

# Notes of Excellence

from the Center for Teaching Excellence



Fall 2010



» **Welcome to Mary Kayler** (CEHD), our fall 2010 Mason Footsteps visiting scholar! Dr. Kayler has been working on evaluating web resources on critical thinking and identifying assessment resources for the *Students as Scholars* QEP. We are grateful for our semester of collaboration.

## » 2010 Innovations in Teaching & Learning Conference

On October 4th, the CTE hosted our second annual Innovations in Teaching & Learning conference, with over 200 participants throughout the day! Internationally renowned cultural anthropologist, Dr. Michael Wesch (Kansas State University), was our keynote speaker this year and gave two presentations, "The World Remixed: How New Media Mediate Our World" and "From Knowledgeable to Knowledge-able: Beyond Critical Thinking & Information Literacy in New Media Environments." In addition to Dr. Wesch's two presentations, Mason faculty members held 33 presentation sessions and 8 teaching table sessions. Teaching Excellence Award winners and finalists facilitated conversations at lunch tables.

We thank all the student, staff, and faculty participants whose attendance gave great energy and enthusiasm to the conference. We are especially grateful to the CTE Coordinating Circle, and particularly Shelley Reid, our conference co-chair. Her commitment to the growth and success of the ITL conference is commendable!

## » An Update from the QEP Planning Committee

Thank you to those who reviewed the draft of the *Students as Scholars* QEP and provided us with your input. Impressively, the QEP Café ([masonqep.onmason.com](http://masonqep.onmason.com)) received over 1,700 page views between the time the draft was posted on October 1st and our deadline for feedback on November 10th!

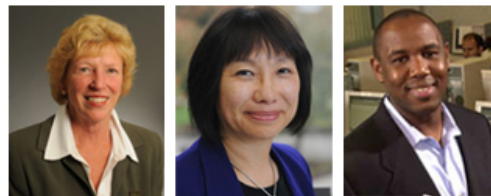
Mason's QEP will foster a culture of student scholarship through increased participation in and celebration of scholarly activities. Students will see their education as a process of scholarly inquiry, where scholarship is valued as a core practice of the Mason student experience. This topic was selected and developed, based on the feedback and input of faculty, students, staff, alumni, and administrators from across the university over the past two and a half years.

We are currently working to incorporate your helpful suggestions into our plan, and copies of the final version to be available in February. Early next semester, our goal will be to continue raising awareness about the QEP before the SACS review team comes to campus in late March to conduct their on-site visit. Once approved, implementation of the activities in our plan will begin in fall 2011.

Please visit our website ([qep.gmu.edu](http://qep.gmu.edu)) for more information on the QEP process and updates about our progress!

## 2010 SCHEV Outstanding Faculty Award Nominees

We are pleased to announce that 7 Mason faculty members have been nominated for the 2011 SCHEV Outstanding Faculty Awards. These awards recognize superior accomplishments in teaching, research, and public service and are the Commonwealth's highest honor for faculty at Virginia's institutes of higher education. Our nominees are Sandra Cheldelin (ICAR), Rita Chi-Ying Chung (CEHD), Kevin Clark (CEHD), Paula Ruth Gilbert (MCL/NCC/WMST), Eden King (PSYC), Linda Monson (MUSI), and Jeff Offutt (CS). Congratulations and good luck to each of our nominees—recipients will be notified in January.



## » Strategies for Success Workshops Introduce Faculty to Teaching at Mason

The CTE offered several New Faculty Workshops—*Strategies for Success*—before the fall semester. Goals of these workshops included helping new faculty to identify characteristics of the Mason student population, construct a Mason course syllabus, formulate strategies to engage students, prepare for the first day of class, find resources to enhance teaching and learning, and direct students to relevant campus resources.

New faculty were invited to attend full or half-day sessions. The full-day workshops featured a panel discussion about the first year of faculty life by Seth Parsons (CEHD), Shannon Portillo (CLS), Matt Rice (GGS), and Sylvia Vitazkova (NCC), which was a highlight of the event. We also collaborated with Human Resources, the Division of Instructional Technology, and the academic units for several New Adjunct Workshops, as a welcome to the university and to get them started with teaching at Mason. We plan to offer new adjunct workshops again before the spring 2011 semester, and we are already thinking about the *Strategies for Success* workshops for the fall!

## >> CTE Website Continues to Evolve

Over the summer, the CTE website ([cte.gmu.edu](http://cte.gmu.edu)) was updated with a new, cleaner look on the homepage, clearer navigation, and the addition of several new features.

