

# Faculty Forum

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# Faculty Forum

*From the Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning*

WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

CULLOWHEE, NORTH CAROLINA

Vol. 21, No. 1

September 1, 2008

## **Let's Grow WCU While Supporting the Region**

At the spring faculty meeting in 2008, our Chancellor shared a possible vision for a changing Cullowhee—a whitewater park, a revitalized "back entrance" to campus and a town center at the current location of the Camp Building. In return, this is the time to discuss our options as a university. We are fortunate to have some time for input and in that the administration has been soliciting feedback via survey. We encourage all faculty to provide that input; as we do so, though, perhaps we could also take into account the following concerns.

To begin with, few of us are opposed to growth. Small businesses can prosper in Cullowhee as the university grows, adding vitality, employment and profit to the community while providing incentives to students to spend more time on campus. This is the kind of growth which the Cullowhee Revitalization Endeavor (CURVE) supports.

However, the Chancellor also mentioned the possibility of a Moe's Burrito, a Barnes and Noble, or a Starbuck's Coffee, and here I do have qualms. How could any professor object to a bookstore or coffeeshop, you may ask? But it's not hard if the businesses in question can be expected to attempt to undersell local businesses, to hire cheaper and less qualified labor to provide the bare minimum of service, to offer a standardized range of selections, and to waste maximum resources while doing so. Such companies' practices are too often oppositional to a regional comprehensive university's mission: to make ever greater efforts to support the peoples and economy of *this* region.

Of these issues, the most troubling is the possibility of WCU setting up chains in competition with unique local businesses. Sylva already has a local independent bookstore, City Lights; its owners have supported campus literary festivals since their inception, and supported our visiting writers' series for many years before that, ordering and buying the authors' books and sitting for untold hours outside of our events to provide them to audiences. City Lights has further accepted our interns from the Professional Writing program, providing crucial hands-on training and pre-graduation business experience. Cullowhee also has a coffeeshop and bakery, the Mad Batter. Like City Lights, the Mad Batter has built its business from scratch, providing quality, responsible products and superior service. Both businesses have made a point of serving WCU; the Mad Batter actually schedules its vacations around Western's. And Cullowhee has recently acquired an independent burrito shop, Rolling Stone, owned and run by faculty members.

A secondary issue is that Cullowhee and Jackson County have a unique environment: personal, distinctive, independent, memorable. Many of the students who come here speak of our small-town atmosphere as a "draw." It's true that others toss around pejorative comments about the lack of night life, malls, and consumer opportunities; it can be very fashionable, when we're young, to disparage wherever we find ourselves—and yet, here they still are, with the highest test scores in our history. It would be easy—too easy—to mock or demean our students, to treat them as a blind market force, to say, "Oh, they don't care about anything but consumption; they won't patronize City Lights; they only want McDonald's." But I think we can all see that this is not necessarily true, that, given the chance, our students can be at

least as progressive as faculty or administration. After all, they are here, often holding a reusable mug of fair-trade organic coffee from the Batter or a fresh burrito from Rolling Stone. Our students, like most of us, want to do good while also doing well, when they understand the choices. But how could we criticize students for preferring the generic, if that were all we provided?

The constantly-increasing success of downtown Asheville, which has refused to admit chain businesses, suggests that we don't need to become Charlotte to be attractive, nor do we need to endanger our local businesses to keep up with the times. The most forward-thinking universities and communities capitalize upon their existing strengths to put forward a unique identity, not to copy everyone else's. If the new town center were to offer opportunities and incentives first to business owners who already have a stake in the community, rather than to chains with none, we could continue to offer students a distinct identity and atmosphere while even more actively engaging with the community which has been so good to us.

Indeed, if "engagement" is our watchword, offering aggressive chains a chance to destroy these businesses is perhaps not the best way to demonstrate it. It behooves an engaged Western not to force a single vision upon the community, but to grow in ways which support what the community already has, and what it already wants. The success of our local businesses suggests that the community (including our students) does want them.

As the Chancellor has noted, we are on the cusp of change: changes in state standards, in technology, in development, and in our region. We are fortunate in that the Chancellor sees that a revitalized Cullowhee can be good for everyone, but it rests with all of us together to be sure that it IS good for everyone, not only for the shareholders of Barnes and Noble.

Catherine Carter, English

co-signed

Elizabeth Addison, English  
Mary Adams, English  
Colin Christopher, English  
Annette Debo, English  
Deidre Elliott, English  
Mimi Fenton, English

Brian Gastle, English  
Karen Greenstone, English  
Leah Hampton, English  
Jennifer Harris, English  
Elizabeth Heffelfinger, English  
Eric Hendrix, English  
Brent Kinser, English

Gayle Miller, English  
Mae Miller-Claxton, English  
Terry Nienhuis, English  
Chandrika Rogers, English  
Laura Wright, English

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Hello everyone:

The *Faculty Forum* has been in publication at WCU for 20 years with little change to its format. A quick perusal of its archives reflects the many changes that have occurred in education in general and at WCU specifically during that time. Terry Nienhuis shepherded the publication with great care through all those years of change, but with Terry's recent retirement, I am excited about the opportunity to move the publication forward into its third decade as the key written communication tool between and among faculty at Western.

Last Spring the Faculty Center conducted a survey to determine the feasibility of digital publishing as opposed to hard copy; over 90% of the faculty chose digital format, citing "saving trees" as their rationale. So, as the Fall 2008 semester begins and a new series of *Faculty Forums* is launched, we have adopted the digital format but retained the traditional look. The publication will be emailed to you as a pdf attachment around the 1<sup>st</sup> of every month. If for any reason you are unable to download and print it, please let us know. As always, we will be in the constant market for new articles by faculty, and for responses to the previous month's featured article, so please don't hesitate to send me an email at [vguise@wcu.edu](mailto:vguise@wcu.edu) if you have a topic in mind, OR if you hear another faculty member discussing an issue at the water cooler that would be good grist for the mill. I look forward to working with you and the fine staff at Coulter Faculty Center. Here's to Terry and to the future of the *Faculty Forum*!

Vera Holland Guise

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# Faculty Forum

*From the Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning*

WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

CULLOWHEE, NORTH CAROLINA

Vol. 21, No. 2

October 1, 2008

## THE DEATH OF THE LECTURE REVISITED

About seven years ago, Alan Altany (then director of the Coulter Faculty Center) sent an e-mail manifesto to WCU faculty. Originally circulated nationally, the manifesto, called for the death of the lecture on the grounds that it was ineffective, anachronistic, and uncreative. Teaching and learning, it said, have entered a new era and the time is ripe for faculty to face up to that fact and to find better alternatives. Had it been a petition, Alan asked, how many of us would sign it? The responses largely took two forms. In the first, faculty called for the head of the lecture (so to speak) to be placed on a bloody stick and paraded about so that others might recognize its demise. In the second, faculty vigorously defended the lecture, citing the weight of tradition behind it. There was little middle ground in the debate, either on our campus or in the literature published nationally. Since the manifesto was circulated, the call for a cultural change in higher education continues to be sounded and the lecture still serves as the flag bearer for tradition. With the large influx of new faculty at WCU, I thought it might be interesting to open up this can of worms once again and to see where we stand today.

Teaching and learning in higher education are often characterized as going through a revolution from an *instructor-centered* to a *learning-centered* paradigm. Our new faculty, then, are the vanguard of this revolution. It is likely that many of them have been more strongly acculturated into the strategies and tactics of this revolution than the rest of us. The presence of faculty development centers has been growing, as has graduate teaching assistant training. Concepts such as Bloom's taxonomy, backward course design, service learning, etc. have higher profiles and even those without education degrees are increasingly likely to have been exposed to them. Also, with a growing body of educational literature that demonstrates successful models for moving beyond the lecture and into more creative forms including group work, role play, and multi-media, new instructors have an enticing buffet of options from which to choose their teaching styles and methods. By crowding out the lecture in this way, though, we have created an awkward generational gap that has not existed before. For many of us, the revolution has made it so that we can no longer teach as we ourselves were taught and the transition to new styles of teaching and learning has been uncomfortable, awkward, cumbersome, and/or incomplete. Now, newer faculty are more likely to have been exposed to the revolutionary approaches as students (though not necessarily at the Research Institutions that generate the majority of PhDs) and to model their own teaching after what they have experienced. The teaching effectiveness of these same new faculty is going to be evaluated by a very different generation of faculty to whom these methods are revolutionary, even confrontational, and it is going to be measured, most likely, by assessment instruments developed prior to this Revolution.

