Concerns have been raised, on occasion, about the efficacy of courses taught in compressed or intensive formats. While the literature on the topic of teaching and learning using compressed formats is not extensive, most of what has been reported supports the notion that the quality of the learning experience is comparable to when the same subject matter is taught in a longer format, particularly when the instructional quality is high. Based on a study of how faculty, known for high quality instruction, approach teaching in a compressed or intensive format, a set of best practices emerged for teaching in compressed formats. Compressed (or intensive) is used to describe courses taught in a comparatively shorter time period than in a typical term. For example in the U of M Summer Session 3-credit hour courses are taught in four weeks versus 13 weeks in the fall/winter terms.

Best Practice - What is it?
Best practices are practices that have been shown to have good results, have been selected using a systematic process, and have been judged as exemplary. Once identified, best practices can be adopted to improve performance. The process involves identifying best practices of individuals or institutions and examining how they do what they do. What does successful faculty do to ensure quality of the teaching/learning experience in compressed formats? What can we learn from them? What is best practice?

(Continued on page 2)
Restructure Courses

High performing instructors considered re-structuring the course as a key element in preparing to teach in a compressed format. Restructuring requires instructors to re-organize/redesign the course content and processes into the different format. This may require prioritizing content, whereby some material is given more emphasis than others, or deferring or eliminating select content altogether. While courses taught in compressed formats sometimes have the same number of contact hours or amount of class time, the courses are taught at a faster pace (longer and more frequent class meetings over a shorter term). This results in a need to think about how to set up the course content to fit the compressed schedule. Best practice suggests that instructors consider the basis on which to determine the fit of course content. One suggestion is to focus on outcomes versus content delivery (what students need to know versus what content needs to be covered). For example, the need-to-know determination may be based on requirements of advanced courses in the discipline, curriculum standards, or requirements of professional practice. An outcome-based approach helps outline the “must” versus “should” components of a course.

When re-designing courses to teach in a compressed format, it is recommended that complex and important topics are dealt with as early as possible in the course. This practice, echoed by several best-practice instructors, connects to decisions about “must” versus “should” inclusion of course content. Given other considerations like the sequencing of topics, it makes sense to deal with “must” topics earlier in the course rather than at the end when time pressures tend to increase.

Course restructuring and adjustment for teaching in compressed formats fits with the notion of “focus” discussed by Virginia Lee (2002). She proposed that faculty teaching in compressed formats focus on what needs to be covered in the course. For example, she suggested that as a planning exercise instructors consider what they would do if they had to teach a course in three hours (versus several weeks), specifically asking themselves what they would like their students to know and be able to do as a result of the three hour “course”? This suggests that it is most important for instructors to focus on what students need to know and do as a result of taking the course, which fits with a learning outcome-based approach.

Reconfigure Assignments

In order to fit the time compression, high performing instructors did a number of things to allow students to complete assignments more readily without compromising the integrity of the course. Best practices include deconstructing single longer assignments into frequent shorter assignments, scheduling the first assignment early in the course in order to have students start immediately, and requiring an assignment outline early in the course that is counted as part of the grade. The latter is most appropriate for larger assignments that may be due later in the course. As well as immersing students in course work earlier, early and more frequent assignments provide important feedback that encourages students to keep up with the course work.

As part of the redesign to a compressed format, best practice instructors suggested rescheduling assignments to fit the “rhythm” of the course by synchronizing assignments with lectures. In particular, attention should be given to scheduling longer assignments and more complex readings over longer breaks in the week. Lee (2002) suggested instructors develop a general evaluation scheme for the course based on the expected outcomes, and place assignments and exams appropriately in the course timeline. In some instances, best practice instructors felt it was prudent to reduce the number of assignments in order to allow students to complete the course requirements in the shorter time frame. The general view was that a reduction in the number or length of assignments did not jeopardize the academic integrity of the course or limit students’ ability to perform.

In addition to reconfiguring reading and written assignments, high performing instructors moved select activities from in-class, as was the case during the full-length term, to outside of class time. For an example, students were required to view films on their own time versus being shown the film in class. This shift increased the available class time for other activities.

Organize and Plan for the Entire Course

Good organization is critical to any successful teaching experience, but it is particularly important when teaching in a compressed format. High performing instructors planned carefully, taking into consideration the compressed schedule. They attempted to anticipate requirements and contingencies for the course, including developing a longer planning horizon. In other words, a teaching plan should be developed for the entire course, including scheduling opportunities for instructor-student interaction.

