

# THE TEACHING EXCHANGE

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## *A Conference in Celebration of the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Sheridan Center and the Frederick Lippitt Endowment*

On November 2nd and 3rd 2007, the Sheridan Center organized a conference on "Professional Development in Teaching and Learning" for the entire Brown teaching community to celebrate its 20th Anniversary and the endowment of the Center by the late Frederick Lippitt. The events were co-sponsored by the Office of the Provost and the Office of the Dean of the Faculty.

The conference was opened at 5:00 PM on November 2nd with a keynote speech by Brown alumna Julie Evans (Brown'79), CEO of Project Tomorrow/NetDay. Her speech on the topic *How Do We Prepare for the Students of the Future?: The Impact of Electronic Technology on Learning & Teaching* was open to the public and attracted educators from other institutions of both secondary and higher education.

The keynote speech focused on the impact of technology on learning and, therefore, the future of teaching and research. What can we expect from the students of the future? Project Tomorrow/NetDay ([www.projecttomorrow.org](http://www.projecttomorrow.org)) is a national education nonprofit group based in Irvine, CA. The mission of Project Tomorrow is to prepare today's students to be tomorrow's innovators, leaders and citizens by supporting innovative use of science, math and technology resources to develop their capacity to solve problems in the 21st century.

Of particular relevance to the Brown educational community is the broad-based national research Project Tomorrow has conducted with K-12 students on the impact of technology on their learning capacity. As an alumna who does admissions interviewing for Brown, Ms. Evans was delighted to return to Brown. Her speech gave Brown faculty, graduate students and undergraduates (as well as local educators and parents) a chance to hear about the sort of learning needs our students will be bringing to Brown and how we can think more constructively about how to ensure that the education at Brown truly helps empower them to learn and to be valuable citizens in the future. (A PowerPoint version of the keynote speech is available on the Center's website).

In spite of a miserable storm on Saturday morning November 3rd (and no heat in the building), a stalwart band of educators from across campus gathered in Sayles Hall for a series of ten (10) thought-provoking workshops and a luncheon which featured a panel of undergraduates discussing with Ms. Evans their perceptions of the impact of technology on their learning.

After fortifying themselves with hot coffee and tea, participants chose among the first five (5) workshops:

1. Prof. Michael Paradiso (Bio-Med Neuroscience) presented a session on *Lessons about Learning from Neuroscience*. Research in the field of Neuroscience has profound implications for understanding how we learn - and how we teach. Prof. Paradiso spoke about learning and the brain and led a lively discussion on how to make connections to learning outside the laboratory.

2. Prof. Nidia Schuhmacher (Hispanic Studies), Prof. Ian Dell'Antonio and Shawna Hollen (Physics) led a session on *Departmental Approaches to Professional Development of Graduate Students*, which described how departmental faculty at Brown are developing a variety of approaches to support the professional development in teaching of their graduate students.

3. Prof. Kerry Smith (East Asian Studies, History), Sheridan Center Faculty Fellow, Jennifer L. Yates (Classics) and Joshua Reineke (Bio-Med MPPB), Sheridan Center Head Teaching Consultants, prepared a session on *Teaching/Presentation Consultations are for Everyone* intended to demonstrate that faculty, post-doctoral fellows and graduate students alike can benefit from ongoing constructive feedback from peers on how we present ideas, whether in the classroom, at a conference, or before an audience unfamiliar with our subject.

4. Prof. Susan Alcock (Classics, Joukowsky Institute for Archaeology and the Ancient World) and Ömür Harmansah (Joukowsky Institute for Archaeology and the Ancient World; Egyptology and Ancient Western Asian Studies) led a substantive session on *The Challenges and Rewards of Interdisciplinary Teaching*. Teaching across disciplines challenges faculty and students to master multiple approaches to intellectual problem solving.

5. Gail Cohee, Ph. D. (Sarah Doyle Women's Center Director & Co-Editor of *Feminist Teacher*) addressed the issue of what role gender plays in teaching and learning in the classroom and lab in a session on *Feminist Pedagogy for ALL: Practice & Theory*. In order to prepare, participants were able to consult ahead the journal at: <http://www.uwec.edu/wmns/FeministTeacher/>

After a short break to warm up with more hot tea and coffee, the dedicated band were able to choose amongst the final five (5) sessions:

6. How many times have you gone away disappointed from a student presentation because of his/her inept oral communication skills? Based on the success of the Rhetoric Fellows Program at Brown which she led for twenty years, Dr. Rhoda L. Flaxman (Director of

WriteConsulting; former Director of the Dean of the College Writing/Rhetoric Program) led a powerful discussion on *They Speak/ We Listen: Helping Students Create Effective Oral Presentations*. Dr. Flaxman offered a short primer on best practices in public speaking that participants could easily convey to students, along with useful handouts to use in helping students create and present effective oral presentations.

7. Prof. Kathryn T. Spoehr (Cognitive Science), addressed the timely subject of assessment of learning and its relationship to assessment of institutional effectiveness in a session on *Reflective Teaching Practice, Student Outcomes, and Institutional Effectiveness*. Recent changes in federal policies seek to address concerns about the educational effectiveness of higher education. Prof. Spoehr led a discussion on how the principles which underlie reflective teaching in a single classroom are exactly those which, when applied institutionally and nationally, will answer many of the criticisms that have been leveled at American higher education over the past 10-20 years. (See her article on this subject on page 1 of this issue of the *Teaching Exchange*)

8. Members of the Task Force on Undergraduate Education: Prof. Luther Spoehr (Education/History), Deputy Dean of the College Stephen Lassonde and Assoc. Dean of the College Kathleen McSharry prepared a session *Making Student Course Evaluations Worthwhile* on how to make Student Course Evaluations an integral and effective part of a Brown education.

9. The Provost's Internationalization Report challenges members of the Brown teaching community to re-conceptualize their approach to teaching. Two members of the Internationalization Committee's Curriculum, Language Instruction, and Study Abroad sub-committee, Prof. Susan Alcock (Classics, Joukowsky Institute for Archaeology and the Ancient World), and Prof. Kerry Smith (East Asian Studies, History) prepared a session on *Internationalization and Teaching Across the Curriculum* to discuss the implications for this initiative at Brown. Participants could read the report at: ([www.brown.edu/Administration/Provost/committees/int/report/appendixE.pdf](http://www.brown.edu/Administration/Provost/committees/int/report/appendixE.pdf))

10. Sheridan Center Assoc. Director for the Life & Physical Sciences Kathy M. Takayama (Bio-Med MCB) developed an inspiring session on *Creating Learning Communities using Technology* to encourage deeper engagement and inquiry as an important pedagogical goal. Drawing upon her many years of teaching biology at the University of New South Wales (Aus), she demonstrated how technology can improve communication and learning.

The conference concluded with a chance to hear from current undergraduate students in a panel discussion over lunch on *Student Views on the Impact of Electronic Technology on Learning*. Moderated by keynote speaker Julie Evans '79, three undergraduate students (Bentley Rubenstein '09, Henry Shepherd '08, Jane Zhang '10) discussed their views on how electronic technology impacts their learning (whether video games or classroom/laboratory based) as well as the sort of teaching which they feel uses technology effectively.

The Sheridan Center is deeply grateful to the Office of the Provost and the Office of the Dean of the Faculty for sponsoring this opportunity for members of the Brown teaching community to gather and share ideas and concerns.