

News from the Center for Research on Teaching Excellence

University of
California, Merced

Center for Research on Teaching Excellence

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For information about
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Inside this Issue

CRTE's Support of Accreditation	1
Time Demands of Accreditation	2
FIPSE Guidebook Project	2
ELI Broadens Support	2
Involving Undergraduates in the Assessment of Learning	3
Three Grad Programs Approved	3
The Challenges of Supporting Instructional Technology	4
Upcoming T&T Workshops	5
Upcoming TM Workshops	6

CRTE's support of Accreditation

This July UC Merced was informed that it was granted initial accreditation for a seven year period by the Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities of the [Western Association of Schools and Colleges](#) (WASC). An historic and essential step in UC Merced's development, our status as a newly accredited institution [signifies](#) that our campus demonstrably possesses the resources and practices to achieve our educational goals and has provided evidence of the quality of our educational programs.

Fundamental to this success has been the development of a culture of outcomes-oriented, evidence-based inquiry across our institution. In keeping with the CRTE's [mission](#) to "support a campus-wide culture that values, fosters, and rewards continuous improvement in teaching and learning," we have supported the development of this culture and thus, accreditation, in a number of ways. Through [workshops](#), consultations with faculty and staff, and participation on institutional committees, including the [WASC Steering Committee](#) and the [Senate Administration Council on Assessment](#), we have supported the development of the policies and practices that will sustain a culture of evidence-based inquiry. CRTE staff support for WASC Substantive Change has ensured institutional compliance with WASC substantive change policies and been essential in gaining WASC approval for two new undergraduate majors and three stand-alone PhD programs. Finally, through the [Students Assessing Teaching and Learning](#) (SATAL) program, the [FIPSE¹ Guidebook Project](#), and our [Teaching Matters](#) workshop series we have worked to increase undergraduate and graduate student involvement in the assessment of student learning at the classroom and program levels.

Consistent with the CRTE's goal to "Foster an enduring commitment to an evidence-based approach to improving student learning at course, program and institutional levels," we look forward to supporting the campus as it continues to develop its capacity for evidence-based inquiry into learning, teaching and serving that underpins UC Merced's commitment to student learning and success.

UCM has been extraordinarily successful in establishing outcomes and assessing student learning in its academic programs at the undergraduate and the graduate levels.

~WASC EER Team Report, March 2011

¹ Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education

Time Demands of Accreditation

In fall 2007, when the Center first opened, our campus was just beginning preparations for its WASC Capacity and Preparatory Review (CPR) for Initial Accreditation. For the next two years, the Center's small staff of four half-time and two full-time members devoted almost all their time to this crucial accreditation task. Meeting with faculty individually and in small groups, the Center sponsored a syllabus alignment initiative that ensured all courses had learning outcomes—a fundamental requirement for accreditation. With external grant funds, the Center funded national authorities on assessment of teaching and learning to offer on-campus workshops and to consult with faculty and administrators on strategies for a successful CPR review. Our staff worked closely with Faculty Assessment Organizers and others responsible for generating assessment reports about academic and administrative programs. Most of the campus's CPR report was written or otherwise prepared by Center staff as well.

Overall, about 80% of Center resources in salaries and assigned staff workload supported the campus effort for a successful CPR review, an effort that then continued into the next WASC phase for our Educational Effectiveness Review. Measured solely in terms of external grant support, from 2007 through 2011 the Center has contributed over \$200,000 to assist the campus in its four year campaign for Initial Accreditation. In particular, our Students Assessing Teaching and Learning (SATAL) program, which has been entirely grant funded, has assisted faculty assessment initiatives in all three schools and almost half of all undergraduate academic programs.

These examples of Center support are relevant to note because the cost of accreditation is not adequately represented in WASC policies or procedures. For a new public research university such as ours, the often hidden costs of accreditation should be publicly stated, especially when state funding of higher education is in sharp decline.

Building Community for First Generation Students

Since fall 2009, the CRTE's FIPSE¹ grant *Educating Future Faculty to Engage with the New Demographic* has provided 18 graduate student research appointments to investigate instructional practices designed to meet the learning needs of first generation college students. In 2011, we expanded the program to involve graduate students in supporting program assessment. Research fellows have since provided program assessment support to Biology, Economics, History, and Foreign Languages. Forming the foundation of a guidebook, the resulting graduate student-authored articles, curriculum, and program reports are freely available on our eScholarship site at http://escholarship.org/uc/crte_gsiguidebook. For the concluding semester of this grant funding, we will offer mini-grant funding opportunities for assessment support to courses or programs. If you are interested in learning more about this new funding opportunity, please contact the Project Coordinator, Dr. Anne Zanzucchi at azanzucchi@ucmerced.edu.

ELI Broadens Support for Internationals

The English Language Institute was created to support the language needs of international graduate students, undergraduates and visiting scholars at this campus. It provides essential English-testing of international graduate students that is required by California state law, and also offers weekly grammar workshops, a conversation partner program, and individualized pronunciation work and support. In addition to continuing these efforts, this semester the ELI is adding a graduate level writing workshop series to help new and international graduate students with the styles and content requirements of writing for different purposes, from technical papers and conference proposals to literature reviews and grant proposals.