Once a plan was developed, successful instructors checked their pace regularly against the course plan, including checking with students. One instructor used the analogy of...
Goldie Locks and the Three Bears to describe checking with students about pace, which he did frequently by simply asking them if the pace was too slow, too fast, or just right. Best practice instructors indicated that coaching students on time management was key to helping students keep pace. While students may use time management techniques in full-length semesters, the lessons of time management need to be reviewed for students taking courses in compressed formats because the pace is much faster. This includes stressing the importance of beginning course work early, alerting students to the intensity and faster pace, and warning students not to overextend themselves with too many outside activities.

FOCUS ON TEACHING
As important as it is for students to focus their attention on the course, so it is for instructors. High performing instructors talked about “clearing the decks” in order to be better focused on teaching. Some successful instructors suggested not teaching more than one compressed course at a time. The significance of this warning will vary with experience, but, as is the case with students, teaching more than one course is more time consuming and energy draining, which can have a negative impact on the quality of the teaching/learning experience.

CAPITALIZE ON CONTINUITY AND SMALLER CLASSES
Typically, there is greater continuity of class meetings in compressed format courses. Best practice instructors used the frequency of class meetings as an opportunity to focus on teaching with less interruption than in courses taught in a full-length term where there are longer breaks between classes. This has advantages of creating a more seamless teaching/learning experience, and increasing time-on-task.

Sometimes courses taught in compressed formats have comparatively fewer students. Smaller classes provide a better opportunity to recognize and respond to learner differences, and to engage students more fully in the course. According to Lee (2002), the notion of engagement includes setting a relaxed classroom environment and creating a sense of community through discussion, group work, guided reflection, and other activities that promote student interaction. This, in turn, helps learners to connect with course material, and with the instructor and fellow students. Best practice suggests that instructors schedule class time for discussion, group work, and student interaction to maximize student engagement.

MAXIMIZE SUPPORTS TO STUDENTS
Best practice instructors purposefully made themselves more available to students. In compressed format courses, students do not have as much opportunity to connect with instructors compared to courses in a full-length term. Consequently, it is important for instructors to be more available to students by scheduling longer and more frequent office hours, and planning to arrive early and stay after class. These increased opportunities to meet with students to deal with academic and other course related issues are important to student retention and successful performance in compressed format courses.

High performing instructors provided reading and study guides to support student learning. Guides could include an outline of the textbook chapters and readings that students must read (primary importance) versus those that students should read (secondary importance), plus a list of discussion/reflection questions to help students focus on key issues. Another option is to arrange shared reading where not every student is responsible for all readings, but rather each student is assigned selected reading with a responsibility to report to the class.

Best practice instructors prepared handouts of lecture notes or slides for students. While note taking may be considered work that students should be doing, handouts of this type ensure students have the basic information contained in lectures and presentations, which is particularly important in the faster pace of compressed format courses. As well, this practice gives instructors the opportunity to shift class time from information giving to facilitating more interaction and discussion with students.

Maintain Expectations and Standards
High performing instructors were clear that expectations and standards should not be lowered in courses taught in compressed formats. In their view, redesigning a course, selectively determining reading requirements, and adjusting assignments and tests did not result in lowering standards and expectations. On the contrary, many exemplary instructors attributed these changes to creating a better learning experience for students in courses taught in compressed formats.

CAUTION ON TEACHING IN COMPRESSED FORMATS
Best practice instructors recommended not teaching a course for the first time in a compressed format. Without a good grasp of the content and the processes of teaching, it is difficult to make the necessary decisions to ensure success in a compressed format. This is particularly important for less experienced instructors; less experienced in teaching...
generally, and teaching in a compressed format specifically.

**Concluding Comments**

Instructors were asked to construct a metaphor that was illustrative of teaching in compressed format courses. One instructor used a coffee metaphor, “teaching [in a compressed format] is like drinking a cup of espresso versus drinking a cup of American coffee.” Another talked in terms of acting in a play, “teaching is like being in play, you are interacting with the audience [students], but it’s a different type of play [in a compressed format], it’s more intense and I am on the stage for longer.” While a third offered an image of jars of soup, “the content of the course is like a quart jar of soup; [compressed formats] require that you fit the soup into a smaller jar, but as you attempt to get the soup into the smaller jar some spills over; you have to be okay will some broth spilling, letting some broth go, but you need to be skilled enough to ensure that the hearty components of soup get into the smaller jar.”

These metaphors represent different perspectives on teaching in a compressed format; more concentrated, more intense, and more attention to course redesign. The best practices outlined focus on these features, and provide those teaching in compressed formats with guidance on how to maximize the quality of instruction. As indicated earlier, the quality of the learning experience of courses taught in compressed formats is at the least comparable to courses taught in the full-length term when instructional quality is high. Adopting best practices, those practices judged exemplary, can help to improve teaching performance and, in turn, the quality of the learning experience.

