

# THE TEACHING EXCHANGE

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The Harriet W. Sheridan Center serves the faculty and graduate students of Brown University as its locus for ongoing collegial professional development in pedagogy. The Teaching Exchange is one of the Center's media for exchanging ideas about teaching within the Brown community. The January 2008 issue focuses on University assessment of teaching outcomes, departmental professional development for graduate students in languages, preparing students to give

effective oral presentations, and the role of the librarian as instructor. In addition, the 2007 Sheridan Award honorees are announced and there is an account of the Sheridan Center's celebration of twenty years of service to the Brown teaching community! The Teaching Exchange is simultaneously published on our web site at [www.brown.edu/sheridan\\_center/pubs/teachingExchange](http://www.brown.edu/sheridan_center/pubs/teachingExchange) (click on "current issue").

## Professional Development of Graduate Instructors in Hispanic Studies

TORI SMITH  
Senior Lecturer, *Hispanic Studies*

Hispanic Studies has a long history of supporting the professional development of the graduate instructors in its Spanish language program. The language faculty, Beth Bauer, Nidia Schuhmacher, Silvia Sobral, and I, meet frequently to work out the details of our multi-faceted program, which has grown to be a kind of department within a department. I liken our work to the cultivation of a large garden. At times it is difficult and gritty, it will never be completed and there is always something that needs tending. Fortunately, our toils yield highly gratifying results.

The basic framework for the support of our graduate instructors consists of several components. The first is the graduate seminar HISP290, *Theories and Methods of Foreign Language Teaching*, created in the early 1990s under the auspices of the Center for Language Studies. It was originally designed as a team-taught interdisciplinary course. More recently it is taught by my colleague, Silvia Sobral, and is offered through our department, though students from other departments are still welcome to attend. HISP290 introduces students to the theoretical underpinnings

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## Reflective Teaching Practice, Student Outcomes, and Institutional Effectiveness

PROFESSOR KATHRYN T. SPOEHR  
*Cognitive & Linguistic Sciences*

*Ed. note: This was originally presented as a lecture on September 10, 2007 at the Sheridan Teaching Seminar.*

There are many styles of reflective teaching practice and just as many different ways of accomplishing it. You have already heard from two exemplary practitioners this afternoon about how they go about it, and it is a daunting task for a final speaker to try to add anything important to what has already been said. So I'm going to spend hardly any time talking about my own teaching methods and how they have changed over the years. Rather, I'd like to spend my time with you today putting the concept of reflective teaching practice into a much broader context.

I am going to argue that 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. Indeed, those principles are the very ones that colleges and universities will need to employ if they are to survive in the face of changes in federal higher education policy that are likely to be enacted over the next twelve months.

What criticisms are we talking about here, and what federal policy changes are bearing down upon us? Let me give you a very brief history. In 1990 close to 80% of all U.S. college students were enrolled in public institutions; 85% of them enrolled

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## Reflective Teaching

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in a public college or university in the same state in which they resided. The implicit “compact” between state government and higher education was that it was economically and civically beneficial to the state to provide an affordable college education to high school graduates who were capable of college-level work. Costs to in-state students were kept low thanks to state appropriations to public colleges and universities.

Beginning in the early 1990’s, however, state legislatures began to feel a serious budgetary pinch; the cost of maintaining public colleges and universities rose at an annual rate that greatly exceeded inflation, and there were an increasing array of competing demands on state revenues to provide increased levels of state services, entitlement programs, and so forth. Moreover, many state legislators had the sneaking suspicion that the public colleges in their states weren’t all that good anyhow. After all, they had all heard from campaign contributors in the state’s business community that new college graduates just didn’t have the skills needed to succeed in a job. Indeed, one of the most persistent and troubling criticisms leveled at higher education by politicians and the public alike for the past 20 years is, that despite American higher education’s pre-eminent position in the world, our colleges and universities simply are not educating young people well enough.

In order to insure that scarce state funding was being well used, most states initiated what have come to be known as “accountability” programs, which required each public college or university to report annually, to the legislature and the public, a set of statistical measures that documented the efficiency and quality of the institution. Many states adopted mathematical formulas by which the monetary allocation to each public institution was computed from the accountability data – enrollments, number of students per FTE faculty, and so forth. But one problem with these early

forms of accountability was that virtually all of them were “input measures.” They tabulated the SAT scores of admitted students, the number of faculty, the number of faculty with Ph.D.s, the number of students per section in a class, the number of contact hours per faculty member, and the like. Only occasionally were data reported on results or “outputs” such as the effectiveness of teaching (as measured, for example, by the rate of students passing licensing exams in certain fields such as nursing) or the quality of student outcomes (e.g., the percentage of entering students who actually complete a degree). And, of course, regardless of whether such measures provide any accountability at all for public institutions, private institutions like Brown remained untouched by state accountability legislation.

