteria, especially to communicate effectively with first-generation students who comprise a majority of our under-graduate population. Below is a compilation of suggestions for TAs that resulted from the discussion among the participants and presenters.

#### **How to maintain an open classroom environment and encourage office hour attendance:**

- Email students early in the semester
- Be available, i.e. let student *see* you in lecture so they know who you are
- Remind students about office hours and other availability at pressured moments (near assignments, quizzes, exams)
- Give a little dose of fear: reveal standards and expectations early on
- Return assignments or quizzes during office hours
- Offer frequent feedback
- Do everything on the board to keep with note-taking pace (avoid PowerPoint, or at least be aware of its potential problems with interaction and learning)
- Include a “no disrespect” rule to validate all questions; uphold the rule of asking students to leave who are disrespectful of other students
- Require a research log of learning from each day
- Reveal the messiness of your discipline to validate the value of questions and error
- Make discrepancies, like manuals that do not match laboratory practice, a learning moment



Participants and presenters at the Scaffolding workshop

## Teaching with Clickers

Tom Harmon, Professor of Engineering, commenced the Center's new seminar series, "Teaching and Technology," by discussing what's involved in setting up an audience response system (clickers) and how it can be used to build interactivity into presentations. He provided seminar participants with actual clickers for a hands-on experience. Professor Harmon has been using clickers for a few years now, and he has found them to help his students better engage in his classes. Video podcast of Professor Harmon's presentation is available on the Center's website.



Information Technology (IT) has chosen to go with TurningPoint clicker system (<http://www.turningtechnologies.com/>). They hope to make the system widely available throughout the campus. Here are some related articles about clickers:

- *Science* magazine discussing the effectiveness of clickers: <http://www.sciencemag.org/cgi/content/full/323/5910/122> (need VPN connection)
- *Inside Higher Ed* magazine exploring the pros and cons of clickers: <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2008/11/03/clicker>
- *Vanderbilt Center for Teaching* has compiled a bibliography of articles on clickers: [http://www.vanderbilt.edu/cft/resources/teaching\\_resources/technology/crs\\_biblio.htm](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/cft/resources/teaching_resources/technology/crs_biblio.htm)

## Interested in Enhancing Student Learning? SATAL Can Help!

SATAL (Student Assessment of Teaching and Learning) is a program designed to provide feedback to professors interested in enhancing student learning. Beginning in Fall 2009, carefully selected and trained UC Merced students will respond to professors' invitations to gather data on classroom activities and give them confidential feedback. The program is open to all instructors and can serve as a resource 1) to provide faculty members with feedback that helps them gain a better sense of the student experience in their classes; 2) to foster closer relationships between faculty and students; 3) to allow students to reflect on teaching and learning; and 4) to improve the quality of education at UC Merced. There are different

options for faculty to participate in the program. Instructors may require the student consultant to be a recorder/ observer, filmmaker, faux student, class interviewer, primed student, or another role, depending on the evaluative feedback on the classroom activities or particular learning issues instructors envision to obtain. SATAL at UC Merced values the voice of the students in their educational development while providing instructors with valuable insights to supplement student evaluations and peer reviews. For more information or to sign up for the program, contact Adriana Signorini in COB 214, or [asignorini@ucmerced.edu](mailto:asignorini@ucmerced.edu).

### Teaching Matters Workshops for TAs

The next and last *Teaching Matters* session this semester takes place Thursday, March 12, in COB 322 from 12-1:30 on *Boundaries: The Ethics of Student-Teaching Relationships and TA Time Management*. We hope to see a large turnout of TAs to contribute to the discussion!

### Upcoming CRTE Faculty Workshops

*Non-Techies can Benefit from Technology Incorporation: A Hybrid Classroom* (March 17, 10:30am, COB 267)

*Creating Electronic Portfolios for Learning and Teaching* (March 31, 10:30, COB 267)

If you've missed any of the workshops held previously or will be unable to attend future workshops, Center staff will be happy to provide the information through individual consultations.

## Teaching and Technology Series

The goal of the Teaching and Technology Series is not only to introduce new tools and pedagogies related to technology but also to foster discussions about the intersection between teaching and technology. This series is open to both faculty and graduate students. To the right is the schedule of the remaining presentations (see website for more details). We hope you can join us! If you have any questions, please contact Mike Truong ([mtruong@ucmerced.edu](mailto:mtruong@ucmerced.edu)). Podcasts of the workshops are at <http://crte.ucmerced.edu/node/57>.

**Accreditation Timeline** through the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC)

✓ Letter of Intent for Initial Accreditation (August 1, 2008)

Capacity and Preparatory Report (July 7, 2009)

Capacity and Preparatory Review Site Visit (Fall 2009)

Educational Effectiveness Report (Dec. 14, 2010)

Educational Effectiveness Review Site Visit (Spring 2011)

Initial Accreditation Decision (June 2011)

**For more information see:**

WASC's main site at <http://www.wascweb.org/>  
UCM accreditation at <http://accreditation.ucmerced.edu>

**CRTE Services**

- Faculty development
- Instructional workshops
- Grant opportunities
- Videotape analysis of lectures
- Faculty orientation
- Syllabus design consultation
- Instructional mentoring
- Survey design consultation

## Different Perspectives on Student Success

Did you know ... faculty and undergraduates have similar ideas about academic success at UC Merced? During an Open House for new and returning faculty, the Center staff asked attendees, "What do you need to know to be an effective teacher at UC Merced and to further student learning?" At a separate event, Center staff asked undergraduates in the Peer mentoring Program "What has helped you succeed academically at UC Merced?" Here are some of the results:

Among the top responses, faculty said they need to know:

How to connect with students

- Who the students are – their background and preparation
- How to encourage students to focus on learning, not on grades
- How to construct a realistic syllabus

Students said their academic success related to:

- Peers (for study groups and advice)
- (Taking advantage of) office hours
- Professors and TAs "who care, are accessible, and love their subjects"
- Time management skills



Lively conversation at the Open House

Faculty and students apparently agree on the fact that to academic success at UC Merced depends upon *faculty who know their students, encourage them, and are accessible and supportive*. Another result of this informal survey revealed the importance of peer interaction. Let your students know about the *Peer Mentoring Program*, especially if you have new students in your class who need help with time management skills, finding campus resources, or a role model for appropriate behavior and attitudes in college.

How can YOU help your students succeed academically at UCM?

- Be accessible and approachable
- Encourage them to form class study groups
- Tell them about Peer Mentoring (<http://peermentoring.ucmerced.edu>)
- Tell them about tutoring and peer advising (available in the Student Advising & Learning Center, by the bookstore, or at <http://learning.ucmerced.edu>)

## Apply for mini-grant teaching support!

All faculty are encouraged to apply for Center grants and fellowships. The best proposals will explain anticipated improvement in teaching, its efficacy in terms of current scholarship on learning, and appropriate plans for assessment.

Mini-grant awards will not exceed \$5,000. Review of submissions will begin on March 30 for Fall semester awards and October 1 for Spring semester awards. Early submission will improve chances of funding.

For more information or an application, please visit the "Grants and Fellowships" link on the Center website at <[crte.ucmerced.edu](http://crte.ucmerced.edu)> or contact Juana Dumagan ([jdumagan@ucmerced.edu](mailto:jdumagan@ucmerced.edu)) at 228-7950.