It is interesting to note that little attention was given by the selected best practice instructors to the use of technology when teaching courses in compressed formats. Instructors were asked to describe how technology was used when teaching in compressed format courses (used differently or use of different technology). Other than basic teaching aids, instructors did not use technology to assist their teaching in compressed format courses, which they indicated was also the case in courses taught in the full-length term. Given the current discussion about technology for teaching and learning in post-secondary institutions, this is somewhat surprising. For example, the use of blended learning approaches (the integration of face-to-face and online instruction) is gaining attention with promises of enhanced learning environments for students. There is reason to believe that blending face-to-face instruction with instructional technology may be helpful in developing and teaching courses in compressed formats.

**Reference**

The objective of this article is to share some experiences we have in Brazil about the insertion of information and communication technologies (ICT) in the educational context. We are going to discuss some of the implications of this insertion in face-to-face, virtual and blended contexts. Even they have their similarities and differences, we want to call your attention to some points that are essential when thinking about technologies in the educational context: continuous and critical formation, interaction, collaboration, and sense of community.

Can we change familiar forms and routines of literacy education, of using technologies and get away from the syndrome of the “new wine in old bottles”? Do we want to leave behind some of our prejudices or traditional conceptions that the teacher is the one who teaches and the student the one who learns? Is it possible nowadays to continue depositing information inside students’ heads when information is available everywhere, especially on the internet? How can we change information into knowledge, to transform data into something pertinent to our lives, to share and construct new ways of interacting, communicating and producing meaning in a critical way?

How can we deal with all these complexities which the digital society offers us, where space and time barriers are broken, and different logics of dealing with knowledge are emerging? What are our challenges? What roles should we assume as educators, which conceptions of learning do we construct when dealing with ICT and how can we manage with all these complex contexts under a globalization perspective?

**Teacher Preparation**

Thinking about the pre-service teachers at undergraduate courses, future teachers at schools full of technologies, we started offering a discipline focusing on the insertion of ICT at educational contexts. Our aim was not just teaching how to deal with the ICT but also to talk about them, their implications of teaching and learning processes, and which conceptions of education support those contexts. It happened at the university, face-to-face classes, at the laboratories of technologies, where pre-service teachers could not just use the ICT but also discuss them.

From all the discussions we had by using the MOODLE virtual environment with its tools of communication, such as the forum, chat, e-mail, messages and wiki, we could understand as a fundamental point the necessity of a continuous teacher formation based on critical thinking. We agree with Sampaio & Leite (1999) when they pointed out that teachers need to dominate the technological language and its technological literacy, but not just the mechanical use of the resources, but also the critical domain of the technological language. When people are not able to interpret information and the different languages which the technology uses critically, the human-technology relationship becomes another factor of social inequality. It is necessary to prepare the teacher to use pedagogical technologies by training citizens to be active in the current society.
FEEDBACK FROM ONLINE COURSES

We used the MOODLE virtual environment to offer some undergraduate courses through distance education. Almost all of the students mentioned how the communication tools enhanced student interactions and collaboration. For them, interaction and collaboration are fundamental at the learning process as they can promote construction of knowledge from different points of view, considering individual and collective conceptions. Figueiredo points out (2006) that collaborative learning makes students more reflexive, by developing their intellectual and affective abilities as well as promoting interaction and autonomy. He also states that in the net environments, students, members of a community, feel that construction of their knowledge is a collective adventure – an adventure where knowledge is built, but also where they contribute to build others’ knowledge.

We believe, according to Freire (1993, p.9), men/women learn the reality by a net of collaboration, in which one helps one another to develop, at the same time he/she develops himself/herself. Everybody learns together and in collaboration. Nobody trains anybody or nobody educates himself: men/women train themselves in communion, mediated by the perception of the world.

COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Within this net of collaboration, as a group we have been participating in GETED since 2006. The group is composed of professionals from different Institutions of higher Education (private or public) and also from schools, teachers, students, researchers, coordinators, supervisors, all of them concerned about sharing and constructing knowledge relating to ICT and virtual environments in the teaching and learning processes. We have face-to-face and virtual meetings by using NING and MOODLE environments.

From the data registered through the ICT tools, we could understand how important is to share information, conceptions, insights, ideas; to discuss topics we are interested in; to create and recreate ways of dealing with knowledge; to be connected to others with different perceptions of the world; to start thinking being a member of a community and to develop a sense of identity. That is what Wenger et al (2002) call a community of practice.

In a community of practice, people spend time together, share information, insight, and advice, help each other solve problems, discuss their situations, their aspirations, and their needs, ponder common issues, explore ideas, develop personal relationships and establish ways of interacting, even develop a common sense of identity (Wenger et al, 2002).