The public perception that higher education is somehow not doing its job, coupled with the poor quality of state-level accountability standards, has led recently to a fairly dramatic change in the federal government’s stance toward assuring high quality post-secondary education. In the fall of 2005 the U.S. Secretary of Education, Margaret Spellings, appointed a national Commission on the Future of Higher Education that was “charged with developing a comprehensive national strategy for postsecondary education that will meet the needs of America’s diverse population and also address the economic and workforce needs of the country’s future.”<sup>1</sup> In September 2006 the Commission issued its report, modestly entitled, *A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education*.<sup>2</sup>

The Spellings Commission made a number of very positive and useful recommendations. Among them are recommendations to promote greater access to higher education, especially among under-represented minority groups, and suggestions about how to make college more affordable for everyone. But the Commission recommendations that are most controversial and threaten the autonomy of colleges

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## A Librarian's Perspective on Teaching

LEE A. PEDERSEN, PH.D., MLIS  
Chemistry, Engineering, and Physics Librarian

I am the Chemistry, Engineering, and Physics Librarian for Brown. This means that I develop the collections, liaison with the faculty, do specialized information research for students and faculty, create outreach opportunities, and, most importantly, teach information finding and using skills to undergraduate and graduate students in classroom and one-on-one settings. During a typical instruction session, I help new users navigate databases and use Library tools so they can find high quality, relevant information for their assignments. While these sessions do not involve semester-long contact and reinforcement, they are the basis for learners to build information competency life skills that will be transferable to any career.

In today's information-seeking environment where the common assumption is that everything is online and freely accessible with Google, I see my teaching responsibilities as coaching on how to find reliable information with efficiency and effectiveness. Perhaps that is why I usually start a class session with a Google example and use it to guide participants to better, focused resources available through the Library's science and technology collections.

Many of my constituents are not aware of how important the role of teacher is for me to serve them. There are many venues for teaching. When faculty members invite me to meet with their students, the face-to-face content is designed for each class. An online course guide provides the students with useful links to paid and free resources and a way to replay on their own schedule some of the information

see "Librarian" continued on page 4

## They Speak, We Listen: Helping Students Create Effective Oral Presentations

RHODA L. FLAXMAN, PH. D.  
Director, *WriteConsulting*

How many times have you walked away disappointed from talks by famous scholars whose organization and delivery kill the interesting material of their presentation? This situation is not unique to our faculty community. All too often the oral presentations of our students are boring, tangential and a waste of precious class time. When I directed the Writing/Rhetoric Fellows Program at Brown with Associate Provost Nancy Dunbar (*Theatre, Speech and Dance*) for sixteen years, I often heard colleagues report that students more urgently needed help with their speaking than they did with their writing skills. We also recognize that they may need oral skills more often than writing skills in the working world. We found that assisting students with their oral skills is fairly easy, using the following short primer of best practices in public speaking.

Because students are more accustomed to writing papers than they are to delivering a speech, they are often more fearful of an oral than they are of a written assignment, and therefore more in need of faculty guidance and instruction. Students are often intimidated by their lack of practice, convinced that they will receive immediately negative peer feedback of bored expressions in their audiences, and confused by the difficulty of satisfying two audiences simultaneously (professor and classmates). But pointing out that many problems are common to both media may put them more at ease. Both communicative forms employ the same stages of creation: invention, organization, and delivery. In addition, both essays and speeches may suffer from weak structure (a result of lacking a clear introduction, organizing idea, conclusion, and supporting evidence); too many undeveloped ideas;

chronological rather than thematic order; insufficient awareness of audience; derivative ideas that fail to demonstrate critical thinking; incoherence; deficiency in the intrinsic interest that can flow from a variety of supporting materials including visual aids etc.

But in the case of speech, the unique factor, effective delivery, most often is the element that trips up our students, and with which they most need faculty assistance. Since the effectiveness of an oral presentation depends about one-third on the content and two-thirds on delivery, speeches need more redundancy and clarity of structure than do essays. This clarity can be achieved by strong reliance on forecasting, signposting, and recursivity. Since studies have shown that people retain only between 20-30% of what they hear, repetition often makes the difference between a speech that is indelible and one that is ephemeral.

In the years when we directed the Rhetoric Fellows Program on campus (1987-2003), we publicized the idea that integrating writing and speaking assignments provided an essential interaction to an activity best characterized as translation from one medium to another. Further, we noted that asking students both to write academic essays and to give oral presentations mutually reinforced communication skills across the curriculum.

So, what were the foundational principles we taught students in order to strengthen their oral speaking skills? Thinking backwards from ends to means, we suggested that an effective and engaging oral presentation should be simple and snappy; to the point; well and clearly organized; colorful, with relevant supporting materials; conversational and natural in delivery; and relevant to one's listeners. We instructed students to follow

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## Librarian

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and searches given in the session. A new instructional technology screencasting, with audio and visual, was invaluable for creating a tutorial called Patent Searching: Don't Reinvent the Wheel (see URL below). This technology will become a key tool for student replay on other course guides. I also teach whenever a constituent has a one-on-one consultation with me or I answer an email query. When I hold office hours, a service I call Librarian in the Lobby, the visitors to my "desk" in Barus & Holley and MacMillan always get a dose of coaching. At the same time, they teach me. Each time I conduct hands-on workshops on the resources available specifically for undergraduates or for graduates and faculty in my subject areas, the teaching opportunity is meant to help the participants develop life skills in information discovery. I currently offer a workshop for undergraduates who will be doing their first research project with a Brown faculty member in chemistry, engineering, or physics. I also have one for physics grads and one on chemistry resources.