On the homepage, the “sticky column” on the right has three tabs. The first tab has CTE News and Announcements, with a regularly updated list of activities and advice related to teaching and learning. The second tab has links to recent news stories about excellence in teaching and learning at Mason, and the third tab links to some excellent blogs about teaching and learning. Watch all of these!

We also implemented a new page under Resources, New Faculty Resources. This page brings together information for new faculty (both full-time and adjunct) to support their teaching, as well as the transition to Mason. The webpage was inspired by the new faculty workshops led by CTE staff before the fall semester.

Lastly, the Resources links were updated and reorganized. Information to help you teach is found in About Teaching and Working with Students. On-campus resources, including policies and student support services, are grouped under Resources for Teaching at Mason. Teaching in the Disciplines is regularly updated.

If you know of something that you would like to see included on our website, please let us know. Bookmark the page—we update regularly!

## >> Curricular Innovation Grant Group (CIG)

The beginning of this academic year brought the second cohort of CIG participants. These faculty members are all being supported by the College of Science (COS) in a collaborative initiative with the CTE to explore, implement and promote innovative instructional materials in the sciences. After a competitive selection process, 7 faculty participants representing 7 different departments were awarded stipends and a course release to plan for their curricular innovations and share ideas. Based on feedback from last year’s participants, this year’s initiative will be expanded such that conversations continue across the full academic year.

## >> Teaching Tips: Teaching Large Classes

Large classes present particular teaching challenges, as they may feel more impersonal and disengaging for students. Students’ participation and attendance in large classes may also decrease as the semester unfolds. Simple strategies and sound practices may help ease some of these challenges and make the large class experience more meaningful for you and your students.

- Arrive early to class to set up and greet students.
- Come to class prepared and organized.
- Make sure that students can hear you well and see the material you present from any angle of the classroom.
- Move about the room and use a variety of presentation techniques to keep students engaged.
- Because students’ attention tends to decrease after 15-20 minutes of the class, break up your lectures with learning activities, such as short discussions, writing prompts, shared problem solving, or demonstrations related to the material.
- Use anecdotes to illustrate concepts.
- Stress how your personal research, scholarship, or creative works influence the content of your class.
- Point out current news, articles, and events that reinforce or enhance what the students are learning.
- Stay for a few minutes after class to talk with students and answer questions.
- Support learning beyond class time with pre-class emails and post-lecture discussion boards.
- Seek feedback midway through the semester, and respond to that feedback in a way that acknowledges your students’ comments.
- Invite students to contact you outside of class, and be clear on your preferred communication methods.

Overall, there is no perfect way to teach large classes, but there are many good methods. Be patient, flexible, and open minded, and experiment with ways to engage your students. In time, you will develop approaches that work better for you and the way you teach your discipline.

For more about teaching large classes, please see the CTE website ([cte.gmu.edu](http://cte.gmu.edu)).

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## >> Critical Thinking Across the Curriculum (CTAC)

Last spring, a group of faculty teaching synthesis classes piloted our first critical thinking (CT) faculty learning community. The group met 6 times over the semester and conversed online to share strategies they use to foster critical thinking in their classes and address the challenges experienced in teaching for critical thinking. Participants were Julie Christensen (MCL), Jeannie Brown Leonard (BIS), Tamara Maddox (CS), Laura Moore (HIST/ARTH), Hugh Sockett (PIA), Jason Warren (COMM), and Susan Shields (DANC).

A number of positive outcomes resulted from this work. The spirited discussions we had in our meetings resulted in experimenting with different approaches and strategies in the classroom. We found it valuable to review the different types of assignments that were designed to foster critical thinking. Each participant received feedback from other members of the group in terms of what their colleagues liked about the assignment, questions raised, and possible suggestions for improvement. The group was also instrumental in revising Mason’s new CT rubric, which was piloted in the summer of 2010 for critical thinking assessment.

Finally, members of the CT faculty learning community presented at the 2010 Innovations in Teaching and Learning conference. Their session engaged participants in a conversation about critical thinking as a developmental process and the essential underpinnings students need to acquire prior to synthesis-level course work. In addition to describing the new CT rubric, they shared data from the university-wide critical thinking assessment occurring in synthesis courses.

Looking forward, we expect another round of fruitful discussions with a new CTAC group this spring. Invitations to all faculty teaching synthesis classes will be sent out shortly. If you are interested in learning more, please contact us at [cte@gmu.edu](mailto:cte@gmu.edu).