Teachers and students being together in a community can diminish the gap which exists between the digital natives and the immigrant ones, that is, “... a gap exists between our youth and those who are attempting to teach to – a gap that is not only forcing adults to become more technology-savvy but also to explore different theories and means by which to deliver education online to youth…” (Palloff & Pratt, 2007, p.16).
What we want to believe is that people are still more important than technologies. We agree with Palloff & Pratt (2007, p.64) that “Online education requires more than a software package that allows an institution to offer coursework online. In any setting, whether academic, organizational, or corporate, it is people who are using the machinery that makes the course go”. They add: “The human element, therefore, will inevitably play a role in the electronic classroom, particularly as we work toward the purpose for being together online” (p.64).

New possibilities of teaching and learning appear, both in the face-to-face and the virtual and blended contexts. They are not related exclusively to the use of the technologies of communication and information, but mainly to our pedagogical concepts, to our personal and collective relationships, to our collaborative and participative roles and to critical and continuous literacy. The ICT can offer us space to interact, to dialogue, to share and construct knowledge, but it also depends on our commitment, responsibility, protagonism, and participation to develop our and others learning processes.

(Continued from page 6)

REFERENCES

Freire, P., 1993, Políticia e educação, Cortez, São Paulo
Figueiredo, F., 2006, A aprendizagem colaborativa de línguas, 1ª ed. Ed. da UFG, Goiânia
Palloff, R. M. & Pratt, K., 2007, Building Online Learning Communities: effective strategies for the virtual classroom, 2ND ed, United States of America: Jossey-Bass

Dr. Maria Christina Lopez is a professor at the Education Post-Graduation Programme UCDB (Dom Bosco Catholic University) in Mato Grosso do Sul, Brazil. Leader of the Group Research & Studies about Educational Technology & Distance Education (GETED). Visiting Professor at the University of Manitoba at the Family Social Department, Faculty of Human Ecology.
Until now, much has been said and done about the relation between foreign language teaching and culture (Byram & Morgan, 1994; Tavares & Cavalcanti, 1996). The studies developed on this topic have contributed to widen aspects of foreign language teaching, bringing deeper thoughts in promoting discussion on themes such as ideology, identity, beliefs, and prejudice within classroom discourse.

Here I would like to present the theoretical and the methodological orientations towards the use of an intercultural approach to teaching English as an additional language. The intercultural approach is used with undergraduate pre-service students of the Languages course at the Federal University of Alagoas, in the Northeast of Brazil. The principal concerns of applying this approach are: 1) to investigate how we can relate language and culture in EFL classroom taking into account ideas that come from Critical Literacy and Applied Linguistics which defend the construction of third places in students’ foreign language learning and the discussion about World Englishes; 2) to analyze how this process take place in a focused and localized context; and 3) to observe how students develop discourse in this situation. Most of these concerns are related to a critical literacy approach of teaching and learning English as a foreign language in the so-called “pheriferical” countries, such as Brazil, with the objective of dealing with language as social practice, focusing on critical thinking and social context. The main authors that contribute to the development of this idea are: Kramsch (1993, 1998), Pennycook (1994), Thompson (1995), Canagarajah (1999), Bauman (2001); Kumaravadivelu (2006), Phillipson (1992), Hallet (2005), Bhambra (2003), Moita Lopes (2006), Brydon (2010).

The methodological aspects follow an ethnographic approach, using, more specifically, action research. This research is related to the study of culture and new literacies and their impact on the teacher’s critical formation in contemporary foreign language teaching, particularly in the teaching of English in Brazil.

The use of an intercultural approach takes part of a larger research entitled “Language policy and cultural literacy: new trends to the teacher’s critical formation in EFL at the state of Alagoas”, a project related to the research group “Observatory of Language in Use” (OBSERVU) which was created in 2004.

Observu is also related to two projects: an ongoing collaboration with the National project of Teacher’s formation on the new theories of new literacies and multiliteracies: critical teaching of foreign languages in public schools coordinated by Prof.Dr. Lynn Mario T. Menezes de Souza and Prof. Dr. Walkyria Monte Mór. And, an international research partnership dedicated to the cross-sector co-creation and mobilization of knowledge between Canada and Brazil within the emerging field of promoting transnational literacies in...
global contexts named Brazil/Canada Knowledge Exchange: Developing Transnational Literacies, coordinated by Prof. Dr. Diana Brydon. There has been a slow shift in curriculum practice from taking and seeing English as a monolingual enterprise to a language always in translation and to viewing it as World Englishes.

The term cultural literacy is related to a social practice in which the learner of FL creates meaning to the gaps that may appear between the culture of her native language and the additional languages that she is in contact. These meanings, in terms of English teaching, are presented in a World Englishes perspective. In EFL classes we should use themes that stimulate discussions that involve contemporary aspects, such as: transnational cultures, identity, history, power, tolerance, prejudice, post-colonialism, resistance, gender.