Here's just a sample of what a subject librarian teaches: how to use Online Course Reserves Access (OCRA), how to find an article that is not online at the Library; how to get a copy of a dissertation lent to the Library, how to use specialized databases for article discovery, and why, when, and how to use Josiah. Of course, when I have the opportunity to work with a group in a class or a workshop/training session, the teaching cannot cover everything I think the audience needs. The ideal outcomes are that they begin building competencies in information finding and they have a personal coach to whom they can turn if they need more. Librarians for other subjects are also available for instruction in classes, working with faculty for developing specific course guides, and for individual consultations for both faculty and students (see URL below).

Before becoming a librarian, my professional career was as a research scientist in industry and later a faculty member. I tell people that as a librarian at Brown I have the best of both those worlds – teaching and research.

*Patent Searching:* Don't Reinvent the Wheel [http://brown.edu/Facilities/University\\_Library/instruction/screencast/uspto/](http://brown.edu/Facilities/University_Library/instruction/screencast/uspto/)

*Subject Librarians:* <http://dl.lib.brown.edu/libweb/about/sr.php> ❖

## Hispanic Studies

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of foreign language teaching and learning, examines various instructional methods and approaches, and offers some basics of praxis. For example, students observe experienced instructors, do some supervised teaching themselves, and design and evaluate teaching materials. This ambitious course gives students a taste of a broad, interdisciplinary field with which they would not otherwise have contact during their time at Brown.

The next piece of the framework is the handbook entitled *Guidelines for Instructors in Hispanic Studies*, which I initially compiled in the mid-80s at the beginning of my 20-year tenure as director of the language program. My successor, Nidia Schuhmacher, and Silvia Sobral have recently expanded and refined this document. A cornerstone of the program, it details almost every aspect of language teaching in Hispanic Studies, and covers such areas as instructor responsibilities, administrative matters, course management, resources for students as well as instructors, and the teaching evaluation process. Instructors report that *Guidelines* informs and reassures them before they start teaching and serves as an indispensable resource once they are teaching.

In addition to studying *Guidelines* before they begin teaching, new instructors are required to attend a 5-day teaching orientation. We usually have 5-6 attendees, including graduate student TAs as

well as Associates from a variety of Spanish-speaking countries. The goal of the orientation is to give students enough support for their first semester of teaching at Brown, without overwhelming them with information.

Here's a quick sketch of the orientation program:

*Day 1:* We present an overview of the language program, familiarize instructors with their responsibilities, acquaint them with general principles of foreign language teaching and learning, and distribute materials and assignments for the days that follow.

*Day 2:* The group meets in the Language Resource Center to learn about the instructional technology available at Brown. To acclimate our instructors, many of whom are not familiar with the American university, we have designed activities and discussion pertaining to academic and classroom culture in this country. For example, we role-play scenarios that are likely to fluster new instructors.

*Day 3:* We focus on various pedagogical matters, such as teaching grammar, pronunciation and production skills, and working with error correction. Later in the day, students work with lesson planning, the use of course textbooks, and the development of class activities.

*Day 4:* We hold a Q & A session, give students time to work on the lesson plans they will present the following day, and discuss with them the complex set of administrative and pedagogical matters that arise at the beginning of the term.

*Day 5:* This is a half-day session during which instructors present their lesson plans to the entire group, which then critiques and discusses each plan. Finally, we ask students to fill out an evaluation of the orientation program, which assists us in planning the event for the coming year.

Though we help our beginning instructors formulate a lesson plan during the teaching orientation, we believe that they need additional support with the task during the first part of the semester. Con-

*see "Hispanic Studies" continued on page 6*

## A Conference in Celebration of the 20th 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 p.m. 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



Keynote Speaker  
Julie Evans '79

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

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## Sheridan Award 2007 Honorees

The Advisory Board of the Sheridan Center is very pleased to announce the winners of the 2007 *Harriet W. Sheridan Award for Distinguished Contribution to Teaching and Learning* at Brown University. The Sheridan Medal will be presented to **John J. Stein, Ph.D.** (*Bio-Med Neuroscience*) and **Meiqing Zhang, M.A.** (*East Asian Studies*) on Monday May 5, 2008 at the annual University Awards Ceremony to be held at 4:30 p.m. in Sayles Hall. Thanks to an endowment from the late Frederick Lippitt, the two recipients of the Sheridan Award will each receive a stipend of \$2,000, as well as the Sheridan Award medal. Mr. Lippitt was Senior Fellow of the University's Board of Fellows and a member of the Sheridan Center's Advisory Board.