The literature on teaching and learning methods is voluminous and the conclusions drawn vary widely and wildly, but the one argument that does seem clear is that the lecture is one of the least effective ways for students to learn. These studies are being done, though, by the revolutionaries who are seeking to identify and encourage new methods. I have often questioned if they are giving the lecture a fair shake. First and foremost, I personally do not believe there is such a thing as 'a lecture' anymore than there is

such a thing as 'a painting'. In other words, some lectures are the equivalent of Dogs Playing Poker and some are closer to the Mona Lisa. It is an art form and, as such, cannot and perhaps should not be aggregated. As an art form, though, it is difficult to assess. The lecture is designed to impart knowledge in a different way than other forms of teaching and so holding them each to the same standard or final outcome seems to me to be fraught with difficulties. A very good lecture does not simply impart information, but also provides a framework for organizing and thinking about that information that may not bear fruit until years later. The Vermeer of lecturing can impart a subtlety and a passion to his or her subject matter that would be very difficult to capture on a multiple-choice survey of learning. Perhaps the difficulty lies with us. Just as there are few master painters, there are few master lecturers and it is likely that most of us will never be that good, no matter how hard we try. Perhaps the difficulty lies with the students. Much of the impetus to kill the lecture comes from student feedback. In a McUniversity world, they are the consumers and we often move to give them what they want. But, what they want, what they think they want, and what they need may or may not be one and the same. It seems to me that at least in some cases, it is no surprise that students ask for teaching methods that demand less of them. The solution seems to lie in finding solutions in the assessment and research methods rather than, or in addition to, the teaching and learning methods themselves.

The different sides of this discussion remind me in many ways of the debates surrounding the European Reformation in the sixteenth century. The passion of the defense of tradition, on one hand, versus the zeal of reform, is a dynamic with which Luther, Calvin, and Loyola would have been familiar. In the case of the Reformation, though, there was a voice of reconciliation, that of Desiderus Erasmus. Erasmus scolded Luther for being too impetuous and wanting to throw out hundreds of years of tradition on often dubious grounds, a characterization that could fit educational reformers. On the other hand, he also scolded the Catholic Church for abusing its position and for being out of touch with broader generational changes, a characterization that could fit many of the defenders of the lecture. Erasmus did propose a solution back then and he wrote letters to representatives on both sides in an effort to carry it out. Tradition and reform, he argued, can intermingle and the differences between the two sides, he believed, were not so overwhelming or fundamental, that reconciliation was not possible. A department could, for example, allow for a range of instructors and teaching and learning styles. While it has not been studied (much) at the level of the major, I would not be surprised to find that students appreciate such variety. Erasmus believed that the humanist-inspired principle of balance and harmony might supercede the black-or-white absolute mentalities that characterized Reformation rhetoric. If one were to take the lecture and add interactive elements to it, thus balancing some of the strengths and weaknesses of each of the different teaching methods, perhaps one could find a middle ground.

In his own lifetime, Erasmus was largely unsuccessful and the Reformation tore Europe asunder for many years afterward. The conclusion to our story remains open but I believe we are closer to the denouement than we were seven years ago. It is really up to us, as faculty, whether we will take on the wisdom of Erasmus or whether we will continue with the equivalent of decades of strife and warfare. The fate of our old friend, the lecture, hangs in the balance.

By Laura Cruz  
Associate Professor of History

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*A note from Vera Guise, Faculty Fellow for Publications*

*You may respond to Dr. Cruz's article by clicking on this link; <http://media.wcu.edu/groups/facultyforum>. Your comments will be automatically posted to the Faculty Forum website.*

## **Coulter Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning**

Responses to Catherine Carter's "Let's Grow WCU While Supporting the Region" (9/1/08)

### **Jane Nichols**

Where do I co-sign? I wholeheartedly agree. If we are to become a 'greener' and more sustainable campus and institution, we need to support LOCAL business.

### **Nicole Pekarek**

I agree that local businesses ought to be considered before chain stores as part of our millennial campus. I would like to see those local businesses open 2nd locations, or relocate here close to campus if they have not already done so. I also would encourage variety as part of the new town center and an inviting, come sit awhile attitude for whatever businesses are involved.

### **Eric Hendrix**

I signed Catherine's letter and don't have much to add except I'd prefer the Cullowhee project NOT include a Fresh Fish Market:). To have the most positive local impact, Western needs to continue energizing local businesses. Thanks, Catherine, for composing the response and Vera for posting it for feedback.

### **Sharon Jacques**

I signed Catherine's letter and don't have much to add except as a WCU faculty member for 34 years, I have seen a lot of growth in supportive "services" both on and off campus. I adore City Lights, and I usually bought a lot of books they brought to early Christmas Bazaars on campus. I fear that this excellent resource is not on the "map" that many students have of WCU and would like to see a Cullowhee presence. I have watched numerous locally-owned and -operated eateries of varied quality open and close on sites near campus, and I suspect that rising rents have driven some of them away. What national chain store does Cullowhee really need? I would vote for a Kinko's!

### **Karen Lunnan**

Thank you, Catherine, and others in the English department for articulating this important issue. I've just returned from a visit with my family in New Jersey and I admit to having a frappicino with my sister at Barnes and Noble. We had our pick of literally hundreds of national chain stores to meet our needs. Know what she loves to do when she visits Jackson County? Visit Annie's, Mad Batter, City Lights, Spring Street and Lulu's (among others). These businesses are unique and good for so many reasons. Let's support them... not put them out of business. I can visit NJ and all of its national chain stores. I have chosen to live in Jackson County for the last 30 years because it is unique and good.

### **Myron Coulter**

My thanks and congratulations to all of you who had a hand and a mind in revitalizing the Forum. We also owe thanks to Dr. Judith Stillion, who shepherded the beginnings of the publication in the early days of our Institute for College and University Teaching (ICUT) a groundbreaking program, state-wide and well received, and now defunct. Keep up the good work and please send me a copy of the September issue.

### ***A Brief Message from Vera Guise, Editor of the Faculty Forum***

*The Faculty Forum has, for more than 20 years, served as an avenue for faculty to start conversations about current needs and issues at WCU. With the September issue, the Coulter Faculty Center launched a new era by moving from hard copy to digital download as a means of resource conservation. Thanks to Neil Torda's able assistance, we have now added a discussion board to allow for real-time conversations about those topics. It is now possible to leave your comments directly on a new wiki website we have created for the Faculty Forum. Just go to <http://media.wcu.edu/groups/facultyforum> and you will be able to read and comment directly on each article. At the bottom of each article is a button that says "Add a new Comment." Just click this button and log in using the same username and password you use for your WCU email. Not only will you be able to comment directly on the story, but we are hoping a real dialogue will be created by faculty responding to each others comments. The new wiki resulted in great feedback from last month's issue! Check it out and add your comments to this month's feature article. Keep them cards and letters comin'!*



# Faculty Forum

*From the Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning*

WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

CULLOWHEE, NORTH CAROLINA

Vol. 21, No. 3

November 1, 2008

## **DIGITAL SCHMIGITAL: MOBILE SCHMOBILE!**

Here we are in the twilight of 2008, and we are debating the relative importance of embedding "digital" versus -- what? -- "non-digital?" -- media into our teaching and learning. Show me the medium that is truly "non-digital" and I'll show you a piece of paper that was probably typed on an old-fashioned typewriter or chiseled onto a slate tablet! The point is, that regardless of the form of communication, today virtually all forms of communication are "digital." Today's "tools du jour" includes such things as podcasts, wikis, blogs, web-based video, social networking and other communication methods that never graced pedagogical conversation as recently as five years ago.

Stories abound about the new communications habits of the younger generation. Post-secondary educators are being urged to re-cast teaching practice around these changes. We need to meet the needs of the "millennial generation," we are told. But wait! Might we not be getting ahead of ourselves? Recent research published by EDUCAUSE gives us pause. In a study of more than 27,000 students, strong preference was discovered for face-to-face interaction in undergraduate education. Other findings showed that, although a majority of students possess Internet-capable mobile phones, by far the greatest portion of them fail to use these devices for Internet access. More locally, in a recent hybrid WCU psychology course, 16 of 20 students reported not knowing what the term "podcasting" meant.

These findings call into question the ostensible ubiquity of mobile device use among younger students. If our current institutional intent, therefore, is to design instruction to "meet students [technologically] where they are" in their personal lives, mobile tools and digital media may not provide the best methods for doing so. May we, therefore, take comfort in the notion that discussion of this technological change among millennials is over-hyped? Not exactly. The EDUCAUSE study also tells us that conditions are rapidly changing while ever more technology-weaned young people enter college and university.

What do we do, then? The Coulter Faculty Center (CFC) finds itself needing to encourage faculty to transform instruction in response to technological changes that never fully stabilize. Therefore, the CFC supports the traditional principles of excellent teaching while simultaneously encouraging the risk-taking of technological innovators. In doing so, we recognize that most faculty are committed primarily to their scholarly disciplines. Teaching and course design constitute little more than means to fulfill this core commitment. Just as excellence in site-based teaching often serves as foundation for transformation to digital means of instruction so, too, do digital innovations find their way into our site-constrained classrooms. Let's look at two examples:

Masafumi Takeda decided that his students would benefit from the capacity to listen to his lectures repeatedly. He also wanted his distant students to be able to participate in a live classroom



experience. To do this, Masafumi creates a video stream of his Japanese classes for live Internet broadcast. With a simple video camera connected to his laptop computer, he is able to broadcast his class live to the world, as well as archiving each session for all students to review retroactively on-demand.

