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News from the Center for Research on Teaching Excellence

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University of California, Merced

Center for Research on Teaching Excellence

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http://crte.ucmerced.edu

A Humanities Approach to the *Student-Centered* Research University [1]

Professor of Art, Dunya Ramicova, explains the learning expectations of UC Merced's arts education, focusing on the ways in which students gain research experience in the process of becoming a graduate in her program. Many of our institution-wide guiding principles align with these program learning outcomes, including aesthetic understanding and creativity, communication, self and society, and development of personal potential.

Initially, it may not appear that artists do research, they create works of art.

Therefore, as members of research university faculty artists occupy unique position which may at times be challenging. There are professional standards for evaluating academic research in the various disciplines commonly found on research university campuses, but how do we judge a work of art? Whereas narrow specialized knowledge might be required in pursuit of excellence in science, arts education must be holistic. For the artist the body of knowledge to acquire is the whole of human experience.

To become an artist one must first work very hard to acquire expert knowledge of one's chosen medium or media (for example, to become a painter, one must become an expert in the medium of oil paint, acrylic or watercolor etc., to become a violinist one must become an expert in how to play the violin). In art we refer to the acquisition of expertise as acquisition of technique. Technique is defined as "the method or procedure (with reference to practical or formal details) in rendering an artistic work" as well as "the degree of expertness in following this." …

No teacher can make someone into an artist. All I am able to do is to give my students tools of expression and to create conditions in which they may experience creative inspiration first hand. I work to make students understand that to be a real artist one must be as serious and as dedicated as any scientist who hopes to succeed has to be. Art is not easy. Artistic careers of any kind demand, at the very minimum, extraordinary levels of technique, dedication, ability to overcome failure and rejection at any stage of one's career.

The Magic Flute - Ramicova

[1] *UC Merced Mission Statement* http://www.ucmerced.edu/about_ucmerced/mission.asp

Undergraduate Perspective on the *Student-Centered* Research University

Working on a research project with Benoît Dayrat (Asst. Professor, NS) has given Roger Tseng expertise in practical lab skills, but also strengthened his critical thinking and communication skills.

"Now approaching graduation, I definitely have improved in areas like understanding scientific methods and concepts, writing a manuscript, preparing a presentation, communicating scientific ideas, and so on.

The rigors of academic life and becoming a researcher are not easy. My exposure to Dr. Dayrat's lab definitely has introduced and prepared me for it. I am really grateful to have such experience."

Alison Lu, Dominique Hall, Ciriza, and Joseph Desena

Mentoring Future UC Merced Graduates

Jesús Ciriza, a native of Spain, serves as a postdoc with Marcos Garcia-Ojeda (Asst. Professor, NS). He brings the diversity of his educational background (degrees in chemistry, biochemistry and molecular biology, and food technology and science, as well as research in gene therapy and DNA vaccine) to his research at UC Merced – and to his mentoring of three undergraduates in his lab. He provided insights on this responsibility and its influences on his professional life.

Ciriza's current responsibilities with UC Merced undergraduates differ from his previous experience as a TA in Europe - "going to a class, give a talk, make an exam, that's all." The possibility of extended contact with the same students provides a different perspective and focus on undergraduate education.

"What I'm learning is how to teach them in close contact … with one student for hours and hours with an experiment, watching how they work, how they learn.

What I try to explain more to them than just technical questions is the next step – what the project is, what they want to explain with the project. Or, what they are doing and why."

He acknowledges that mentoring undergraduates may demand a significant investment of instructional and supervisory time initially. It may at first appear to be incremental and slow progress for the effort expended. The reward is witnessing undergraduates' scientific maturity, growing independence, effective collaboration, and their ability to "understand the big picture" as they begin to assume the scholarly habits of the scientific mind.

After working with Ciriza for over a year, Dominique Hall recognized how she benefits from the mentoring relationship. These include being more organized and transferring knowledge gained through discussions and research tasks to her biology classes. She also notes her increased confidence to organize and give scientific presentations.

"Jesús has made the lab experience very enjoyable for me and makes me want to be a researcher for my career … he definitely keeps me informed about internships and fellowships. He has been very helpful and has made my college experience more enjoyable."

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 provide detailed and appropriate plans for assessment.

Mini-grant awards will not exceed $5,000. Review of submissions will begin on March 1 for Fall 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> or contact Juana Dumagan (jdumagan@ucmerced.edu) at 228-7950

Test Your WASC IQ!

What are Program Learning Outcomes and Student Learning Outcomes?

1] A Program Learning Outcome (PLO) is:
a) A party at the end of the academic year given by every program.
b) The skills and knowledge a specific program has decided its students should be able demonstrate they have learned upon graduation.

2] A Student Learning Outcome is:
a) The skills and knowledge students can demonstrate they have learned in a course.
b) A diploma and a paying job.

Why are the distinctions between PLOs and SLOs important? For the past year, in order to better communicate expectations to students, the faculty has revised syllabi to include student learning outcomes. Developing PLOs is a critical next step. By taking the opportunity to talk to colleagues to determine what skills each program's graduates should possess, faculty help build infrastructure for the curriculum. This infrastructure is an important element of the first stage of WASC accreditation, the Capacity and Preparatory Report (CPR), due internally March 2009.