Involving Undergraduates in the Assessment of Learning

From its inception in 2009, the Students Assessing Teaching and Learning (SATAL) program has assisted faculty and administrators with their annual assessments efforts, and thus been instrumental in UCM's Initial Accreditation effort. Through group discussions and exit interviews, SATAL has helped programs gather student self-perceptions of their learning, providing insights into student learning that complement those gathered through direct review of student work.

The data generated by SATAL has provided a number of programs with actionable information on student learning. For example, the Applied Mathematics faculty gained valuable insight into student learning needs that they plan to address by implementing changes in the senior capstone course, group work in upper division classes, and course review. As a faculty noted, "The focus group discussion identified areas that faculty need to address as well as reinforced areas that faculty have already been considering [for improvement]." Physics faculty reported that "the information provided by SATAL was very helpful for understanding the demographic makeup of the Physics majors" by highlighting how effectively the program is attracting students to the Physics major, both in terms of total numbers (relative to the size of the faculty) and student diversity. Overall, SATAL brings student voices to program assessment efforts, generating insights into student need and interests unavailable through simple paper or online surveys.

Through class interviews, videotaping, and surveys, SATAL has also supported course-level assessment, helping faculty to better tailor their courses to meet student learning needs. SATAL has

become a popular service; requests have steadily increased to reach 150 individual or programs served over the last two years.

By providing students' feedback on both course and program progress, SATAL has helped UC Merced academic and administrative units identify what works and what needs to be improved and thus to "close the loop" by taking evidence-based actions. Program directors and Faculty Assessment Organizers (FAOs) have expressed their intentions to continue using SATAL services in support of their annual assessment and program review needs, and SATAL looks forward to supporting them.

Three Grad Programs WASC Approved!

Cognitive and Information Sciences (CIS), Psychological Sciences and Quantitative and Systems Biology (QSB) have joined Environmental Systems as **standalone graduate programs** at UCM!

Before the campus opened in 2005, the UC systemwide Coordinating Committee on Graduate Affairs (CCGA) approved an Interim Individual Graduate Program (IGP) to incubate our graduate emphases, such as Applied Math, BEST, EECS, MEAM, Physics & Chemistry, Social and Cognitive Sciences, and World Cultures. To become separate, standalone programs, these graduate emphases must receive approval from UC Merced's Graduate and Research Council (GRC), the CCGA, and our accreditor, the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC).

This year, CRTE staff assisted CIS, Psychological Sciences, and QSB in the WASC review process that followed approval by the GRC and CCGA. All three graduate programs start the 2011-2012 academic year fully approved. QSB also is approved for a MS degree. Future MS and MA programs at UC Merced now will be able to get expedited WASC approval, because WASC also has granted UCM fast-track approval for master's degree. The campus expects to see several other graduate emphases seeking CCGA and WASC approval as standalone programs in the next year.



The Challenges of Supporting Instructional Technology at a Start-up University

As the first research university built in the 21st-century, UC Merced's technology profile is one that many schools would envy. We have wireless internet access for the entire campus community, a centralized learning management system, a highly digitized library system, and a slew of innovative initiatives such as electronic portfolios, clickers, and hybrid courses. Through workshops and consultations, the Center supports teaching and learning with technology but is confined by three major challenges: 1) limited learning spaces, 2) aging equipment, and 3) inadequate staffing.



As a campus, we're growing so fast that we are literally running out of physical classrooms. One response to this shortage has been to shift some of the learning to the online context via hybrid courses, which meets partly face-to-face and partly online. The new multimodal learning experience has forced faculty to rethink not just the curriculum but also the pedagogy in how best to teach and engage their students.

Aging servers, networks, and equipment are unable to keep up with the increasing load put on by the growing numbers of devices, including desktops, laptops, tablets, and smart phones. Since the majority of course-related materials are located in the cloud, unreliable internet access and unstable experience with CROPS (UCM's learning management system) frustrate users, disrupt learning, and impede academic success.

One of the Center's priorities is to provide faculty and TAs pedagogical training, technical support, and on-going nurturing to skillfully and strategically use technology to enhance teaching and learning on our campus. Tools ranging from blogs and wikis to clickers and e-portfolios have amazing potential to transform the learning experience, but faculty and TAs need help understanding the "what," "how," and "why" these tools should be used to further learning. As a 21st-century university, we need to teach our students traditional skills like critical thinking, problem solving, and effective communication alongside new skills like information literacy, media literacy, and technology competence. As the Center grows, we'll need to hire smart, skilled, and adaptable instructional designers and technologists to honor these priorities.



In today's climate, supporting instructional technology at a start-up university has never been more challenging. Committing greater financial resources to expanding learning spaces, upgrading existing and/or purchasing new equipment, and hiring talented staff is a big part of the solution. Yet, we must not stop there. As a campus, we can help our students succeed not just by providing them the latest and greatest technologies, but more importantly, by ensuring that our faculty and TAs are pedagogically informed and technologically savvy. We thus encourage all interested faculty and TAs to attend one or more Teaching and Technology workshops. Fall offerings with full descriptions are on the following page.