**John J. Stein, Ph.D.** (Lecturer, *Bio-Med Neuroscience*) was enthusiastically nominated for the Sheridan Award by colleagues and graduate students in departments across the University. Not only is he well-known among undergraduates for the quality of his teaching, whether in *Biology 20: The Foundation of Living Systems* or *The Brain: Introduction to Neuroscience*, but he also enjoys an outstanding reputation for his leadership in the pedagogy of biology, whether in higher or elementary and secondary education. As one colleague described him, he has been “a tireless and inspiring mentor to a small army of graduate and undergraduate teaching assistants during his twelve years at Brown.”

Dr. Stein's work in mentoring graduate and undergraduate teaching assistants in responsible pedagogy is founded on his own teaching style. His ability to collaborate with colleagues in co-teaching complex courses models the fundamental collegiality of pedagogy. His work with TAs at all levels inspires teamwork through the exchange of ideas and an understanding that sound

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## Hispanic Studies

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sequently, the faculty supervisors of each multi-section course supply instructors with lesson plans for several weeks. (This has the added benefit of ensuring more uniformity between the course sections.)

Regular course meetings with their faculty course supervisors are another important part of our program. They are held almost weekly, depending on the particular course. In addition to being an opportunity to distribute materials and discuss course content, pedagogy, and logistics, the meetings are important for tracking and supporting those language students who might be experiencing difficulty.

The last piece of program's basic framework is our system of teaching observation. New instructors are observed twice during their first year of teaching. Although each class is filmed, the faculty supervisor makes every effort to observe it in person. The instructor is asked to submit a lesson plan to the observer beforehand. After the class, the instructor is asked to view the video and to write up a one-page statement that answers the following questions: What were your goals and objectives for this class? Did you accomplish what you set out to do? What would you change or do differently? Did anything surprise you? The instructor turns in the statement and the video to the observer, who reviews them and then meets with the instructor to discuss the class.

We consider the first two observations as practice runs for the second year observation, which is more thoroughly evaluated and goes into the instructor's dossier. If difficulties emerge at the time of the second year observation, we make additional observations until we feel the instructor is on track. This can be a challenging process but we feel that it is essential to ensure that our instructors reach a high level of competence.

With our basic framework in place, we offer various means of support once

the academic year is underway. For example, we find that frequent meetings of the language faculty are imperative to keep things running smoothly. At these meetings, in addition to discussing many aspects of the program, we regularly discuss the progress of our instructors, with a particular eye for supporting those who might be experiencing difficulty. Beth, Nidia, Silvia and I are fortunate to work very well together and aim to model collegiality for our graduate students. The meetings keep our camaraderie strong.

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*I liken our work to the  
cultivation of a large garden.  
At times it is difficult and gritty,  
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Fortunately, our toils yield  
highly gratifying results.*

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We consider it is important to foster a similar sense of community among our instructors. Toward this end, we hold a Teaching Chat over lunch each semester with them. The Teaching Chats have been well attended and our instructors have stated that they appreciate the chance to discuss their concerns about teaching in a friendly, informal atmosphere.

There are two formal channels through which language faculty and graduate instructors communicate. The first is the Language Committee, chaired by the Director and comprised of the Language Faculty and two graduate student representatives. The student representatives poll their peers regarding various aspects of the language program and present the results of their survey at the meeting. The second channel is the Departmental Standing Committee, on which the Director sits, along with graduate students and departmental faculty. Both groups meet

twice a year and through them we have resolved many issues and developed new directions for the department.

Finally, a few miscellaneous items:

We attempt to give students a varied teaching experience by rotating them through different courses.

We actively advertise and encourage participation in the Sheridan Center programs, and give it weight when we evaluate instructors for departmental and university teaching prizes.

We cultivate the habits of self-evaluation and self-analysis in our instructors. We have developed worksheets to help them better understand their student course evaluations and to analyze their teaching on their own.

We have begun work to make extra course activities available on-line.

We encourage our instructors to seek training in MyCourses, and assume their eventual proficiency in its use. This skill is crucial for our program as well as for the professional development of our graduate students.

Several years ago, the language faculty doubled in size, from two to four members. Though still understaffed, we are now better able to foster the professional development of our graduate instructors and believe that we are on the right track. Recently, our language program was given kudos by a team of outside evaluators. Furthermore, we have an impressive record of winners of Brown's prestigious Presidential Award for Excellence in Teaching.