Most of these ideas were developed based on critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy scholars support the construction of meaning through invention and re-invention, thinking and reflection, dialogue and awareness, cultural and political resistance towards the status quo (Freire, among others). Critical literacy (CL) is one of the major pillars of critical pedagogy. CL is not only related to the mastery of encoding and decoding language but it is an educational approach through which critical pedagogy is implemented. It was long ago when literacy was related to reading and writing abilities; most of the time developing what Freire’s calls functional illiterates.

Within the concept of critical literacy, the teaching and learning of languages should be related to the social construction of the self by acknowledging different cultural ways of seeing, describing and explaining the world. CL also involves the development of historical, political and active beings that are conscious that society and reality are constructed within specific power relations (Tavares & Cavalcanti, 2010). I hope the ideas that I have written here might contribute to a reflection about our own way of teaching and learning in high education.

**REFERENCES**


Brydon, D. 2010. ‘Knowledge work in the era of the global turn’. Conference at the Umea-Manitoba partnership conference: from cultural capital to culture capital: understanding the impact of changes to our cultural climate.


Menezes de souza, L. M. T., & monte mór, W. 2009. Projeto de formação de professores nas teorias dos novos letramentos e multiletramentos: o ensino crítico de línguas estrangeiras na escola, USP.


Thompson, J. B. 1995. Ideologia e cultura moderna: teoria social na era dos meios de comunicação de massa. 5 ed. SP: Vozes.

**Dr. Roseanne Tavares is a professor at the Federal University of Alagoas, working at the Language Postgraduate Programme, and a visiting researcher at the University of Manitoba working with the Centre for Globalization and Cultural Studies.**
A bit about Brazil

Brazil's population is currently estimated at approximately 190 million. It has borders with eight Spanish speaking countries in South America and it's the fifth largest country in the world. Its official language is Portuguese, although there are, in addition, at least 180 indigenous languages and many communities that speak German, Italian and Japanese. As Kachru (1988) calls, Brazil belongs to the expanding circle of countries with respect to the use and status of English.

The Faculty of languages studies (Fale) which belongs to the Federal University of Alagoas exists, including the teaching of English and French, since 1961 and it is mostly related to teachers' formation. There are 200 undergraduate students of English who are taught by 12 professors who usually apply the communicative approach in their classrooms.

HYBRID LEARNING: COURSE DESIGN AND FACULTY DEVELOPMENT

Date: March 24, 2011
Provided by: University Teaching Services & Extended Education
Location: 207 Isbister Building
Time: 12:00 - 1:30 pm

Hybrid learning models are one of the fastest-growing delivery modes in higher education. The growth of hybrid models has been fueled in large part by students with differing technology comfort levels, institutions with physical space constraints, and an increase in the demand for more scheduling options.

Discussion topics will include:

- An overview of the hybrid model and the 21st-century learner
- Guidelines and best practices for institutional implementation: marketing to students, student readiness, and quality assurance
- A ready-to-use hybrid redesign program

Instructor: Veronica Diaz, Associate Director, Educause Learning Initiative (ELI) and Former Instructional Technology Manager, Maricopa Center for Learning and Instruction, Maricopa Community Colleges

To register for this Academic Impressions WEB CONFERENCE please go to:
http://intranet.umanitoba.ca/academic_support/uts/workshops/facultywinter2011.htm
Congratulations to the following for completing the CHET Certification in Higher Education Teaching Program:

Graduating from the CHET program in October 2010 were:

Maryam Al-Shukri, Obstetrics & Gynecology
Maziar Heidari, Electrical & Computer Engineering
Kristin Klassen, Applied Health Sciences
Khanh Hoa Nguyen, Pharmacology
Majid Ostadrahimi, Electrical & Computer Engineering
James Robson, Natural Resources Institute
Thi Huong Ta, Natural Resources Institute

IN GRADUATE STUDY FOR THE 21ST CENTURY (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), Gregory Colon Semenza notes that “poor time management and inadequate organization skills” often create the major barrier to a successful graduate school experience. To help you manage your time and your work materials, we’ve summarized some of his suggestions.

**Date books** may be out of date (or style) but… it’s important to have something that will help you keep track of your appointments and deadlines. Here’s a great tip: create a one-page weekly TO-DO listing of your deadlines, appointments and tasks, and post it somewhere that’s easily accessible.