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).

Teaching and Technology Workshop Series

Tues, 8/30, 11am-12pm:

How to Set Up Your CROPS Course Site to Maximize Student Learning (Basic Level)

As a faculty or TA, how you set up your course site can impact how your students engage with your course. In this training workshop, we will show you some of the best-practices for setting up a course site, such as creating a course description, adding and deleting tools, uploading syllabus and other resources, managing resources using WebDAV, and adding podcasts, news feeds, and website links.

Wed, 8/31, 11am-12pm: Going Green with CROPS (Advanced Level)

Are you looking to conduct a more paperless and environmentally-friendly class? This workshop provides practical ideas and tips on how to use various CROPS tools to do many of the common tasks including the following: taking attendance; assigning, collecting, and grading assignments; assessing student learning and attitudes; and creating lessons.

Wed, 9/14, 11am-12pm: Using Clickers to Solve Common Instructional Challenges (Basic Level)

Research has shown that effective use of clickers can address many common instructional challenges. In this workshop, we will discuss how clickers can be used to deal with attendance/tardiness problems, coming to class unprepared, not understanding materials, and being bored and/or unchallenged.

Tues, 9/27, 1-2pm: Helping Students Develop 21st Century Skills (Advanced Level)

Along with traditional skills like critical thinking, effective communication, and peer collaboration, students today need to acquire new skills such as information literacy, media literacy, and technological competence to be successful in the world. In this engaging workshop, a panel of faculty and librarians will discuss what these skills entail, why they're important, and how best to teach them.

Tues, 10/11, 12-1pm: Effective Presentations and Student Learning (Basic Level)

Students learn best when information presented are clear, contextualized, concise, and coherent. In many respects, effective presentation of information not only reflects sound pedagogy but also fosters deep learning. This workshop will feature two approaches to effective presentations – one using PowerPoint and another using data presentation.

Wed, 10/26, 11am-12pm:

How Hybrid Courses Can Extend Learning Beyond the Classroom (Basic Level)

Hybrid courses meet partly face-to-face and partly online. The blended format offers new pedagogical possibilities, such as flexible scheduling, multi-modal engagement, and creative collaborations. By shifting certain learning tasks online, instructors are able to redeem classroom time for more meaningful interactions.

In this workshop, a panel of faculty who have taught or coordinated hybrid courses will share their experiences about the opportunities and challenges associated with the new learning format.

Wed, 11/9, 11am-12pm: Using Social Media as a Teaching Tool (Advanced Level)

Social media tools such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube have great potential for teaching and learning. Come and hear faculty who are using these tools in their courses and find out what are some of their promises and pitfalls.

All Teaching & Technology workshops meet in COB 322, the “Willow Room”

Teaching Matters Workshop Series

Teaching Matters workshops are for graduate students. A “basic level” workshop is intended for audience with little or no knowledge of that topic. An “advanced level” workshop is intended for audience with prior knowledge of that topic. However, all workshops, regardless of their designation, are open to anyone who is interested in attending.

Thurs, 9/8, 12-1pm: Engaging First-Generation Students (Basic Level)

In 2010, close to 55% of our undergraduate were first-generation students (defined as neither parent having graduated from a 4-year university). Come to this introductory level workshop to learn more about our students and to share techniques for supporting learning and engaging this population.

Mon, 9/19, 12-1pm: Grading (Basic Level)

Wed, 9/21, 12-1pm: Grading (Advanced Level)

Midterms are approaching, and these two workshops, one at the basic level and one at the advanced, will address how to create a rubric and how to grade more efficiently (basic), as well as how to enhance learning and save yourself time by using peer grading techniques.

Thurs, 10/6, 1-2pm: Utilizing Student Support Services (Basic Level)

What do SALC and DS stand for? If you don't know, you need to attend this session covering tutoring and disability services and the basic protocols for referring students, as well as results you might expect from a referral.

Thurs, 10/20, 12-1pm: Classroom Management (Basic)

This basic session will feature short video vignettes of some typical classroom management situations. Ideas for how to manage difficult scenarios from tardiness to complaints about grades will be explored.

Thurs, 11/3, 1-2pm: How to help students learn from lectures (Basic Level)

Are your students listening but not really hearing the lecture? This basic session will cover ways to help students learn how to listen and learn from a lecture.

Mon, 11/14, 12-1pm: Engaging Students in Reading (Advanced Level)

Do you get the sense that your students are staring at pages but not comprehending the reading? This advanced session will explore ways to help student read effectively

Wed, 11/30, 1-2pm: How to Help Students Think in a Discipline (Advanced Level)

Do you get the sense that your students don't understand the vocabulary and approach to your discipline? This session will feature a SNS and a SSHA graduate student discussing how to help students think like scientists and social scientists.

All Teaching Matters workshops meet in KL 159, the “Acorn Room”



*TAs are invited to
COFFEE, TEA & TEACHING
Social gatherings with a purpose
The 3rd Tuesday of each month
in the Bobcat Lair*