We know that the demand for Spanish at Brown will continue to grow, especially as the university becomes more internationalized. Over time we hope to expand our course offerings and to increase the kinds of support we offer to the future professoriate. We are pleased with our accomplishments and appreciate this opportunity to share them with you. However, as any dedicated gardener knows, you enjoy the flowers and are often inspired by them, then you put your gloves back on and tend to the next task. ❖

## Reflective Teaching

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and universities are those bearing on student learning and accountability. Among the findings cited by the Spellings Commission are the following:

- The National Assessment of Adult Literacy indicates that, between 1992 and 2003, average prose literacy (the ability to understand narrative texts such as newspaper articles) decreased for all levels of educational attainment, and document literacy (the ability to understand practical information such as instructions for taking medicine) decreased among those with at least some college education or a bachelor's degree or higher. (p. 13)
- Employers complain that many college graduates are not prepared for the workplace and lack the new set of skills necessary for successful employment and continuous career development. (p. 13)
- Despite increased attention to student learning results by colleges and universities and accreditation agencies, parents and students have no solid evidence, comparable across institutions, of how much students learn in colleges or whether they learn more at one college than another. Similarly, policymakers need more comprehensive data to help them decide whether the national investment in higher education is paying off and how taxpayer dollars could be used more effectively. (p. 14)<sup>3</sup>

The Commission's recommendations for fixing these problems were sobering. They include:

- Higher education institutions should measure student learning using quality assessment data from instruments such as, for example, the Collegiate Learning Assessment, which measures the growth of student learning taking place in colleges, and the Measure of Academic Proficiency and Progress, which

is designed to assess general education outcomes for undergraduates in order to improve the quality of instruction and learning.

- The federal government should provide incentives for states, higher education associations, university systems, and institutions to develop interoperable outcomes-focused accountability systems designed to be accessible and useful for students, policymakers, and the public, as well as for internal management and institutional improvement.
- The results of student learning assessments, including value-added measurements that indicate how students' skills have improved over time, should be made available to students and reported in the aggregate publicly. Higher education institutions should make aggregate summary results of all postsecondary learning measures, e.g., test scores, certification and licensure attainment, time to degree, graduation rates, and other relevant measures, publicly available in a consumer-friendly form as a condition of accreditation.<sup>4</sup>

In short, we are being told that all students in all institutions should graduate having mastered the same set of knowledge and skills, that these skills can and should be measured by a standardized test, and that we can evaluate the quality of a school by how much its students' test scores improve between entry and graduation.

Interestingly, in order to implement this set of recommendations quickly before the Bush Administration leaves office, and without having to force the higher education equivalent of the *No-Child Left Behind* legislation through a Democratically controlled Congress that is unlikely to cooperate, the Department of Education has chosen to co-opt higher education's own accreditation system to do the work for it. While most of you probably know that professional associations like the American Medical Association and the American Bar Association accredit individual professional

degree programs in their fields, you may not know much about the system of regional accreditation that accredits entire institutions and impacts most of higher education in this country.

There are six regional accreditation organizations, all of which began as voluntary organizations of colleges and universities formed as a way for higher education to monitor itself and improve its own quality – a form of self-regulation. After World War II the federal government began to use the regional accreditors as gatekeepers to authorize individual institutions to participate in the many federal education grant and student aid programs upon which we have all become financially dependent. Very simply stated, if your college is accredited by an accreditor that is *recognized* by the U. S. Department of Education, your school can receive federal education program grants, and your students can qualify for Pell grants, federally subsidized loans, and work-study; if you are not accredited, or your accreditation comes from an organization that is *not* recognized by the Department of Education, no federal program dollars flow to you or your students.

In order to implement the Spellings Commission's recommendations quickly, the Department of Education has begun to change the set of regulations by which it recognizes accreditors. It can do this without consultation with or the participation of Congress. The changes it wishes to make, over the loud objections of the accreditors themselves and the institutions they represent, will force accreditors to require standardized outcomes definitions and testing, and to evaluate educational quality on the basis of value-added by these measures. If a regional accreditor does not enforce these requirements in granting accreditation to schools, it will not be recognized by the Department of Education and none of the schools it accredits will be eligible for federal programs. The regulation change process is on the fast track to put the new requirements in place for accreditation reviews that will

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## Presentations

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these steps in creating content for an effective oral presentation:

- brainstorm topics
- determine your purpose for speaking (to persuade, inform, entertain, demonstrate knowledge, etc.)
- decide what your audience most needs to hear
- decide on a clear and coherent argument
- select your main points, supported with relevant evidence
- reiterate your main points in a clear conclusion

Students were advised not to try to cover more than one or two main ideas in any short presentation if they expected to develop each idea adequately and offer a variety of relevant and interesting supporting material. Ideally they would include all parts of their argument, from grounds to claims, to warrants, and, if appropriate, to backings.

Once the content has been set, students must think hard about their delivery, usually the most neglected aspect of their preparation. We told our students that a presentation is a performance. And since no experienced performer performs unrehearsed, their first rule should be to practice, practice, practice, preferably aloud to a sympathetic audience. Effective speakers know how to sound authoritative, thereby establishing audience trust. They know their material backwards and forwards, explaining the significance of their information as they go along. Because they speak from notes or an outline, not a text, they are able to speak in a conversational manner, so that they can actively think about what they're saying, and can improvise (reiterating and explaining difficult points) depending on the needs of their audience. Effective speakers take the physical space they need in order to feel comfortable. Some need a podium, others need to pace. Inexperienced speakers rarely think about whether their body language conveys confi-

dence or terror, but students need to learn to avoid annoying non-verbal fluencies and verbalized pauses ("um", "you know", "really") that distract a listener. How many times have your students' body language telegraphed only the flight and panic syndrome, mumbling, nervously clutching their hair, twitching or twisting one leg around the other until they look like they will fall over? We need gently to point out to our students how distracting these usually unconscious mannerisms can be.

