

News from the Center for Research on Teaching Excellence

Special Edition: Serving Undergraduates

As we begin another academic year and welcome new professors, lecturers and teaching assistants to the UCM family, the CRTE turns its attention to the undergraduate students we serve. We hope these pages will alert the reader to the identities and backgrounds of our students, and provide ideas for supporting them in their classes and university experience. The camera is turned first on the student, and then the instructor. What do our students need, and how can we, as their instructors and guides, teach them and support them in ways that foster success and encourage further academic pursuits? Our university, after all, is to be a student-centered research university.

Freshman Year Experience Program

By Laura Martin & Anne Zanzucchi

Freshman year persistence is critical, as it is the best predictor of degree completion. Our campus has a unique challenge in that a majority of our undergraduates are first generation, a group that is most at-risk of not completing college. With a nearly 80% retention rate, our campus has thus far been successful at promoting student persistence. As our campus grows, however, and given our UC campus benchmark of 90% retention, we will need to build on our ability to coordinate resources to ensure freshman success. As Vice-Chancellor for Student Affairs Jane Lawrence articulates in a recent effort to address these challenges, “greater academic and co-curricular engagement will help to anchor freshman to their ambition and the campus community, and allow them to persevere to graduation.”

During spring 2010 UC Merced established a Freshman Year Experience committee, representing academic and co-curricular leadership from around campus, focused on improving first-year student success and retention. Undergraduate orientations and Welcome Week have been enhanced by greater coordination of freshman support initiatives via workshops and a supporting website that will go live this fall. In support of these efforts, the Center has invited professors and lecturers who teach freshman-intensive courses to participate in a preliminary meeting to discuss the goals and challenges of freshman instruction. Among the benefits of participating in this working group will be the opportunity to discuss and investigate methods to increase freshman academic success and enhanced opportunities for faculty instructional support. If you are interested in learning more about this opportunity, please contact Laura Martin and/or Anne Zanzucchi.

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For information about
resources and upcoming
events, please visit:

<http://crte.ucmerced.edu>

Inside this Issue

Freshman Year Experience	1
Who Are Our Students?	2
CROPS, Clickers and Podcasts	2
SATAL	3
Guidebook Project	3
Upcoming CRTE Changes	4
Fall Workshop Schedule	5

Who Are Our Students?

By Belinda Braunstein

Just as the best public speakers consider their audience in preparing their presentations, so too are successful instructors aware of the perspectives and experiences of their students, and they use this to inform their teaching. UC Merced is a diverse campus; no one ethnicity or language group comprises a majority. What they do have in common is that more than half come from households where a language other than English is spoken and more than half are first generation university students.¹ These are factors that need to be taken into account when planning classes. One must be cautious about assumptions related to cultural background knowledge, study skills, and familiarity with university culture. Instructors cannot take for granted that freshmen will know what to do when they begin to struggle, how to manage their time, or how to study effectively. They may bring with them the skills and habits that worked in high school but are insufficient for the demands of a university. Thus, in addition to teaching the material of our expertise, we must also guide students in developing the skills they need to master this material. For strategies for working with non-traditional students, visit our website.



CROPS, Clickers, Podcasts, Oh My: The Impact of Instructional Technology on Learning

By Mike Truong

While good teaching can certainly happen without the use of technology, instructional tools, when used effectively, can enhance the learning experience for students and ease the workload for teachers. For example, the advent of course management systems has profoundly changed how courses are managed and delivered for the better. CROPS – UCM’s own course management system – serves as the online hub for all courses, and faculty, TAs, and students use CROPS for many course-related tasks, including posting announcements, uploading course materials, administering quizzes, submitting assignments, among other things.

The use of audience response systems or “clickers” is also changing the learning environment. Faculty who employ clickers in their courses are able to actively engage their students and keep their attention longer during class. Moreover, studies have found that clicker usage in lecture-based large classrooms can increase student interactivity and learning.

Another technology that is profoundly altering the learning context is the use of podcasting. Faculty record what happens in their courses and make it available online, and students are able to review the materials at their leisure and on their own time. Lecture podcasts are especially important in courses where the content is complex or heavy, and students benefit from repeated viewing of the materials.