Carlie Merritt uses “Second Life” (a virtual networked universe where real people are represented as avatars in a simulated physical setting) as an innovation to present sensitive courtroom information to her class. An example of how she has used Second Life involves the simulation of courtroom testimony by a victim of child abuse. For a number of reasons, until now Carlie has not been able to display an actual video representation of how a child witness would testify in a courtroom. By creating a virtual child in Second Life and having that child act out the testimony, Carlie has overcome what has long been a hurdle in her presentation of this type of instructional content.

In designing support for the technological “trailblazers” and “settlers,” the CFC follows the principle of strong faculty involvement in service design and delivery. The following CFC services support faculty tackling the mysteries of digitally-driven teaching (for easy perusal, each service is linked to its source on the Web):

- [eLearning Faculty Fellows](#) are responsible for designing eTeaching support and development.
- [eLearning/eMentors](#) comprise a Web-supported service linking expert faculty eTeachers with faculty clients through individually-negotiated agreements.
- [Online Course Assessment Tool](#) affords faculty the opportunity for peer assessment of online course design and teaching.
- [The Annual Passages Faculty Retreat](#) offers WCU and Haywood Community College faculty to learn, practice and network about teaching digitally and online.
- [The eTeachers' Water Cooler](#) automatically confers membership in an electronic meeting space for faculty members through their WebCat online course accounts.

One of the CFC's newer initiatives is its commitment to support the newer digital tools of teaching and learning. There is a new digital media wiki providing detailed video tutorials and printable step-sheets detailing many of the digital resources on campus. The CFC works one-on-one with faculty members, providing them the skills necessary to incorporate digital media in their classes. The Center also offers workshops for podcasting entire class sessions. Two different blogging servers are offered for a variety of needs and an easy-to-use wiki service is available for collaborative class projects. An iTunes U service is also available for delivering audio, video or PDFs directly to students' computers or portable digital devices.

A final CFC challenge, therefore, is to encourage faculty to utilize these services.

John LeBaron  
Educational Leadership and Foundations  
Neil Torda  
Digital Media, Coulter Faculty Center

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*A note from Vera Guise, Faculty Fellow for Publications*

*You may respond to this article by clicking on this link; <http://media.wcu.edu/groups/facultyforum>.*

*Your comments will be automatically posted to the Faculty Forum website.*

## Responses to the October Issue of the *Faculty Forum* entitled *The Death of the Lecture Revisited* by Dr. Laura Cruz

### **Peter Nieckarz, Anthropology and Sociology**

*First of all, excellent piece Laura!*

*I think that those who are ready to bury the lecture are doing so in haste. Lectures are still relevant and effective, and tradition has nothing to do with it. A good lecture is compelling and inspiring, not all can lecture in such a way, but many can. I often suspect that those who are the biggest critics of the method are those who never had much success with it. A good lecture can do much more than some superimposed and awkward group exercise.*

*Of course when many of you say "lecture" you may be talking about a PowerPoint presentation with the instructor just repeating what is already on the screen. To my mind that is not in any way a lecture. A lecture is not the information presented, but the manner in which it is presented. The "lectures" I am thinking of are interactive and Socratic; Not some sleepy recitation with the lights out.*

*I had many classes as both grad and undergrad that were group discussion or project driven and I remember many of them falling quite flat, to the point of where I felt I got nothing out of the class. Just because you are not lecturing does not mean you are automatically doing something better; there is bad teaching taking place via all techniques. Ultimately it lies with the talent and enthusiasm of the instructor regardless of teaching method.*

*And like Laura pointed out, we think we need to ditch the lecture because students report that they do not like it... I am sorry, but as old fashioned as it sounds, they are hardly the experts. Many of them would be just fine if we did absolutely nothing as long as they got credit and a grade at the end. A lecture requires students' focus and concentration, "soft skills" we seem to have discarded in the post MTV era. It's no wonder students find it tedious.*

### **Sharon Jacques, Nursing**

*It pained me very much to give up my "last" lecture on Florence Nightingale after 30 years. My RN to BSN students now do their own online search and write short papers on some aspect of FN's many contributions to nursing in both her day and ours. They comment on how delighted they are to discover and appreciate her impact on humanity, and several have gone on to read further for their own enjoyment. Shifting from lecture to a discovery writing assignment and further discussion has worked very well on almost all of the topics I cover.*

*I asked these practicing professionals to reflect on their Liberal Studies requirements. If they had a dynamic lecturer (one name from a NC Community College setting kept reappearing), they were energized to incorporate new ideas. All of them appreciate that they can now converse more widely with their patients and have a broader world view. Is it possible that we over saturate 17-21 year olds with more concentrated knowledge than they can see an immediate use for? How many of our lectures show off our own knowledge because we are afraid that students will never be exposed to it otherwise?*

### **Vera Guise, Political Science & Public Affairs**

*Today, I projected Laura's Cruz's "The Death of the Lecture Re-visited" onto the overhead in my two Freshman Seminar classes and had students read the article and then discuss it. It was interesting to hear the conflicting points made by students: "No, we do NOT think the lecture is dead...that is the best way I learn BUT, the professor's approach is what makes the difference." "If it is straight lecture or reading", they all agreed, without interactive discussion, then it is boring." "NO, they do not want a McUniversity education, but NO they do not want to have to read a textbook either! Yes!" they proclaim, "we want instruction, but NO we do not like to read!"*

*So, my question to them was, how shall we prepare you, the next generation of leaders and parents, for solving the world's problems? They were shocked when I suggested perhaps someone will invent a "chip" that can be implanted at different stages of maturation: Say, reading, writing and arithmetic in the early grades, and literature and biology and political science in young adulthood. "NO NO NO", they objected, "we certainly do NOT want to be programmed!"*

*And so, I guess the challenge is still on the professor: continue the lecture, but make it interactive and entertaining and somehow, also make it educational.*



# Faculty Forum

*From the Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning*

WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

CULLOWHEE, NORTH CAROLINA

Vol. 21, No. 4

December 1, 2008

## **DO MORE TO ESCAPE STRESS – AND KILL YOUR TV WHILE YOU’RE AT IT**

As one scans the institutional documents related to the university’s strategic plan, the Stewards of Place model, and UNC Tomorrow initiative; phrases like “regional economic transformation,” “livable communities,” and “cultural enrichment” come to the fore. (Call me a nerd – I actually enjoy reading this stuff.) As WCU applies the Stewards of Place model to effect regional economic transformation, one core focus becomes promoting the arts and cultural enrichment to enhance the livability of the community. This focus on art and culture is important on many levels and expands beyond an institutional checklist of tasks relegated to a particular administrative division. Yes, integration of WCU’s academic programming with the regional arts and crafts scene does contribute to the livability of the community. But, increasing individual participation in those cultural events is also crucial to the well-being of the community, the region, and society as a whole. In this matter of cultural participation, we all have a stake.

Art and culture are important components of a vibrant, healthy community. They add meaning to the lives of the people who live there. As you might guess, the arts contribute to the education and development of individuals, inspire creativity, and promote the understanding of other cultures resulting in an enriched understanding of the world. Interestingly, though, cultural participation seems to affect citizens on another societal level. Several national studies reveal overwhelming correlations between arts participation and positive individual and civic behaviors. One recent report from the National Endowment for the Arts concludes, “Americans who read books, visit museums, attend theater, and engage in other arts are more active, more involved, and more socially engaged than those who do not participate in cultural activities.” Cultural participants volunteer more, exercise more, engage in more outdoor activities, and support local sports more than those who do not participate. Citizens living in a culturally active community appear to be not only more engaged but also happier, healthier, less stressed, and more productive.

For these reasons, a vibrant, active, local cultural scene attracts corporations looking to relocate to the community. This fact is important to us as WCU reaches out to draw private partners to participate in the development of a town center and millennial campus. Development in these areas can have a positive effect, not only on the regional economy but also on the quality of life that we all enjoy. Increasing participation in cultural events on campus is one indication that this community can support a profitable, thriving town center. How are we doing on this front?

Western North Carolina does have a rich tradition in art, music, crafts, and other cultural pursuits. The university continues to enhance this region’s thriving arts community through expanded programming and increasing participation in cultural events. Currently, more than 10% of all WCU students and roughly seven percent of all faculty and staff are involved in some way with the production of arts and entertainment events for the region. The number of community-sponsored events hosted last year by just the Fine & Performing Arts Center alone doubled over the previous year. More people saw more community plays, concerts, public school performances, and regional dance recitals on campus. The total number of events held at the Fine & Performing Arts Center last year increased by nearly half over the previous year, and overall attendance at events continues to increase. These figures do indicate increasing participation in cultural events on campus.

The many faculty members who contribute to this increase in cultural participation deserve warm commendation. We see their faces at gallery receptions, theatre performances, concerts, film series, cultural

presentations, and yes even sporting events. Their reasons for attending may be entertainment or education-related. A strong cultural tradition may run through their veins. Perhaps they participate to support their students and colleagues. Regardless of their personal reasons, they form the core of the university cultural scene. They understand how a cultural event can enrich the lives of those who share that experience. Every event that they attend transforms them in some positive manner. Each cultural experience changes their perspective in some way as they participate, observe, and reflectively contemplate on that experience. This transformation becomes evident in their personal lives, their classrooms, and their community.