Faculties can do a great deal to improve the presentational agility of our students by making them aware of these few basic concepts. Sadly, such training has fallen into disuse in the American academy. Once a focus of universal training in pedagogy, instruction in public speaking is relatively rare today. By providing these skills during their undergraduate years, we would actually be returning to an earlier model of teaching public speaking in English classes across the United States in the early twentieth century, a move both speakers and their audiences would greatly appreciate!

### *Postscript*

As Senior Lecturer in Speech and Director of Brown's Writing/Rhetoric Fellows Program respectively, Dr. Nancy Dunbar and I trained a dozen peer writing tutors (known at Brown as Writing/Rhetoric Fellows) between 1987 and 2003 during January break to coach and prepare students to give classroom presentations of various kinds (debates, paper presentations, discussions, etc.), offering an intense mini-class on essential aspects of good speaking. Rhetoric Fellows were assigned to assist students in classes where the professor required both written and oral work. They successfully helped speakers prepare talks of various kinds, and then critiqued the results. The model the Rhetoric Fellows Program offers to other universities and colleges is an exciting impetus to catalyze better speakers among college graduates.

For more information about assisting students with public speaking, please consult *Teaching and Persuasive Communication: Class Presentation Skills* (1997) by Dr. Patri-

cia H. Hamm, with a forward by Dr. Nancy Dunbar, published by the Harriet W. Sheridan Center for Teaching and Learning at Brown University and online at [http://www.brown.edu/sheridan\\_center/publications/handbooks/persuasive.pdf](http://www.brown.edu/sheridan_center/publications/handbooks/persuasive.pdf). ♦

## Reflective Teaching

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take place during the 2008-09 academic year. In case you think this is all of only theoretical interest, let me remind you that Brown is up for its reaccreditation review during the 2008-09 academic year.

The reality is that if we in higher education don't like the way in which federal policy now defines student learning and achievement, we will have to propose something better. At very least, every institution will have to focus better on the goals it sets for its students, be more systematic in determining how well its students are achieving those goals, and be more open and consistent about reporting this information in jargon-free language that is transparent to the public. At first, this may seem hard to achieve. Fortunately, however, current accreditation policies and procedures provide a sound base from which to launch this effort. Ironically, the accreditation organizations which are being dragged kicking and screaming into being enforcers for the Department of Education have been historically one of the few sectors of the higher education community that has been firmly focused on assessing the quality of student learning. So the focus on student outcomes is hardly a new one to the regional accreditors, and many of the current accreditation procedures can be adapted to meet the accountability requirements of the federal government. To make this clearer, let me give you a concrete example from Brown's own regional accreditation organization.

Brown receives its regional accreditation from the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), more see "*Reflective Teaching*" continued on page 10

## Conference

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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. ♦

SAVE THE DATE!

## University Awards Ceremony

Monday, May 5, 2008  
Sayles Hall

4:30 p.m. Reception  
5:00-6:00 p.m. Presentation of Awards

## Reflective Teaching

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precisely from NEASC's Commission on Institutions of Higher Education (CIHE). CIHE accredits more than 225 institutions in New England which offer an Associates degree or higher. Each one is thoroughly reviewed and evaluated every ten years, with follow-ups as needed. Obviously the institutions accredited by CIHE span a wide range of institutional missions and types – everything from large public institutions like the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, to tiny private schools like the Conway School of Landscape Design, to church-affiliated schools like the Andover-Newton Theological Seminary. Recognizing that it is impossible to define a single set of student outcomes that could be used to evaluate and accredit all of them fairly, CIHE instead seeks to determine whether the institution is living up to the educational mission it has established for itself.

CIHE's accreditation standards evaluate all of the major aspects of a modern college or university, such as finances, student services, libraries, academic programs, and so forth, but they primarily focus on the adequacy of the institution's own methods for monitoring and improving its own operations in each of these areas. In other words, each institution must demonstrate that it is *effective* in doing the things it purports to do and has in place the procedures that allow it to determine for itself how to remain effective. An example of CIHE's focus on institutional effectiveness is in its statement about effectiveness in academic programs:

“The institution's principal evaluation focus is the quality, integrity, and effectiveness of its academic programs. Evaluation endeavors and systematic assessment are demonstrably effective in the improvement of academic offerings and student learning.”<sup>5</sup>

What our accreditors are asking us to do at the institutional level is to make a

habit of asking and answering three of the most basic questions underlying all good educational practice:

1. *What are we trying to do here?* or more formally: What are the institution's goals? What intellectual knowledge, skills, and habits of mind do we want our students to develop?
2. *How well are we doing and how do we know that?* or more formally: What good quality information/data do we have that tells us how well we are doing in achieving those goals?
3. *How can we get better?* or more formally: How can we use this evaluative information to make improvements in what we do?