(Correct answers: 1] b; 2] a)

Timeline for UC Merced's Accreditation

Capacity and Preparatory
Report Internal Submission (March 2009)
External (July 7, 2009)
Review Site Visit (Sept. 9- Oct. 1, 2009)

Educational Effectiveness
Report Internal Submission (Aug. 2010)
External (Dec. 14, 2010)
Review Site Visit (Mar. 8-10, 2011)

Initial Accreditation Decision – June 2011

UC Merced WASC Steering Committee

Gregg Camfield (Chair)
Sam Traina
Laurie Herbrand
Anne Kelly
Dunya Ramicova
Emily Reed
Keith Alley
Nancy Tanaka
Laura Martin
Jack Vevea
Arnold Kim
Christopher Viney
Nancy Ochsner
Elizabeth Boretz
Ariel Escobar
Robert Ochsner

Teaching and Technology Seminar Series

In the spring, the Center will offer a new seminar series, entitled "Teaching and Technology" - open to both faculty and graduate students. The goal of this new 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. A final schedule of the seminar series will be available on our website beginning of spring. We hope you can join us!

- Employing clickers in the classroom
- Teaching with DimDim, an open-source web-meeting tool
- Using Second Life for virtual world learning
- Incorporating communication technology in courses
- Using electronic portfolios for teaching and learning

Did You Know?[2]

Compared to the other UCs, a higher percentage of UC Merced undergraduates

- Assisted faculty with research or a creative activity
- Reported that their campus had a strong commitment to undergraduate education
- Helped a classmate better understand course material
- Sought academic help from an instructor or tutor
- Worked with a faculty member on a campus activity other than coursework

In addition:
- 86% reported raising their standards for acceptable effort due to the high standards of a faculty member

[2]University of California Accountability Framework
http://www.ucop.edu/ucal/accountability/documents/accountabilityframework_draft.pdf

Even before her freshman year began, Esmeralda Aguayo participated in research at UC Merced. She comments here on her research experiences with Matt Meyer (Asst. Professor, NS)

"Working in his research lab allowed me to learn about some of the questions being pursued in current organic chemistry research. After reading research articles and working with mathematical modeling computer programs, I felt that I had gained a better grasp of how organic chemists approach a problem and what they look for in experimental controls. … [I] think of Professor Meyer as a mentor. Who just a few days ago informed me that the research project I had been a part of, after further research will soon be published."

Today's Teaching Assistants – Tomorrow's Professors

Nationwide, teaching assistants play a role in apprenticing undergraduates into the world of scholars. Increasingly, research universities provide support for the TAs as they explore their future responsibilities within the academic community – including "[familiarity] with the role of technology in the delivery of instruction, dealing with the diverse needs of students, and using some of the more active and collaborative methods of teaching and learning." [3]

In addition to faculty mentoring of TAs, UC Merced graduate students can gain expertise through:

- Resources such as Stanford's *Tomorrow's Professor* listserv (http://ctl.stanford.edu/Tomprof/index.shtml)
- UC Merced's TA Orientation before the academic year begins
- Courses focusing on pedagogy (e.g., *Oral Communication for International Scholars, Teaching and Learning in the Sciences,* and *University Teaching*)
- *Teaching Matters* workshops offered by the Center

Two recent *Teaching Matters* workshops focused specifically on the concepts of active and collaborative learning. Gregg Camfield modeled effective group discussion techniques. We have a video podcast of his insights on encouraging effective discussions at our Center website. Here, a UC Merced teaching assistant offers his perspective on such an event.

David Hambley, Applied Mathematics:

Michael Winder's *Teaching Matters* workshop on October 24th, *The Play's the Thing: Using Theater to Enhance Classroom Discussion and Student Presentations*, was a highly participatory introduction to using theater games in the classroom.

As workshop attendees, we were asked to join in several games which Michael walked us through while giving a running commentary on the potential uses and benefits of each. The purposes of the games included: getting students physically and vocally warmed up for classroom presentations or participation; reducing anxiety about speaking and/or working at the white board in front of their peers; improve concentration; and generally breaking down barriers to classroom discussion and communication.

There was a variety of games introduced, but Michael was quick to point out that there are many more theater games to be found in various resources. A few resources found through a Google search are:

http://www.creativedrama.com/theatre.htm and **http://www.humanpingpongball.com/**

Personally, I enjoyed Michael's presentation. I think he has a great style for working with a group, and thought he explained the purposes for his games well. I wonder if I will be brave enough to bring some theater games into my discussion section?

Michael Winder (Writing Program) and Corey Cain (NS) explore the use of theater games to enhance student learning.

Want to share your teaching expertise or helpful tips with other TAs? You can do so in future newsletters.

Contact us at crte@ucmerced.edu to become a newsletter contributor – a perfect addition to your teaching portfolio and CV!

University of California, Merced

Center for Research on Teaching Excellence

Services Offered:

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

Teaching Matters

Current or future teaching assistants who attend five workshops over the course of a year are eligible to become Instructional Interns earning a $250 honorarium. Attending the *Teaching and Technology* seminars can be included in the five. For complete details, follow the grants and fellowships link at crte.ucmerced.edu. Please stay tuned for the exact time and days of our *Teaching Matters* workshops! The topics address issues all teaching assistants face regularly:

Effectively Teaming with Faculty – teaching assistant panel
Scaffolding Assignments: Teaching the Way the Brain Learns – Shirley Kahlert & Pam Gingold
Boundaries: *The Ethics of Student-Teacher Relationships and TA Time Management* – Karen Dunn-Haley & Anne Zanzucchi

[3] Gaff, J. G., & Lambert, L. M. (1996). Socializing future faculty to the values of undergraduate education. *Change 58*(4), 38-46. http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=f5h&AN=9609031759&s