Perhaps many others would like to have such transforming experiences as these, but have not been able to participate in campus events. Reasons for not attending cultural events on campus are just as numerous and varied as those for attending them. Leisure time seems to be at a premium and fragmented. Economic uncertainty affects how we spend our discretionary dollars. A proliferation of other entertainment media substitutes for the live experience. Information about the many events on campus may be overwhelmingly abundant for some faculty and elusive for others. And the list goes on. How can we remove these barriers to cultural participation on campus so that more of us can participate? The latter two roadblocks to attending cultural events are probably the easiest to overcome, so we'll tackle those first.

Quite simply, you can find all the information you need about cultural events on campus in one easy place online. Just go to the WCU Arts & Entertainment Web page at <http://events.wcu.edu>. Here you'll find a listing of upcoming main events with links to news articles and tickets, gallery listings and movie marquees, and a link to the comprehensive calendar of A&E-related events on campus. Need help sorting through all the info to find just the types of events that interest you? Scan *Event Preview*, the weekly e-newsletter listing of upcoming events. The week's events are arranged by type and also contain helpful links to more information about each particular event. If you are not already receiving *Event Preview* in your inbox at the beginning of every week, subscribe online at the WCU Arts & Entertainment Web page. Just enter your name and email address in the short form and hit subscribe. It's that easy. So whether you get event info online or drive it to your inbox each week, you have the tools you need to be able to plan your on-campus, cultural activities. Now, how do we deal with the issue of those scarce resources – time and money?

Americans who work generally earn more money than ever before, but our leisure time is meted out intermittently. We tend to gravitate toward entertainment options that are convenient and flexible and that require little commitment from us up front. Instead of planning a cultural activity, many of us end up turning on the TV, popping in a DVD or BlueRay, or gathering 'round the Xbox. It's easier. But in the same amount of time that we spend flipping channels or making it through the next few levels, we could engage in something fresh, provocative, and involving – a cultural event on campus perhaps. Logistically, campus events are designed around your convenience. You can peruse the event listings and buy your tickets online, drive directly to the venue, park usually within a city block from the door, and enjoy a total cultural experience within a two-hour time-span. You can't beat the convenience of an event on the WCU campus.

You also can't beat the entertainment value of a campus event. Tickets to national touring acts and major theatre productions on campus usually go for \$20 or less. You can experience world-class musicians, visual artists, and local ensembles oftentimes for free. Art galleries, museum exhibits, and receptions are made available on a donation basis. Compare the costs of these events with those in other cultural centers in our region. Add to that the free parking and no-hassle logistics and you can't afford not to attend.

Immersion in cultural activities goes well beyond pure entertainment value. Participation does allow us to escape stress and rejuvenate, transforming ourselves and our communities while creating memories with our family and friends. If you've never experienced a cultural event on campus, resolve to attend at least one next semester. If you are an ardent supporter of the arts, introduce your passion to at least one other person - a friend, relative, colleague, student or a neighbor who may have no ties to the university already. These may become the folks who will sit on regional symphony boards, volunteer at local museums, or pave the way for the non-university community to become regular attendees. Next time you find a free block of time on your schedule, grab a friend and attend a cultural event on campus. You're probably bored with TV anyway, so use that remote clicker to kill it. Grab your jacket and someone else and come on down.

John West, Associate Dean, College of Fine and Performing Arts  
& Director of Bands

Laura Huff  
Event Marketing Coordinator

## Coulter Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning

Responses to *Digital Schmigital: Mobile Schmobile!*, the feature article in the November 2008 issue of Faculty Forum written by John LeBaron and Neil Torda.

Bob Houghton, Associate Professor in Education Oct 31, 2008 10:45 PM

*John and Neil, thanks for stepping up on this thinking. Your leadership has been huge. There is still much to be done.*

*Unresolved is what WCU defines as digitally literate for 21st century careers and personal development. What are the most basic requirements that all need? Curiously, higher education could be seen as largely silent on the issue at the national and state levels. Though higher education had the technology and mission long before public schools, it has been the K-12 educational community that has defined standards for K-12 settings (Google this -NETS standards for Teachers and Students). But they've only started the job, not finished it. Where is higher education's leadership on this? Where is Educause in correlating with NETS standards, an organization which claims to be the premier "nonprofit association whose mission is to advance higher education by promoting the intelligent use of information technology". Where is WCU's? How do we take the handoff from K-12 in North Carolina and the NETS standards and build on it in the Liberal Studies program, leading to greater digital specialization in majors? What feedback are we annually giving state high schools about the preparedness of those sent to us? What must every college freshman and sophomore be able to do? The state of NC has given us an 8th grade exam as one definition. What is WCU's? What promises can WCU recruiters make to potential students about the digital literacy capacities they will graduate with? What standards can employers expect from WCU? How are the software licenses that IT buys integrated into our definition? As one example of our progress, I'm having to teach seniors spreadsheet skills that 8th graders are taught, software that has been standard since the 1980's, which the seniors generally report they have not used since 8th grade, if then.*

*The English department makes gigantic Freshman strides with text literacy with Eng 101 & 102 but we are a wee bit past the date that Gutenberg came up with his printing press. Shouldn't curriculum come from what the working world is doing and using? Where will students pick up the rest of the 21st century's reading and composing agenda, knowledge routinely used to think about and structure information on the Net with: image, audio, video, 2D & 3D animation, and sensors & robotics compositions. We have the capacity to teach live over the Internet or any hybrid variation to any distance. These capacities remain barely explored by specialty courses let alone taught to some degree to all.*

*This knowledge should not be optional. The still growing presence of personal computers and the NET have established a new set of global literacy standards that are still expanding. WCU has wealth of under utilized technology resources begging application to new century thinking for employers looking to leadership from our graduates.*

For a more detailed consideration of these ideas, see:  
<http://ceap.wcu.edu/houghton/MM/literacyMM.html>



# Faculty Forum

*From the Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning*

WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

CULLOWHEE, NORTH CAROLINA

Vol. 21, No. 5

February 1, 2009

## GRADUATE ASSISTANTS: A MANIFESTO

The Council of Graduate Schools estimates that about two thirds of the approximately 1.5 million graduate students nationally hold an assistantship, but the duties and expectations of such assistantships vary so widely that generalizations about the experience are not possible. That number is significantly lower at WCU (approximately 15% of our entire graduate student population hold assistantships; approximately 45% of eligible graduate students). In part, this differential stems from Western's position as a State Comprehensive University (SCU) rather than a research-intensive institution.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, some faculty see graduate training as the last bastion that is truly the domain of the academic scholar, free from outside influences that may sully the purity of its imparting of knowledge. This is not to say that good work has not been done in researching graduate education, but rather to point out that models for doing work in this area are few and far between. In specific areas, such as graduate assistant training and development, bibliographies are very short.<sup>2</sup>

The role and development of graduate assistants has been overlooked at comprehensive universities, at least in part because it has largely been overlooked everywhere.<sup>3</sup> As the 'learning centered revolution' marches on, graduate education as a whole has been one of the last frontiers for research and certainly the area in which, generally, the least amount of reform has taken place. The impetus for educational reform began with secondary education and then transitioned out into higher education, putting graduate education margins of institutionalized educational reform. We can see this here at Western with the QEP's initial focus on undergraduate education and student outcomes. Fortunately, WCU's QEP, under Carol Burton's leadership, is also now developing and piloting in select programs graduate education outcomes that compliment our undergraduate QEP focus.

In his recent book, *Teaching at the People's University*, Bruce Henderson suggests that SCUs lack the clout and funding of Research I and II level institutions and the specific mission and/or traditions of community college or liberal arts colleges. Born as teachers' colleges, the mission of the SCU expanded following the huge influx of students into higher education after World War II. Henderson argues that SCUs suffer from this position as a "youngest child" and that where they fail, they do so because they try too hard to be like these other institutions and do not feel sufficiently comfortable to differentiate their own values and identity.<sup>4</sup> The awkwardness is compounded when examining graduate programs at SCU's. By definition, comprehensive universities offer a variety of graduate programs at the Master's level but few, if any, PhD programs. While most graduate programs

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<sup>1</sup> The term comprehensive university comes from the classification of institutions of higher education done by the Carnegie Foundation. Carnegie recently changing their nomenclature and what had been called comprehensive universities are now referred to, for the most part, as Masters I level institutions. For more information on the designations and the reasons for the switch, see Carnegie Foundation FAQs (<http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/about/sub.asp?key=18&subkey=405>).

<sup>2</sup> The best bibliography I have found was compiled by Gabriel Power at the Center for Teaching Effectiveness at the University of Delaware. <http://cte.udel.edu/docs/TABibliography.doc>.

<sup>3</sup> E. Wert, "Foreward," in M. Marincovich, et al (ed) *The Professional Development of Graduate Teaching Assistants* (Boston: Anker, 1998), xvii-xxii. See also the now somewhat dated overview in R.D. Abbott, et al. "Review of Research on TA Training" *New Directions for Teaching and Learning* 29 (1998), 111-124.