When framed in these terms, the demonstration of institutional effectiveness and good student outcomes – the very core of accountability – becomes nothing more than the application of good, reflective teaching practice at the institutional level. The questions are the same three that I ask of myself almost every day of every semester I teach: What are my goals for the students in this course – and for this class period? Am I accomplishing what I set out to do, and how do I know whether I am or not? And if what I'm doing now isn't working as well as I want, how can I do better? The core of sound educational practice thus seems to take the form of what mathematicians call a Mandelbrot fractal set: a geometric pattern in which an object's structure or appearance at the finest-grained level of analysis, say under a microscope, is replicated at the next larger level of analysis, and at each successively larger order of magnitude. The same questions that assure quality teaching for a single instructor are the ones to ask to assure quality at the institutional level.

Regrettably regardless of how often individual faculty members ask the basic effectiveness questions of themselves, the questions arise too rarely at the institutional level at most colleges and universi-

ties, including Brown. Fortunately Brown, over the next two years, will have the opportunity, in fact the necessity, to ask and answer those three basic educational questions at the institutional level. Our institutional reaccreditation with NEASC will take place in March of 2009, and over the course of the current academic year we will be writing the institutional self-study report that must be submitted six months in advance of the evaluation visit.

The preparation of Brown's institutional self-study will likely be just a distant spectator sport for most of you, and you may hardly notice how federal accountability policies play out nationally. But I hope you will not forget the three most important questions you can ask yourself as a teacher: What are my goals for the students in this course – and for this class period? Am I accomplishing what I set out to do, and how do I know whether I am or not? And if what I'm doing now isn't working as well as I want, how can I do better? If you get in the habit of asking those questions of yourself, you will be well on the road to developing a reflective teaching practice that will serve you, your students, and your institution well. ♦

<sup>1</sup> U. S. Department of Education. Secretary Spellings Announces New Commission on the Future of Higher Education (press release), September 19, 2005. [<http://www.ed.gov/news/pressreleases/2005/09/09192005.html>]

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Education, A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education. Washington, D.C., 2006. [<http://www.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/hiedfuture/index.html>]

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Education, A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education. Washington, D.C., 2006, pp. 13-14. [<http://www.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/hiedfuture/index.html>]

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Education, A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education. Washington, D.C., 2006, p. 24. [<http://www.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/hiedfuture/index.html>]

<sup>5</sup> New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Commission on Institutions of Higher Education. (2005). Standards for Accreditation. (section 4.51). [[http://www.neasc.org/cihe/standards\\_for\\_accreditation\\_2005.pdf](http://www.neasc.org/cihe/standards_for_accreditation_2005.pdf)]

## Sheridan Award

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pedagogy is based on ongoing reflection and revision. Colleagues accord him high praise for his patient leadership of weekly TA meetings which transform TAs who “by the end of the semester...are confident in how to make teaching decisions, how to organize and present information and how to deal with challenging questions. John’s mentoring plays a key role in this transformation.” A graduate student observed that his mentoring enabled her to develop an innovative method of teaching which has now been adopted for use by local high school science teachers.

Dr. Stein’s support for connecting the pedagogy of biology between higher education and area schools and community programs benefits some 1000 students each year through Brain Awareness Week. One colleague noted that his commitment to this labor-intensive effort is based on his “deep sense of community and outreach.” As a result of his long experience in orchestrating such outreach, in 2006 he and co-investigators in Summer and Continuing Studies and Education were awarded a prestigious NIH Science Education Partnership grant (A.R.I.S.E.) to advance local science education.

Senior colleagues with whom he has worked also credit Dr. Stein for helping them improve their own teaching, whether through example or collegial exchange, especially in interdisciplinary teaching. He is able to bring together colleagues across disciplines to help students understand intellectual connections, rather than mere disciplinary distinctions. In sum, Dr. Stein was universally recommended for the Sheridan Award as a faculty member who exemplifies mentoring which empowers other to teach a broad spectrum of students complex scientific concepts effectively and imaginatively.

Colleagues from the department of *East Asian Studies* nominated Senior Lecturer **Meiqing Zhang, M.A.** for the Sheridan Award in recognition of her skills as a mentor of faculty colleagues in



pedagogy and professional development within the discipline of Chinese language, for her work in pedagogical innovation amongst the members of her department, and for her scholarship in pedagogy within her field. Ms. Zhang has taught at Brown since 1988 and during that time her success in training others to be effective instructors of Chinese has resulted in the international reputation of the Brown program. In fact, it was noted that her skills as a mentor and “teacher of teachers” had created a problem - the teachers that she has trained are in such demand that her department must continually replace them!

One colleague cited Ms Zhang as providing a model to colleagues of adaptation to ever-changing pedagogy in her field, whether in the incorporation of new discoveries in cognitive and linguistic sciences or the application of electronic technologies to empower student learning. She was also noted for the quality of her research into pedagogy which has led to the recent publication of an innovative approach to teaching first year Chinese, a new book on teaching grammar, and work on a book on teaching advanced Chinese.