CROPS, clickers, and podcasts are among the technology-related workshop topics offered by the Center this fall semester. For a complete schedule of all workshops, please refer to the back page of this newsletter.

The Center is dedicated to helping faculty and TAs in the successful adoption and effective use of various instructional technologies in their courses to enhance teaching and learning. Should you have any instructional technology-related questions or needs, please contact Mike Truong, Faculty Development Coordinator for Instructional Technology (mtruong@ucmerced.edu or 209-217-7249).

1. Source: <http://ipa.ucmerced.edu/student.htm>

SATAL Can Support Your Quest for Getting More Information about Student Learning

By Adriana Signorini

Students Assessing Teaching and Learning (SATAL) is a program designed to provide feedback to instructors and academic programs interested in enhancing student learning. How does the program work? The SATAL program employs undergraduates who are trained to lead focus group discussions, videotape and itemize patterns of classroom instruction, conduct exit interviews with graduating seniors, and conduct entry surveys to establish students' preparation for a course. Other assessment options are also available. Because students regard the SATAL program members as peers, they tend to be more open about their difficulties in their courses, and the SATAL members are better at understanding students' common misconceptions when addressing an issue than their instructors would be, leading to more accurate feedback to the instructor and program.

“Having SATAL coordinate and conduct the interview was crucial to the success of the assessment. Students needed an environment in which they could speak freely without professors there.” – Applied Math

Since spring 2009, SATAL has assisted seven academic programs in their academic review process and twenty two instructional faculty by gathering feedback on courses and classroom activities. The SATAL program has assisted faculty in answering key pedagogical questions: “How do repeat students differ from new students in how they learn? Does providing feedback on homework help students learn better? Will the use of clickers engage my students? Are my lectures and slides clear enough? What can I do to engage my class more?

SATAL services can support your quest for getting more information about student learning without overworking yourselves.

Invite SATAL members to collect confidential feedback on your courses by either completing the request form on the center's website: <http://crte.ucmerced.edu/node/86> or contacting Adriana Signorini in person in COB 214, by email asignorini@ucmerced.edu, or by phone 228 4766. The distribution of the SATAL reports will be at the discretion of the instructor requesting it.



Guidebook Project

By Anne Zanzucchi

During October 2009, the Center was awarded a two-year \$295,484 grant from the U.S. Department of Education Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education. Center graduate fellows, who have a 25% GSR appointment in the Center, conduct classroom research and publish their findings in our guidebook project paper series. As our campus serves a majority cohort of first-generation students, this guidebook focuses on the instructional practices relevant to creating an academic community for at-risk student populations. The program was initiated in spring 2010, with two peer and faculty-reviewed articles and related curriculum published on [eScholarship](#). Summer guidebook participants are working with faculty in UC Merced's [Summer Bridge](#) Program, a Title V-funded writing and math intensive course addressing the needs of at-risk local incoming freshman. Summer participants will write curriculum and articles related to (1) evaluating reading skills, (2) meeting the needs of international students, and (3) integrating multi-media laboratory opportunities in introductory social sciences courses. Spring 2010 participants, Debye Conte and Korana Burke, will be offering a Teaching Matters workshop on October 26 from

(Continued on next page.)

Guidebook Project (continued)

12-1pm in Kolligian Library 159 (the Acorn Room) on active learning principles. For further information about the Teaching Matters workshop series, please contact Karen Dunn-Haley. If you are interested in learning more about the guidebook project, Anne Zanzucchi coordinates the project and would be glad to respond to inquiries.

“Thanks to the guidebook I really understood what a learner-centered teaching method is. I learned a lot about student needs.” – Paola Di Giuseppantonio Franco, Guidebook GSR

Upcoming Changes in the CRTE

By Robert Ochsner

The CRTE is now refining its identity as a teaching, learning and research center at a research university. Since its inception in 2007, the Center has devoted most of its resources to support UC Merced’s progress towards Initial Accreditation. To that end, the Center’s two full-time members have served with numerous other campus representatives on the WASC Steering Committee and several subcommittees while also contributing to the Capacity and Preparatory report submitted in 2009 and the pending Educational Effectiveness report that is due December 2010. The Center’s Assistant Director also serves on the Senate-Administration Council for Assessment that establishes policies on assessment practices, and another staff member coordinates WASC reviews of new or substantially modified academic program. In the summer of 2011 this collective effort will culminate in a decision by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges regarding our progress towards becoming a fully accredited university.