<sup>4</sup> Bruce Henderson, *Teaching at the People's University*, 10.

are patterned after their counterparts at Research I institutions that offer PhDs, little to no work has been done to find a distinctive identity for graduate programs in fulfilling the mission of public comprehensive institutions.<sup>5</sup>

In the 1980s, the first conference specifically devoted to graduate assistant training and development took place at Ohio State and the national-level Preparing Future Faculty (PFF) initiative was launched as a joint project by the Association of Colleges and Universities and the Council of Graduate Schools. This multi-year, multi-million dollar project encouraged participating institutions to develop and disseminate innovative models for providing comprehensive training and development for graduate teaching assistants. Today, the conversation has been extended to include efforts to develop graduate teaching assistants into broader conversations about the future of higher education, and the raised profile of faculty and teacher professional development. When these efforts have been somewhat productive, their productivity has been aimed largely at the Research I, doctoral degree granting institutions, as the designation “Preparing Future Faculty” suggests. Despite the money and attention, few, if any, workable models have emerged from PFF that apply to institutions such as WCU and many of our departments continue to use graduate assistants to perform unpleasant duties that faculty do not want to do, from inappropriate administrative tasks to (at least in legends about which our graduate students whisper) performing non-academic related duties.

What PFF discovered is that graduate students benefit most from assistantships that offer training in ‘soft’ or people skills, teacher development, time management, reflective practices, and networking and/or mentoring. Interestingly, these skills coincide almost directly with the skills a North Carolina Employment Commission survey say employers are looking for with new hires. The current model for graduate education at SCUs, based on the Research I paradigm, emphasizes product over process, research over teaching, publications over professional development, and perhaps even yard work and filing over reflection. The majority of our 2000 graduate students will not become tenure-track faculty (if the national statistics are accurate) and most of them do not intend to do so. In other words, we train graduate students at an institution much different than where we did our own graduate work, so our ideas about graduate education do not fit either our mission or the goals of our students. What we have to recognize is the need for more graduate training at the regional comprehensive level for those graduate students who are very likely going to face a work place with different priorities than we face as faculty members. Some of our graduate programs at WCU have taken steps down this road. This is certainly true in the professional programs like Physical Therapy and the MS in Technology program, which requires their graduate students to engage with and serve the community. It is also true in programs like English’s Professional Writing program, which brings local business needs into the classroom and provides in-house teacher training for writing.

In the past three years, the Graduate School has taken a first step towards promoting these “soft” skills through the GATE program and by requiring job descriptions that relate to the assistant’s program of study. Less than 25% of graduate students nationally claim to be satisfied with the training and development they received as graduate assistants and the numbers are even lower at regional comprehensive universities such as ours. If any of us received such low marks for our teaching or research, we would no longer be employed. Simply put, we need to train our graduate students better and we need to come up with a development model for graduate assistants who work for our institution. For example, faculty developing grants that engage our communities might make better use of graduate assistants in those grants, allowing the students the opportunity to develop discipline-related skills as part of the work, to promote community development and to become stewards of their environment. We encourage you, as you work on your plans to address WCU’s QEP and students’ intentional learning, that you include your graduate students and your graduate program curriculum in that discussion.

**Laura Cruz, Associate Professor of History**  
**Scott Higgins, Dean of the Graduate School**

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<sup>5</sup>One of the few is Phyllis R. Freeman and Jan Z. Schmidt, “An Interdisciplinary Teaching Assistant Training Program at a MA Institution,” *The Journal of Graduate Teaching Assistant Development* 7 (3) 2000.



## **Coulter Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning**

*Please note: The opinions printed here belong solely to the authors and do not necessarily represent the opinions of the editorial staff or of the Faculty Center. If you would like to respond, you may input your comments directly through the wiki on the Faculty Forum webpage, or e-mail [vguise@wcu.edu](mailto:vguise@wcu.edu) by the 15th of the month following publication of the article you wish to respond to.*

### **Responses to the December feature article by John West and Laura Huff:**

#### **DO MORE TO ESCAPE STRESS – AND KILL YOUR TV WHILE YOU'RE AT IT**

*The December article by Laura Huff and John West—Escape Stress—Kill you TV was an excellent article and very timely. I fear, though, since we received NO faculty feedback, that most folks were too stressed to take the time to read it! Now that the holidays are behind us, a new year, and in some ways perhaps, a whole new America has begun, I hope faculty will take a moment and read Laura and John's article. Why not make a New Year's resolution to lay down that stack of papers, set aside all those household tasks that keep calling, kill that new 50" flat screen that Santa brought and get you and at least one other person down to the Fine and Performing Arts Center to one of the excellent events scheduled for this New Year? Come on now, responsibilities will wait while we get a life!*

**Vera H. Guise, MPA**

Faculty Fellow, Coulter Faculty Center

Visiting Lecturer, Dept. of Political Science & Public Affairs



# Faculty Forum

*From the Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning*

WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

CULLOWHEE, NORTH CAROLINA

Vol. 21. No. 6

March 1, 2009

## **“Contingent Faculty —Paupers of the Times”**

This fall we were all informed that WCU may have to make budgetary cuts of 7 to 8% across the board for the 2009/10 school year. That being so, one imagines everything, from the highest salary to the smallest of office supplies being cut back to an 8% reduction. The idea being, “We are all in this together we can all cut back until things normalize.”

Immediately the discussion turned to cutting contingent faculty – the rationale: “that is why they are *contingent* – these positions are buffers for difficult years.” It is hard to understand a system that would be cutting people from the budget in one breath and sending out memos in the next saying there is money to spend for supplies, or books, “please send in your requests.”

I and most of my colleagues view this as inhumane.

Since this announcement, in various departments across campus, contingent faculty have been told their positions most likely will be cut, then told that the cuts may not be as deep as first expected, causing bewilderment and despair among those affected by these indelicate methods of contending with an uncertain budget. Other departments have let out the word that all adjunct faculty will be cut. Even this semester some adjuncts have had as much as a two-third reduction in their course load which means a two-third reduction in pay.

Reality – Most contingent faculty are the instructors who generally teach some of the most demanding classes for the lowest pay. Why do they sign on?

1. Some need the experience.
2. Some prefer the challenges and scholarship of teaching to the rigors of the tenure track.
3. Some have found that even with their terminal degrees the market is just too competitive to land a tenure track position and have managed a way to live on the meager salary these positions pay, often supplementing with additional work.
4. Most contingent faculty find their work to be intrinsically rewarding knowing they are making a difference in the next generation, and though not satisfied with the low pay, are reconciled to it
5. Many are led to believe that their extra work in their various departments, (work not required of them but certainly encouraged), gets noticed and they will be considered if a fulltime position opens in the department, (though generally with time they come to realize this is mostly mythical).
6. Lastly, some are retired or semi-retired and want to teach at WCU part-time because they have a strong emotional attachment to the university, love to teach, and use the scanty

salary as a retirement supplement. These faculty bring a rich and diverse background to the classroom that younger faculty may not possess.

Most contingent faculty teach the foundational courses within a department, courses that lay the ground work for the student's future success in their major. It seems ludicrous to cut the budget in the area where the university gets high quality work from highly qualified faculty *at more than a bargain rate*. It is a heartless choice as well. Many contingent faculty members have moved here for their positions and have acquired home mortgages. Many are the sole bread earners in their homes. Many barely make ends meet on their existing wages, would be more than happy to have a better position, are more than qualified but cannot find work. These positions are filled by people institutions of higher learning brought into their advance degree programs and gave high hopes for their career futures. However, in today's climate they have become the paupers of the university system, generally in financial debt to the system that offered them what have become, nearly useless terminal degrees. Terminating their positions or reducing them further is unconscionable!

What about the student? Consider the impact on the quality of education if these positions are eliminated especially when, as the chancellor just reported, applications are up for the fall: Overloaded classrooms. Overuse of graduate students as instructors – students lacking in experience, are often not mentored, yet teach foundational classes. For the student, they must accept poor quality instruction while their tuitions continue to soar.

Consider another alternative that was recently highlighted on ABC News. The superintendent of the Oxford Hills school district in Maine, given the difficult task of cutting its budget, chiseled away as much as he could but still fell short of the mandated reduction. The only solution was to terminate seven teachers. The superintendent, Mark Eastman, along with Jim Thornton, president of the teacher's union, sought the higher road. They constructed a letter asking each person on payroll from administration to teachers to janitors, to consider giving up *one day's pay* during the remainder of the school year. They quoted President Obama, who commended, "the selflessness of workers who would rather cut their hours than see a friend lose their job... (to) see us through our darkest hours." Over 60% responded in the affirmative and they were able to meet the budgetary demands.

If we, at centers of higher learning, don't lead with a standard that shows a level of enlightenment when it comes to the handling of the lives of our co-workers during difficult times, who will lead us to a better path? Wall Street? Capitol Hill?

If an 8% cut were truly across the board from salaries to office supplies, the entire university could carry on, though a bit pinched, and each person could keep his/her job, each family could keep their home, and this university could set a standard that says, "though these times are tough, together we will get through, but we will not allow our faithful workers to lose their jobs because of circumstances that they had no hand in bringing about."