Use your computer as an organizational tool. Create a folder for each area of your work: research, teaching, coursework and your academic portfolio. In your research folder, begin developing your list of references and keep copies of any papers you’ve written for any seminar you’ve taken. Bookmark important websites and electronic databases like Academic Search Premier available on the UNL Libraries resources page. In your teaching folder, keep copies of your syllabi and lesson plans for every course you teach. Begin developing your teaching statement and save each draft (you never know when you’ll want to return to an earlier version). Save future job search materials like your CV and other documentation materials in your academic portfolio folder. The time you put into organizing these materials now will save you a great deal of time later.

Establish a routine. As much as possible try to follow a regular daily schedule so that by the time you are ready to write your dissertation your work habits will be well established. Doing so will allow you to coordinate your activities with those of your adviser, graduate colleagues, and family and friends, and will alleviate the feeling that someone is always demanding your time.

Prioritize. Prioritize. Prioritize. In graduate school, you need to be very protective of your research and writing time. It doesn’t matter when you set aside time to write or plan your next teaching lecture. It DOES matter that you recognize that these tasks are more important than some of your other tasks, like checking e-mail. Save the more mundane tasks for low energy times. If you’re a doctoral or master’s student who is expected to complete a thesis, spend the bulk of your day on research related activities. And learn to say “no” to friends, family, maybe even your graduate adviser. Managing your time in one area of your professional life will help you do it in other areas, too.

Having said that, **be reasonable about what you can do and when.** If you have to work at night or on weekends, try to choose a time that minimizes disruptions of your personal and family time.

**Use holiday breaks to focus on research.** Stay near the university during the summer. If you stay on campus and spend time on your research and writing, you’ll have a much better chance of finishing in a timely manner.

**Maintain some sort of daily physical activity during graduate school.** Exercise can help you structure your day and release stress, contributes to greater confidence, keeps you healthy and clears a space in your mind for those “aha” moments that help you break through barriers in your thinking. Hobbies are good, too. Go to a UNL basketball game. Attend a show at the Lied Center. Learn to knit (yes, there are health benefits to knitting). Like people who exercise regularly, people who take time to enjoy their favorite hobbies tend to experience less stress.

**Begin working on your curriculum vitae now.** By building your vita early in your graduate career, you’ll be able to track your accomplishments while noting the gaps in your experience.
Identify yourself.
Faculty interact with a large number of students every semester. At the beginning of your message, refer to the class you’re taking with the faculty member or how the faculty member knows you, especially when you’re contacting someone who doesn’t know you very well. Conclude your message with more than just your first name. Provide your full name and NUID number.

Avoid text acronyms.
If you’re responding to e-mails on a Blackberry or smart phone, it’s tempting to abbreviate or shorten words and phrases (e.g., u instead of you). However, abbreviations are easy to misinterpret or may be completely misunderstood.

Beware of your tone.
Perhaps the most difficult part of writing an e-mail is achieving the right tone. If you’re writing an especially sensitive e-mail, let your final draft sit overnight and reread it before sending to make sure the message is appropriate. You also can ask a colleague or friend to read your message and offer feedback about how the message might be perceived. Remember, e-mail creates a permanent record of your communication that you have no control over after you click the send button. So if you’re worried about the tone of your e-mail, you might want to skip the message altogether and ask for a meeting with the faculty member.

Keep it simple.
Long e-mails with too many questions can get confusing. If your message is more than one or two paragraphs, rethink the purpose of the message. You may want to start with the most important question or topic. A lengthy e-mail may be a signal that the subject warrants a meeting rather than a written communication.

E-mail communication is an important part of building positive relationships with your professors. It’s always worthwhile to take the time to make sure your messages are clear and appropriate.

Resources


Thank you to the University of Nebraska - Lincoln for permission to use these articles (Tips on Time Management & Organization and Five Quick Tips for Writing Effective E-Mails), which can be found in Graduate Connections (November 2010) - A Newsletter for UNL Graduate Students published by the Office of Graduate Studies.

http://www.unl.edu/gradstudies/current/dev/newsletter/
In today’s world, we have so much technology, and so much of it is available to the masses.

The proof? Consider how many times in 2010 the following question was asked by a 13 year child to their parents: “When will I be getting a cell phone?”. Note the lack of first asking first IF they will be getting one. It is practically an expectation today that technology will be available to us, and to our children. With everyone in the world having such an ability to be connected at a moments notice, we have a remarkable opportunity as teachers (and presenters in general) that no teacher has ever had before: a way to connect with students (or those we are talking to) at any moment, instantly, and across boundaries like distance. Further, we have the ability to get instant feedback from masses of people instantly, and without worry for boundaries like distance. Feedback from the students on how they are doing, and allow them to ask questions, despite feeling embarrassed or not being very good at public speaking. Even 10 years ago this kind of feedback would have had to wait until after class, but today we have backchanneling. Wikipedia defines backchanneling as “the practice of using networked computers to maintain a real-time online conversation alongside live spoken remarks.”

