

# Notes of Excellence

from the Center for Teaching Excellence



Spring 2010



## »» 2010 David J. King Award

The David J. King award is given annually to a faculty member who has made significant, longstanding contributions to the overall educational excellence of George Mason University. Nominations were submitted for the David J. King award from the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, College of Science, the Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, and the Volgenau School of Information Technology and Engineering.

Our winner for this year is Dr. Paula Ruth Gilbert (MCL/WMST).

## »» 2010 Teaching Excellence Awards

We received forty-two nominations from across the Mason community for the university-wide teaching excellence awards. Nominees were from a range of academic units, including the College of Education and Human Development, College of Health and Human Services, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, College of Visual and Performing Arts, College of Science, School of Management, and the Volgenau School of Information Technology and Engineering.

Our winners this year are Dr. Jose Cortina (PSYC), Dr. Rebecca Fox (CEHD), Dr. Devon Johnson (ADJ), Dr. Tom Owens (MUSI), Dr. Dann Sklarew (ESP), Professor Twila Johnson (ENGL) for General Education, and Dr. Mark Sample (ENGL) for Teaching with Technology.

Congratulations to all of our nominees and winners!

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

After two years of learning from faculty who participated in the early stages of the CTAC initiative, CTE and the Office of Institutional Assessment have been working to integrate critical thinking more broadly into the curriculum. To foster this goal, we collaborated with Associate Provost Rick Davis and the university General Education Committee to integrate critical thinking learning outcomes into the synthesis requirement for general education. To support faculty who are teaching synthesis classes, invitations to participate in a faculty learning community were sent to all faculty members teaching spring synthesis courses. As a result, a diverse group of faculty members have been meeting regularly this spring semester to discuss the strategies they use to foster critical thinking in their classes and address the challenges that they experience. Participants have discussed common readings, provided feedback to each other on assignments, and explored methods for documenting student learning. Faculty received a stipend for participation in this faculty community.

## »» Save the Date!

Our second annual Innovations in Teaching & Learning conference will take place on **Monday, October 4, 2010** in the Research I building (Fairfax Campus).



We are excited to announce that Dr. Michael Wesch (Kansas State University) has agreed to serve as the conference's Distance Education keynote speaker. To learn more about Dr. Wesch, visit (<http://ksuanth.weebly.com/wesch.html>).

## The Center for Teaching Excellence Announces Mason Winner of the 2010 SCHEV Outstanding Faculty Award

We are proud to share that a Mason faculty member has been honored with a statewide Outstanding Faculty Award. Sponsored by the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV), these award winners have been chosen from over 100 candidates from across the state. Mason's 2010 Outstanding Faculty Award winner is:



»» **Dr. Margo Mastropieri** is a University Professor of Special Education in the College of Education and Human Development at George Mason University, where she has taught since 1998. She is interested in how students with disabilities learn in school, and much of her research has focused on cognitive strategies designed to promote learning and retention of school-related information. She has also studied what happens during inclusive instruction with students with disabilities and suggested instructional strategies to facilitate inclusive efforts. Her publications include over 180 journal articles, 48 book chapters, and 28 co-authored or co-edited books. Dr. Mastropieri received a Mason Teaching Excellence award in 2008.

## >> An Update from the QEP Planning Committee

The QEP is coming!

Mason's QEP topic focuses on creating a culture of student scholarship. The committee has defined this as research and creative activities that require active student participation to generate new knowledge or create new works and to communicate the results to a variety of audiences. It was selected last spring, based on feedback from the Mason community. Throughout this year, the committee has continued to meet with groups of students, faculty, and staff to gather ideas and answer questions about the QEP.

Currently, the committee has three subcommittees exploring and developing ideas focused on curricular, co-curricular, and mentored research. We will be writing a draft of our plan over the summer and inviting feedback from the entire Mason community in the fall before making our final revisions. The final proposal will be submitted to SACS and formally reviewed in spring 2011, and we will begin to implement the first elements shortly thereafter.

Many thanks to the many members of the Mason community who have been helping craft this plan!

## >> Teaching Tips: Creating and Using Rubrics

Rubrics make grading easier when you outline before grading exactly what you want to see from the student. When you grade a complex assignment with a rubric, you provide both a grade and feedback to the student. Rubrics work particularly well on grading essays, problems with multiple steps, oral presentations, final papers, and other complex assignments.

For tips about creating and using rubrics, visit our website at ([http://cte.gmu.edu/Teaching/student\\_evaluation.html](http://cte.gmu.edu/Teaching/student_evaluation.html)).

## >> Teaching Tips: Flexibility

As the recent winter weather reminded us, disruptions to our syllabi can come in many forms. Although the interference was frozen rather than viral, the advice on the Flu-Proof Your Course website (<http://doit.gmu.edu/EmergencySection.asp?page=welcome>) helped keep many classes on track. Tips that apply in many situations where flexibility is the key to keeping on track are:

- Identify coursework critical to the learning goals of the course, and match the coursework to technologies that provide students with alternative methods of completion.
- Create your class policies, and present them to your class.
- Use Blackboard to manage your course.
- Distribute documents, assignments, and readings early in the semester.
- Identify the primary method of communication and documentation distribution for making class announcements, streaming live lectures, distributing lecture notes, conducting office hours, and providing feedback.
- Identify how you will allow students to submit assignments, and take exams and make-up exams.
- Look for ways to structure grading that offer some flexibility.
- Build your technology and teaching expertise.
- Familiarize yourself with technology support on campus.

For examples of how various Mason faculty coped with February's snow storm, be sure to check out Provost Stearns's blog post on "Creative ways that the University was able to combat 'Snowmageddon 2010'" at (<http://provostblog.gmu.edu/archives/190>).

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## >> Curricular Innovation Grant Group (CIG)

This past fall semester, the CTE participated in a collaborative initiative with the College of Science (COS) to explore, implement, and promote innovative instructional materials in the sciences. After a competitive selection process, 11 faculty participants from across COS met regularly to discuss their teaching innovations and to share ideas. At the end of the semester, over 90% of the faculty participants agreed or strongly agreed that participation in the CIG group:

- provided ideas to increase the effectiveness of their teaching,
- helped them think about how to increase student achievement in relation to their course innovation,
- helped them learn more about how their curricular innovation may enhance teaching and learning,
- developed their sense of community with their colleagues around specific teaching projects,
- provided ideas that will increase students' enthusiasm about their course,
- broadened their view of teaching as an intellectual pursuit, and
- energized them as faculty members.

The results of our evaluation showed that what participants valued most was the opportunity to sit with colleagues and share ideas about their teaching and teaching innovations. As one participant noted, "I really valued the sense of community amongst our group. Just to sit around and to talk about different ideas that I have not previously considered was very refreshing and stimulating." With the success of this first cohort, the COS has graciously agreed to support another group of CIG participants for the upcoming academic year.