**Norma Smith**  
**Visiting Part Time Instructor**  
**Art & Design**

# **Coulter Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning**

## **Responses to the February Issue of the Faculty Forum**

**Graduate Assistants: A Manifesto**  
By Dr. Laura Cruz and Dr. Scott Higgins

### **Barbara Eblen**

*I can completely understand why graduate students are dissatisfied with their training in soft skills. Even though they sit in on lectures with their mentors the mentor doesn't sit in on their classes to offer evaluation and or instruction.*

### **Vittal S. Anantatmula**

*Laura and Scott:*

*I can relate to what is written in your article. I carefully selected bright students and appointed them as graduate students semester after semester for 8 years for my program faculty at my previous institution. I used to hold meetings with all the graduate students every semester to get feedback. I heard similar views from them. Graduate students were often used for grading purposes instead of research work for which they were appointed in the first place. Other than financial gains including tuition credit, graduate assistantship did not provide a learning opportunity.*

*Thanks for sharing this article.*

Regards  
Vittal S. Anantatmula  
D.Sc. MS MBA PMP CCE  
Assistant Professor  
Global Management and Strategy  
College of Business

### **Barbara Hardie**

*Graduate assistants who work in the University Writing Center play a central, crucial role at WCU, and I'm grateful for each of them. Working with one client at a time, they provide timely, useful feedback to student writers of all class levels and disciplines, including many international students. To train them, I devote two semesters: first semester, we focus on the nuts and bolts of effective writing center collaboration, and second semester, we focus on writing center theory and its relationship to our individual practices. Not only do my graduate assistants provide an invaluable service, but they are also learning invaluable skills about written discourse and working collaboratively with others in the fullest sense of the phrase.*

Barbara Hardie, Director  
Writing Center

***Whew! We are ALL ready for Spring Break, right? I do hope you will take a moment before you head to the beach or wherever you're headed for a respite, to read this month's issue of the Faculty Forum and respond to this article on a critical issue concerning us all right now—staffing and budget cuts! You may respond to Norma Smith's article by clicking on this link: <http://media.wcu.edu/groups/facultyforum/>***

***Your comments will be automatically posted to the Faculty Forum website. We are working to make the website more efficient in response to your comments, but meanwhile you will need to use your email username and password to access the website.***

***Think Spring!  
Vera Holland Guise  
Faculty Fellow, Coulter Faculty Center***



# Faculty Forum

*From the Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning*

WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

CULLOWHEE, NORTH CAROLINA

Vol. 21, No 7

April 1, 2009

## **FOREIGN LANGUAGES, ACADEMIC CURRICULA, AND THE CHANGING WORLD**

The issue of foreign languages can easily stir up controversy with very different opinions, all of which are --I'd like to believe-- well intended and usually well informed. The document on foreign languages I recently sent out to Academic Affairs and Arts and Sciences prompted an unexpected flood of responses with very valid, if at times contrasting, viewpoints on this subject. Because of the interesting dialog generated by the document, I was asked to submit a version of it to the Faculty Forum, and I am happy to oblige.

It is an undeniable fact that the United States has ceased to be a monolithic society but it remains largely monolingual, and at some levels there is even a steadfast reluctance to promote the study of foreign languages. The availability of foreign language instruction is very limited and in many instances confined to college. In pre-college education the decision on this matter has been left up to the local school systems and many choose not to require a foreign language at all, while others only require 1-2 years of a foreign language in high school, with instruction often being inadequate to develop substantial language competency among the students. Foreign language instruction at the high school level is often in English and very little material is covered. It is hard to justify this as the only venue of foreign language instruction. That an individual can travel to other countries (as one respondent pointed out) without speaking anything other than English is a testament to the foreign language competency of peoples in other countries and this puts the monolingual American traveling overseas in a clear position of inferiority as (s)he is at the mercy of the host country. I, for once, am happy that I can effectively communicate in a few languages other than my own.

Monolingualism and ethnocentrism have historically shaped United States foreign policy. Lack of foreign language competency perpetuates a worldview that Americans embrace national identity blindly and care little to take steps to bridge cultural gaps for the betterment of all. Recent awareness of the global nature of our society has brought about the need for multilingual and multicultural understanding. It is generally agreed that if Americans are to become knowledgeable about the world, the next generation should acquire more than a fragmented foreign language competency at the high school level. Less ethnocentric attitudes are certainly needed in this --and every-- society. The study of a second language creates the desire to understand other cultures and the sensitivity to accept them. These multicultural skills are needed much more today than in the past and many institutions of higher learning acknowledge the importance of foreign languages and require a certain level of competency among their students. Being bilingual gives individuals the ability to know first-hand what it means to transcend the limitations of a single tongue and culture, breeding sympathy, preventing misunderstanding, bias and bigotry, and discovering goodwill between cultures. From a more "practical" point of view, proficiency in a second (and third) language gives job seekers a clear advantage over those who do not have those language skills. The web site of our sister institution NCSU states that "Today, knowledge of a foreign language is more important to Americans than ever before. Foreign languages have become important because so many

facets of American life --business, politics, education, the media, the arts, science, technology, and travel have become truly international in scope.”

There are many short and long-term benefits to society for having multilingual citizens. They help enhance economic competitiveness, improve global communication, and maintain political and national security interests. The United States must educate students who are equipped linguistically and culturally to communicate successfully both in a pluralistic American society and abroad with the diverse peoples with whom they share a city, nation, and world. In most developed nations, having a command of one or more foreign languages is a normal experience. Foreign languages are just another part of the education process and of human existence. For many people, it is odd even to think of only knowing their native language. We need to look beyond our borders to learn from the successes of other cultures in bilingual education, and focus on countries that have succeeded in educating citizens to be multilingual. In many nations, the study of languages is considered essential to the education of their students and foreign language classes have the same status as all other academic classes. Language is seen contributing to the inner enrichment of the student as well as promoting internationalism. For example, in most western European nations, students begin their mandatory foreign language instruction in the first grade with a second foreign language added as they start middle school. By the time they go to college, students can communicate effectively in three languages (their own and two more). Compared to students in most of the world, American students lag far behind in their foreign language capabilities. The majority of students in the US do not begin a second language until they are young adults and then they only have an average of 150 contact hours with that language. The ability to function beyond the tourist level takes at least 600 contact hours.

The UNC Tomorrow initiative clearly identifies “Knowledge of a foreign language” as one of the critical skills for global competitiveness (UNCT Report, p. 13) and one of the suggested strategies is to “increase student proficiency in foreign languages” (UNCT Report, p. 16). Any department that decides to eliminate, reduce, or “relax” the foreign language requirement will be putting itself at odds with the UNC Tomorrow policy that has been approved and mandated by the UNC Tomorrow Commission and endorsed enthusiastically by UNC President Erskine Bowles. Sister institutions of equal or (dare I say) greater academic caliber in the state are moving or have already moved towards universal foreign language education as part of their desire to comply with the UNC Tomorrow initiative. Below are some data taken from our sister institutions in the UNC System:

University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. Minimum requirement is 3 semesters; some majors require 4 semesters.

UNC-Greensboro. College of Arts and Sciences, 4 semesters; Bryan School of Business and Economics, 3 semesters; School of Health and Human Performance, 2 semesters; School of Music, 2 semesters.

UNC-Charlotte [Admission information is both in English and Spanish]. College of A&S, 4 semesters.

Eastern Carolina University. BA degree requires 4 semesters; BS requirement varies by program.

NC State University. College of Humanities and Social Sciences requires 3 semesters. The rest of the university requires 2 semesters.

NC Central University. General Education requires 3 semesters of a foreign language across the board.

UNC-Asheville. Requirement for admission to UNC-A: two units of the same language in High School. General foreign language requirement: two semesters for everyone.

Appalachian State University. College of A&S: For the BA, 2 semesters of intermediate or higher level foreign language (excluding 101, 102); College of Business: For the BS in International Business, a minor in a foreign language is required; College of fine and Applied Arts (includes Nursing, Family and Consumer Sciences, and Technology). For the BA, 2 semesters of second-year foreign language or higher.

UNC-Wilmington. General Education requires every student at the university to take one semester of a foreign language. A revision goes up for a vote requiring all students to take 3 semesters in a foreign language.

Winston-Salem State University. Mass Communications and English majors are required to take a foreign language at the elementary and intermediate levels.

UNC-Pembroke. No foreign language requirement. An ad hoc committee was formed and is recommending a requirement for all schools.

NCA&TSU. The College of Arts & Sciences recommends students to take 2 semesters of the same foreign language. Departments in A&S that have a foreign language requirement include English, Biology, Chemistry, Speech, History, Liberal Studies, Mathematics, Political Science, Psychology, Sociology and Social Work (the list may not be complete).

Fayetteville SU. Foreign language required for the Nursing and English majors only. The new chancellor is in favor of having a language requirement across the board. Implementation of a language requirement is expected.

No information was found on FL requirements at UNC School of the Arts or Elizabeth City SU. It is worth noting that on ECSU's web site, the Chancellor's Welcome appears both in English and Spanish.