The iClicker.

To get started backchanneling today, consider the iClicker. For those who are unfamiliar with it, the iClicker is what is known as a Classroom Response System (or CRS). The unit is a small device that a student can purchase (available in the bookstore) that professors can set up and use in their classroom for backchanneling. When a professor poses a question to their students, the student can press a button on the iClicker corresponding to their response and their response will be received on a base receiver (installed in advance in the classroom by the university), and then save the data on a computer or USB thumb drive. Alternatively, the data can be presented graphically to the class. Further, the iClicker data can be matched to student’s names and id’s, allowing the awarding of marks for their use.

The iClicker, as a CRS, is a device created specifically for the purpose of backchanneling. The fact that such a device exists is a strong indication that backchanneling is here to stay. Further, a quick exploration of the official iClicker website at http://www.iclicker.com/, we find that the iClicker is currently used in 679 higher education institutions across the United States and Canada, including the University of Manitoba (for instance, see http://tinyurl.com/6j8rbnz for a pdf that the Physics department created for PHYS 1020). This tells me that they are meeting a need that many universities see: finding a way for instructors to use technology to instantly interact with students. Bottom line: **professors WANT to backchannel (and lots are).**

More Advanced Backchanneling

The iClicker is a device designed specifically for the purpose of backchanneling and since there is no other reason a student would have one, if a professor wants to use it in the classroom, they must require students to purchase one. This is certainly not ideal. However, one does not necessarily need to use such a specific device for backchanneling. In my last article in this newsletter, I wrote about being open minded in the use of technology for...
education (see http://tinyurl.com/68s9nsa). So if we don’t want students to have to purchase something new, consider what they have already. Consider the following scenario: picture everyone in a particular classroom has a laptop (this is not completely unheard of, especially with smaller classes). Today, most rooms on campus have wireless Internet access. Put these together and you have the ability to have instant backchannelling for free. Simply create a chat room (for instance using TodaysMeet.com, Chatzy.com or TinyChat.com), get all the students to go to the chat room on their laptops, and project it onto a screen or wall in the room. You now have instant feedback with any and every student in the room, whether there are 3 or 3000 (in fact, in such a situation with 300 students, you might get overwhelmed with the shear amount of feedback!). Now you might say to yourself, “I teach such large classes that it will rarely if ever happen that every student has a laptop”. Granted. I will say however that you would be surprised if you asked how many students have them. So what about in a class where students don’t all have laptops? Well, the goal is to still use what they have. So what other device to students have that allow them a connection to the outside world? Of course the main one is a cell phone. Cell phones are even more common than laptops, after all, you can walk into a wireless store today and buy a new Smartphone for zero dollars! With today’s technology, having a Smartphone is very nearly as good as having a laptop, and with regards to backchanneling specifically, laptops and cell phones are nearly interchangeable. Consider for instance Wiffiti.com. Wiffiti creates a wall where comments can be posted, and comments can be posted there using either a laptop or quickly using SMS on a cell phone (text messages)...and I bet you thought that text messages were just for kids...Wiffiti is designed specifically for backchanneling, and so creates a slick full screen interface that can be projected on a screen quite nicely. Wiffiti also connects through Twitter, so one can interact with a Wiffiti board through text messages directly, through twitter directly (at twitter.com), or even through text messages via twitter (the most common way that people interact with twitter).

Or why not try Polleverwhere.com? PollEverywhere takes the entire functionality of the iClicker and uses cell phones as the medium instead of the iClicker device itself. As well, the functionality is completely free for up to 30 participants. This is a great alternative to the iClicker, though if you want to use some of the more advanced capabilities of the iClicker, PollEverywhere can do it, it would just cost you. But for sporadic use, PollEverywhere is useful. Note also that students using this may be charged for sending a text message (25 cents or similar) if they do not have a data plan on their cell phone, however many students text regularly and have data plans.

Further Exploration
There are many other tools you can use to backchannel, some of which are made specifically for this purpose, while some can be used by those who have an open mind. Here are some other web apps you might be interested in checking out:

Edmodo (http://www.edmodo.com)
Google Wave (http://wave.google.com)
FriendFeed (http://www.friendfeed.de/)

Always keep that open mind and always keep in mind the following two rules: if a particular technology motivates students to learn, then it should be used, and used immediately. If on the other hand a particular technology demotivates students to learn, it should be thrown out immediately. Motivation is key, and for many, technology can be a great motivator, but don’t just try to use technology for the sake of using it.

There are hundreds, if not thousands, of new services popping up every day, and I am keeping an eye out for those that may be of use to me in my teaching. Please let me know if you find any new ones of interest! I would love to hear from you.