Her work in mentoring and training others, both instructors and visiting lecturers, received universal accolades from colleagues. In a department in which there is a constant changeover in instructional staff, her skill in serving as the stable foundation for young colleagues has enabled the Brown Chinese program to be successful for students and instructors. One junior colleague observed that the supplementary materials she creates for classes assist her colleagues to be more effective instructors. She invites junior colleagues to observe her classes and to review and discuss what has been observed. Her openness and directness encourage colleagues to approach pedagogical improvement without anxiety. She meets weekly with these junior colleagues to ensure that

they are facilitating student learning in this demanding and challenging field.

In addition, her work was applauded for managing the entire educational experience of the study abroad program. This involved helping colleagues to create stable learning environments for students through thoughtful staffing and mentoring both here at Brown and with colleagues in China. Her ability to simultaneously manage complex and effective learning environments for students in different parts of the world was cited for ensuring that a Brown education in Chinese will have positive application long after graduation.

The criteria for the Sheridan Award and a list of previous honorees (and their citations) can be found on the Center’s web site at: [http://www.brown.edu/sheridan\\_center/award](http://www.brown.edu/sheridan_center/award). ♦

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## 2008 SEMESTER II CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Unless otherwise noted, all events will be held at the Sheridan Center (96 Waterman Street).

For the most up-to date information (such as announcement of special seminars), check the Center's website frequently: [www.brown.edu/sheridan\\_center](http://www.brown.edu/sheridan_center)

**JANUARY**

- 15 Graduate Student Seminar: Brown/Wheaton Course Proposal Workshop, 12:00–2 PM (RSVP)
- 28 Sheridan Teaching Seminar lecture #4, 5:30–6:45 PM, Salomon 001 “Grading and Evaluation: How Well Are Your Students Learning?” Profs. Luther Spoehr (Education & History) and Larry Wakeford (Education)
- 28 Classroom Tools Seminar\*, 4–5:30 PM

**FEBRUARY**

- 4 Sheridan Teaching Seminar lecture #4\*, 5:30–6:45 PM – check MyCourses for room assignments
- 6 Professional Development Seminar for Advanced Graduate Students\*, 4:00–5:30 PM
- 15 Deadline for scheduling ITCs (Individual Teaching Consultations) for Certificate I Candidates

- 25 Sheridan Teaching Seminar lecture #5, 5:30–6:45 PM, Salomon 001 “Teaching as Persuasive Communication” Assoc. Provost Nancy Dunbar (Theater, Speech & Dance)
- 25 Classroom Tools Seminar\* 4:00–5:30 PM
- 28 Junior Faculty Roundtable: Lunch with the Provost, 12:00–1:30 PM (RSVP)

**MARCH**

- 3 Sheridan Teaching Seminar lecture #5\*, 5:30–6:45 PM – check MyCourses for room assignments
- 4 Graduate Student Seminar: “Gender Dynamics in the Classroom”, 12:00–1:30 PM (RSVP)
- 5 Professional Development Seminar for Advanced Graduate Students\*, 4:00–5:30 PM
- 13 Junior Faculty Roundtable: Lunch with the Dean of the Graduate School, 12:00–1:30 PM (RSVP)
- 17 Classroom Tools Seminar\*, 4:00–5:30 PM
- 21 Deadline for Completion of ITCs for Certificate I Candidates
- 31 Deadline for Submission: Classroom Tools Seminar & Professional Development Seminar Assignments

**APRIL**

- 9 Professional Development Seminar for Advanced Graduate Students\*, 4:00–7:00 PM
- 17 Junior Faculty Roundtable: Lunch with the Vice President for Research, 12:00–1:30 PM (RSVP)
- 30 Sheridan Center/Career Development Center Program for Advanced Graduate Students: “Preparing for Your First Year as a Faculty Member”, 3:00–5:00 PM (RSVP)

**MAY**

- 5 Awards Ceremony, Sayles Hall, 5:00–6:00 PM (Reception beginning at 4:30 PM)
- 6 Teaching Consultants Meeting, 12:00–1:30 PM (RSVP)
- 14 Departmental Teaching Network: FL/GSL Meeting, 12:00–1:30 PM (RSVP)
- 15 Graduate Student Seminar: Course Preparation Workshop for Summer Studies, 12:00–1:30 PM (RSVP)
- 19 Junior Faculty Roundtable: Lunch with Recently Tenured Faculty Members, 12:00–1:30 PM (RSVP)

\* indicates that an event is open only to registered participants

**THE TEACHING**

THE HARRIET W. SHERIDAN CENTER FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING ■ BROWN UNIVERSITY

**EXCHANGE**

Brown University Box 1912  
Providence, RI 02912  
Telephone 401 863-1219  
[Sheridan\\_Center@Brown.edu](mailto:Sheridan_Center@Brown.edu)  
[www.brown.edu/sheridan\\_center](http://www.brown.edu/sheridan_center)

Rebecca S. More, *Editor*