The above data overwhelmingly show that foreign languages are part of the requirements at most institutions (this is more evident at the more prestigious institutions). In sum, this is not just a curricular matter pertaining to the College of Arts and Sciences at Western Carolina University. It is a much larger philosophical issue about what real "education" is and should be in this shrinking world of ours, and the role of foreign languages in that process. Most developed nations have understood this and are already moving in this direction; the US definitely cannot afford to lag behind. While particular interests should not be completely ignored, the larger common interest (the intellectual well-being of our students) must prevail over each department's desires to maintain or eliminate the foreign language requirement for its majors. Do we really want to "relax" our requirements to the point that the degrees we offer our students are less valuable than those they obtain at sister institutions in the state and beyond? It is this question that should inform the discussion on this subject, which transcends the confines of our small microcosm in the beautiful mountains of Western North Carolina.

And now the floor is open for more debate!

Santiago García-Castañón, Ph.D.

Professor of Spanish and Head, Department of Modern Foreign Languages

*Please note: The opinions printed here belong solely to the authors and do not necessarily represent the opinions of the editorial staff or of the Faculty Center. If you would like to respond, you may input your comments directly through the wiki on the Faculty Forum webpage, or email [vguise@wcu.edu](mailto:vguise@wcu.edu) by the 15th of the month following publication of the article you wish to respond to.*



## **Coulter Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning**

### **Responses to March Faculty Forum article by Dr. Norma Smith *Contingent Faculty: Paupers of the System***

**Sharon Jacques**      **Mar 2, 2009 4:55 PM**

*I hear you, Norma. At the last Faculty Assembly meeting in Chapel Hill there were representatives urging that all faculty earning over \$60,000 "give back" 1% of their salary to the state as a way to impress the General Assembly. That didn't fly very far, although most of us expressed a need to protect the lower-level earners (both EPA and SPA) in the UNC System. The current term seems to be "furlough" as a way of reducing salary expenses temporarily. If that happens, I think tenured faculty and administrators should take the first cut.*

*Sharon Jacques, Nursing*

**Eric Hendrix**      **Mar 4, 2009 3:30 PM**

*I agree wholeheartedly with you, Norma, and appreciate you stepping forth to rock this boat. Hopefully, once spring break winds down, there will be more excellent responses from readers. The Georgia solution strikes me as the fairest all around response to "cutting back." It's hypocritical at best to be told we contingent faculty are so important and then when funds run low to have us be the first ones cut. This is de-moralizing, especially realizing many of us "may be back in the fall because of high enrollment." Apparently, when the money is there, we're really important; otherwise ... what happened to "thinking OUTSIDE of the box"?*

*Einstein stated that the same mindset which created a problem cannot solve that problem. Thinking outside of the box to solve issues is not only QEP, but provides the perfect opportunity to find a workable solution that benefits all involved. Now, that would make Einstein very proud!*

*At the same time, I completely disagree with the suggestion that all faculty making over \$60k take a 1% salary reduction; especially "as a way to impress the General Assembly;" that sends the wrong message. I don't care about the G.A. These people not only earn their wages, but have earned that privilege as well; they should be respected.*

*Creating, however, an environment of mutual commitment to the goals we all share by providing all involved a chance to work one day during a school year (perhaps two?) respects ALL involved and most importantly, raises high the bar of seeking equitable solutions to difficult situations rather than knee-jerking into the future when times are tough. Thanks again for your heartfelt, thoughtful, and well-composed posting.*

*Eric Hendrix, English*

**Norma Smith**      **Mar 4, 2009 10:33 PM**

*Correction: "The Georgia solution" should read as the "Maine" solution. Thanks! Eric Hendrix, English*

**Greg Adkison**

**Mar 9, 2009 12:16 AM**

*Except for describing how faculty cuts negatively affect students and the call for us to act as enlightened leaders, the March edition of Faculty Forum expressed an unjustified (and presumably unintentional) conceit that reflects badly on WCU's contingent (i.e., fixed-term) faculty. For example, saying that the loss of fixed-term positions is inhumane diminishes the meaning of "inhumane" and fails to recognize the meaning of "fixed-term." Also, complaining about the terms and pay defined by contracts we \*choose\* to sign misdirects responsibility. Worst of all, the piece implies that fixed-term faculty members deserve the same protections given to colleagues in viable programs who have \*earned\* tenure or who are successfully progressing toward tenure. If someone wants the terms and pay associated with tenure, then that person should compete for a tenure-track job. If the person is unable to secure a tenure-track position, then perhaps a reflective assessment of one's qualifications, professional value, and \*choice\* to serve in a fixed-term position is in order. On the other hand, perhaps an evaluation of priorities is appropriate if a different reason underlies the \*choice\* to be in a fixed-term position at WCU (e.g., love of our mountains or love of a spouse or dependent who is tied to this location).*

*The fears associated with being in a fixed-term contract are understandable, but some people consider them acceptable trade-offs for interactive teaching and satisfying research in a beautiful place that offers a uniquely southern Appalachian flavor of nature, serenity, and outdoor activity.*

*Greg Adkison,  
Fixed-term Instructor  
Department of Biology*

**Jayne Zanglein**

**Mar 15, 2009 4:31 PM**

*The discussion about contingent faculty is an emotional one, in general, but triggers even greater emotions in tough financial times. That's because the purpose of contingent faculty is to give the administration flexibility in terms of budgeting and staff--and this becomes essential during a harsh recession such as the current one.*

*On the other hand, all contingent faculty are not created equally. They are diverse in terms of pay, title, potential for job security and advancement, and departmental expectations. Contingent faculty on one campus are not treated the same as contingent workers on other campuses. More importantly, contingent faculty on this campus enjoy different rights, expectations, pay, and authority depending on the type of contingent faculty (adjunct, fixed term, endowed professor, lab instructor, grant-funded, etc.) and their departmental support. Whenever such a wide divergence of terms and conditions exists, fear creeps in--fear that some contingent employees are more secure, enjoy better pay and status, and are more likely to advance than others. There's a feeling of inequality and perhaps a fear of being taken advantage of.*

*As the former Coulter Faculty Fellow for Part-time Faculty, I have heard these comments before. But let me end on a positive note. The contingent faculty who remain at Western year after year, love and appreciate their jobs. They are pointing out their concerns so that their colleagues better understand their situation and to assist administration in making sound financial decisions that will benefit students, faculty, and the university as a whole.*

*Jayne Zanglein  
Business Law*

**Lesa Childers**

**Mar 18, 2009 9:44 AM**

*As a graduate of WCU and a practicing clinical social worker in the surrounding communities, I have been honored to serve as adjunct staff in the Social Work department for several semesters. I find the experience of sharing my skills and knowledge with up and coming social workers to be incredibly rewarding for me and, I believe, for the students, as well. As someone who still is "in the trenches" in our field, I consider my perspective to be unique and vital to the students I teach -- real life vs. theory on many levels. The decision to cut part time staff is a painful one for me. While I did not depend on the pay for my livelihood, it certainly allowed me the opportunity to be a part of an academic setting and I am extremely proud to be contributing to the education of others in my field. Since I drive from Asheville to Cullowhee twice a week to teach one class per semester, it certainly has not been a matter of grand financial gain. It was about "making a difference" and being a part of the future of social work. I will miss my role at WCU and regret that budgetary decisions have warranted such drastic measures. But I am proud to have contributed while I could.*

*Sincerely,*

*Lesa Childers, LCSW*



# Faculty Forum

*From the Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning*

WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

CULLOWHEE, NORTH CAROLINA

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## **Make Room For Baby: The Rising Teen Pregnancy Rate and Its Challenge to WCU Sharon Jacques, Nursing**

We are reminded daily of the rapidly escalating global population explosion and the many issues its impacts have and will continue to have on every element of our world and our society. The rising rate of teen pregnancy is alarming, even while the news glamorizes and, in effect, sanctions teen and out of wedlock births by entertainment, sports and even political figures on the national stage.

Many find this situation deploring and increasingly look to educational and health institutions to offer a range of options and solutions. As a major resource for the people of western North Carolina, Western Carolina University has opportunities and, yes, obligations to address this issue. I hope that this article will be a springboard for dialogue and suggestions from faculty and staff. While we no doubt have much more to do, we are already proactive on a number of fronts:

### **Serving our WCU students:**

The WCU Health Center has top-notch Women's Clinic Services (see [www.wcu.edu/7863.asp](http://www.wcu.edu/7863.asp)). Condoms are readily available at the Health Center for free. The latest Healthy Campus Data Report (see [www.wcu.edu/7911.asp](http://www.wcu.edu/7911.asp)) shows that only 6% of students reported using no pregnancy prevention at last vaginal intercourse, so that is encouraging.

There are many resources on campus to prevent or respond to sexual assault: an active and observant round-the-clock campus police force, a late into the night campus shuttle service that transports students from fringe parking lots straight to their dorm doors, new call boxes placed strategically around campus, an active, involved Women's Center that works hard to promote awareness, a Women's Studies program that educates and illuminates these kinds of issues every year in their Gender Conference, and Counseling and Health Centers that are a confidential resource at a critical time of intervention.