In anticipation of a positive outcome, the Center must also look ahead to refocusing our services in support of other priorities while also allowing that accreditation and assessment will remain an ongoing responsibility.

During a day-long Center retreat in July 2010, the Center’s two full-time and five part-time staff enthusiastically endorsed having faculty and TA development replace accreditation as the main focus of all our activities. Implemented over the upcoming academic year, this change will progressively align the Center’s services much more closely with those at teaching and learning centers nationally, and with our sister UC campuses as well. For instance, we will develop a more robust instructional technology program to support podcasting of lectures and archiving of student learning in e-portfolios. The Center will also seek additional grant funding to augment our current “guidebook” project for faculty and TAs that examines the challenges of teaching UC Merced’s large population of first-generation students.

As complementary functions of the Center, we will strive to retain and expand some distinctive aspects of our identity as a teaching and learning center in the first research university of the 21st century. As one unique example, through the Students Assessing Teaching and Learning Program (SATAL), we are training undergraduates as assessment researchers who assist faculty in course and program assessment. As a related example reflecting national demographic trends, the Center’s English Language Institute will continue to assist English-language learners, including international students, by offering non-credit English workshops and informal conversation groups to the campus community. We will also continue to offer mini-grants to faculty and instructional internships to graduate students who engage in the scholarship of teaching and learning.



Teaching Matters Series

The *Teaching Matters Series* offers professional development in teaching and learning to all **graduate students**, especially **teaching assistants (TAs)**. For more information about this series, contact Karen Dunn-Haley (kdunn-haley@ucmerced.edu or 209-228-4761).

- **Who's the Boss?! Classroom Management** – offered twice, 9/1 (Wed) & 9/2 (Thu), 12-1pm, KL 159
- **Beyond the Classroom: Academic Student Services** – 9/15 (Wed), 12-1pm, KL 159
- **The TA Role and the Instructor of Record: Communicating Effectively** – 9/24 (Fri), 12-1pm, KL 159
- **Providing Effective Feedback and Accurate Grades** – 9/28 (Tue), 12-1pm, KL 159

In conjunction with the FIPSE Guidebook Project, the Center will also offer the following workshops open to all graduate students. For more information about these workshops, contact Anne Zanzucchi (azanzucchi@ucmerced.edu or 209-228-4173)

- **Survey Design and Analysis, Level II** – 10/13 (Wed), 12-1pm, KL 159
- **Active Learning Activities, Featuring the FIPSE Guidebook Project** – 10/26 (Tue), 12-1pm, KL 159
- **Scholarship of Teaching and Learning** – 11/10 (Wed), 12-1pm, KL 159

Teaching and Technology Series

The *Teaching and Technology Series* introduces **faculty and graduate students** to current and emerging technologies that can enhance teaching and learning. For more information about this series, contact Mike Truong (mtruong@ucmerced.edu or 209-217-7249).

- **Going Green with CROPS** – offered twice, 8/26 (Thu) & 8/30 (Mon), 12-1, COB 322
- **Managing Assignments with CROPS** – offered twice, 8/26 (Thu) & 8/30 (Mon), 1-2pm, COB 322
- **An Overview of Clickers and Their Uses** – 9/8 (Wed), 12-1pm, COB 322
- **Using Blogs to Enhance Learning** – 10/6 (Wed), 12-1pm, COB 322
- **Using Wikis to Enhance Learning** – 11/3 (Wed), 12-1pm, COB 322

Faculty Workshops

The following workshops are geared toward **faculty** (professors and lecturers). For more info about this series, contact Mike Truong (at mtruong@ucmerced.edu or 209-217-7249).

- **Podcasting Your Lectures** – 9/22 (Wed), 12-1pm, COB 322
- **Engaging Students through Peer Reviews** – 10/20 (Wed), 12-1pm, COB 322
- **Using Portfolios to Assess Student Learning** – 11/17 (Wed), 12-1pm, COB 322