Email me at:
Robert.Borgersen@umanitoba.ca, and remember to check out my Technology For Education blog at:
http://edtech.robertborgersen.info/.

Thanks!

Rob
Nominations are accepted all year for these annual awards provided by the Dr. and Mrs. H.H. Saunderson Award fund and from the bequest of Mrs. Olive Beatrice Stanton. Each award is valued at $2000, two from the Saunderson Fund and one from the Stanton Fund.

This is the 44th year that nominations have been invited for the Stanton Award for Excellence in Teaching, and the 41st year for the Dr. and Mrs. H.H. Saunderson Award for Excellence in Teaching.

Instructors may be nominated in any year but those who have received either the Saunderson or the Stanton awards in the previous 10 years are not eligible for selection.

Please note: all students, both continuing & graduating, can nominate an outstanding teacher. You can only nominate one professor per year.

Note the nomination deadlines listed on the nomination form at the link below.

If you are a registered student, an upcoming or recent graduate, or a colleague of an outstanding teacher and wish to make a nomination, submit the online nomination form or print the nomination form (pdf) and mail or fax it to:

Saunderson & Stanton Awards Committee,
Financial Aids & Awards, 422 University Centre,
The U of M, Winnipeg, MB R3T 2N2 or (fax) 204.474.7543
http://myuminfo.umanitoba.ca/index.asp?sec=87&too=600&eve=29&fid=949
http://www.facultyfocus.com/topic/articles/teaching-professor-blog/

Nov 18, 2010 Solutions to Social Loafing
Jan 13, 2011 More on Students and Reading
Jan 27, 2011 Teaching Students to ask Better Questions

http://edcre sourcereview.blogspot.com/


Technology for Education
Discovering new ways to use technology in education, with an emphasis on college level sciences
Robert Borgersen (U of M - Mathematics) Education blog at: http://edtech.robertborgersen.info/

OEdb Top 100 Education Blogs
Online Education Database
http://oedb.org/library/features/top-100-education-blogs#college

Blog Topics
College | E-Learning | Education News | Education Policy | Internet
Culture | Learning | Library and Research | Specialty | Teaching | Technology
BOOK REVIEW
reviewed by Cheryl Kristjanson, UTS

Classroom Communication: Collected Readings for Effective Discussion and Questioning edited by Rose Ann Neff and Maryellen Weimer is an introductory resource for faculty members who are just beginning to incorporate discussion in their classroom. It is intended to assist you in overcoming the tendency of students to sit back and wait to be entertained. It is organized as a short “how to” manual with topics that cover; starting a discussion, different structures for discussion, matching the use of discussion to your educational objectives, formulating questions and evaluating your students. The articles provide you with examples of when to use discussion, how to organize your students as well as the pros and cons of each type of discussion method. There is a particularly useful section on grading graduate student seminars. This book will be helpful to you if you are looking for suggestions on how to get started with discussions or how to improve your questioning techniques.


Ask the Director

Do you have a quick question on teaching and learning ?

Email: cheryl_kristjanson@umanitoba.ca

and receive a response within 3 working days.
Celebrating Teaching & Teachers

University Teaching Services is Celebrating Teaching & Teachers with the theme of “I Love to Teach” during the month of February 2011. We would like to extend an invitation to members of the U of M teaching community to share their teaching expertise. Describe one or more your most effective teaching practices by completing the “I Love to Teach” contest submission form available at any UTS Faculty Workshop or online at http://intranet.umanitoba.ca/academic_support/uts/Contest.html.

Upon successful completion of the form your name will be added to a draw for an Apple iPad.

The feedback received will be summarized in the Spring 2011 newsletter, Path to Pedagogy.

Send all submissions to friesen2@cc.umanitoba.ca. Submissions due on Feb. 20

The draw for the Apple iPad will be held at 12pm on February 28th. UTS office in 208 - 214 Isbister Building.
Development of Teaching Expertise

Feb 16 Engaging Student Learning with iclickers
Facilitators: Debbie Norman, Zony Marie

Feb 15 Effective Practices for Advising & Mentoring Grad Students
Facilitators: Jennifer MacAvish, Brenda Herr

Mar 2 Developing Effective iclicker Questions
Facilitator: Norm Hammer

Mar 7 Sharing the Wealth: Using Reference Management Tools
Facilitator: Barry Braksma

Mar 18 A Syllabus Students will Read
Facilitator: Eunice Friesen

Mar 22 Tips for Teaching Large Classes
Facilitator: Rachael Pettigrew

For more information & to register please visit:
http://intranet.umanitoba.ca/academic_support/uts/workshops/facultywinter2011.htm