As for prevention of unwanted pregnancy and safe-sex practices, emergency contraceptives are available at the Campus Health Center at a lower cost than off-campus. The Gardasil vaccine against HPV is fully covered by student health insurance. It appears that all of these services are very effective when students take advantage of them.

## **Education: Our Main Task**

### **✓ Preparing Teachers To Support Students in K-12 Schools**

Public school systems are on the front line for preventing teen pregnancy. WCU's teacher education programs include a second academic concentration in Health Promotion and Wellness, which enrolls about 20-25 new students a year. Options for teaching pregnancy prevention in K-12 schools are abstinence-only, "abstinence plus," and comprehensive sex education. Federal regulations are likely to change soon, and NC Rep. Susan Fisher's (D-Buncombe) Healthy Youth Act now under consideration in the NC House offers more options to local school districts. Debby Singleton, in Health & Human Performance, who is teaching the new HEAL 360 Sexual Health through the Lifespan, said she works to get students comfortable with a full range of topics. Class dynamics include setting group norms, enabling free discussion, using slang without degrading others, and omitting personal opinions.

There are intensive programs in some schools to support teen parents and their children. The NC Coalition for the Prevention of Adolescent Pregnancy has published research showing that effective programs must show as much attention to those who don't get pregnant as to those who do. Marvin Schade in HPER said his interns provide role-models and support to students as they make choices about how to spend after-school hours. Extra-curricular activities help keep teens busy and focused on long-term goals. Service learning opportunities for HPER students further this involvement. Athletic opportunities for both boys and girls will probably survive economic cutbacks in public school operations. After-school programs in the arts (except marching and pep band) are more vulnerable in some schools.

### **✓ Preparing Nurses To Provide Accurate Sex-education Information**

We know that student nurses almost immediately become health care and information resources to their families and friends. Sexual wellness and childbearing have always been part of our basic curriculum. Few of our newly licensed graduates work in areas where they come in regular contact with teens, unless they are already parents themselves. RN to BSN students more often work in schools or health departments. Family Nurse Practitioner master's students do didactic and clinical work in Reproductive Health & Childbearing Family and in Primary Care of Children and Adolescents. These graduates are ready to respond in their communities.

Several years ago I had an RN to BSN student whose Community Health teaching project was to serve as a resource to her teen daughter and her friends. She opened her home regularly after school as a safe place where the girls could ask questions and get straight answers. She was also a resource to the other girls' mothers. This effective intervention leads me to my last suggestion for WCU.

### **✓ Preparing Future Parents To Know How to Talk with Their Children About Sex**

Practically everyone agrees that the schools cannot bear the burden of sex education alone. Families must be more involved and effective in providing accurate information within their value systems. Previous generations of parents, who were measurably less educated than emerging generations, may have been understandably ill-prepared and reluctant to talk with their children honestly and openly about sex. Today a university education ought to include plenty of opportunities to explore both the information and values in safe and balanced discussions.

Debby Singleton found her HEAL 360 class attracted a wide variety of majors. PSY 331 Human Sexuality sells out every time it is offered. SOC 365 Marriage and Family is another popular course. So, we are already doing many important and strategic activities to address teen pregnancy, unplanned pregnancies, and gender issues around sexuality and choice.

However, as the largest and oldest state supported educational institution in our region, shouldn't WCU be doing even more to help reduce teen pregnancy and unplanned pregnancy among our students and the people of the surrounding communities? Girls in middle and high school still drop out of school at a high rate and often see no other real options than getting married early and raising families. Shouldn't we be asking ourselves what more we can and should be doing to educate our own students—the next generation of parents--and the community at large throughout the mountain region beyond Jackson County? Are there other courses with different or similar topics that we could offer? What assignments could we be giving students to help them become more effective parents? What Service Learning options could WCU students engage in with area schools and teens that would open windows of insight and hope to students? What about a speaker's bureau that reaches out to youth, church, and civic groups? How can we better educate our young men on campus and in the larger community to raise the bar on gender relations and change some of the old male paradigms that promote sexual aggression and unwanted pregnancies?

Yes, at a time that the world's population continues to spiral beyond our carrying capacity, and the topics of choice and sex are more acceptably discussed in the mainstream, shouldn't we at WCU be ratcheting up the heat (pun intended) on our role to speak out intelligently about these issues and help our students and the community make greater inroads in addressing the remaining problems?

Sharon Jacques  
Associate Professor  
School of Nursing

*Please note: The opinions printed here belong solely to the authors and do not necessarily represent the opinions of the editorial staff or of the Faculty Center. If you would like to respond, you may input your comments directly through the wiki on the Faculty Forum webpage, or email [vguise@wcu.edu](mailto:vguise@wcu.edu) by the 15th of the month following publication of the article you wish to respond to.*

# Coulter Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning

## Responses to April Faculty Forum article entitled

### FOREIGN LANGUAGES, ACADEMIC CURRICULA, AND THE CHANGING WORLD

By Santiago García-Castañón, Ph.D.  
Professor of Spanish and Head, Department of Modern Foreign Languages

#### Introductory Comments from the Editor

Santiago's compelling article was first shared through the campus email and generated such a strong emotional response from faculty, we decided it merited publication in the **Faculty Forum** as a means of raising attention to his important argument and also a way to archive it in the annals of the university faculty newspaper—**The Faculty Forum**. As we looked back on the wealth of ideas and reflections in the email dialogue that Santiago's first dispatch generated, we decided it was important to capture those as well, knowing that faculty are busy and may not take the time to re-post their responses directly to the **Faculty Forum** web page. So, here they are for your edification and an addition to the institutional knowledge all of us are responsible for compounding. Special thanks to Sue Grider for helping me re-capture all your responses.

**Vera Guise**  
Faculty Fellow, Coulter Faculty Center



*I fully concur with the posts, too, but suspect that to speak the language (ha) of those who oppose the foreign language requirement we need to address the issue of jobs. Tell me, we're going to train people in construction management but they won't need Spanish? We're sending out people with business degrees who won't need Chinese? Get real.*


**Gael Graham, History**

*Dear Colleagues,*


*I want to respond to Santiago's posting because I believe that the issue is important. I fully support his argument. I find disturbing, and frankly incredible, the notion that Western would move against the grain of internationalism, cross-culturalism and multilingual competence in a shrinking globe. Santiago rightfully made reference to UNC Tomorrow, yet our own campus QEP calls for "active and engaged learning that addresses local and global issues." Moreover, the WCU mission seeks to "create engaged learning through [among other things] international experiences." What programmatic cues are we taking from these lofty declarations? Sending monoglots out into the world of "international experience" means that such experience will not be very international, regardless of the soil where it occurs. It will not produce much learning, and it will short-circuit the very cultural awareness-building such experience is supposed to engender.*

*Far from de-emphasizing Western's foreign language requirement, we should be ramping up our standards by refusing to award degrees of any kind without functional mastery of at least one foreign language by graduation. Much of the world does this; so can we.*

John LeBaron, Jay M. Robinson Distinguished Professor of Educational Technologies  
Coulter Faculty Center

 *John has said it very elegantly. Increase the language requirement.*

**Nina Marable**  
**Visiting Instructor, Health Sciences**

 *John and all, thank you for raising this issue. I won't recapitulate the arguments for foreign language instruction, because I hope that we all know them; however, I will add the question of where in our programs the foreign language instruction occurs. By struggling to find a different solution for each program and degree, we're both minimizing the importance of the issue and fragmenting our efforts; in the longer programs, for instance, we've in the past had to reduce our foreign language requirements simply to get students to graduate on time. This is in part because our current Liberal Studies program, now under revision, is so lengthy.*

*I'd argue that our new Liberal Studies program should require sustained study in a language other than English up to the third or fourth year for every student, rather than allowing students to avoid foreign language study altogether if they choose other options. Foreign language study, that most crucial literacy for the new millennium, shouldn't be left to the discretion, or, in some cases, the desperation, of each individual program, degree, or college, but should be an area in which each of our graduating students should be prepared. I've raised this issue with my nearest representative on the Liberal Studies committee; I encourage all those concerned about this issue to do so as well.*

Thanks,  
**Catherine Carter**  
**English Department**

 *Dear Colleagues,*

*Coming from the office of International Programs and Services, many of you may not realize that there is a small revolution afoot among our students. Our students know that language acquisition and an international study, internship, and service learning experience will set them apart in the job market.*

*Even in these stressful economic times, we are seeing increased interest in studying abroad, especially to countries like Spain, Mexico, Japan, and China. High schools in Raleigh teach Japanese and feed into WCU because in the states, we have the most developed program in Japanese, offering four years of Japanese language and culture courses. High schools in North Carolina are beginning to teach Chinese. These students will be looking for a university that also teaches Chinese.*

*WCU needs to look more closely at the importance of language acquisition across the curriculum - not only in the BA degree. It may be time to revisit our options at the department, college and university levels if we truly believe that our students must be prepared for the global environment that they are entering. My office stands ready to assist any college or department in developing international programs for their students and faculty.*

**Lois Petrovich-Mwaniki, Ph.D.**  
**Director, International Programs and Services**



 Dear Colleagues

*I would also like to respond to the posting sent to us by Santiago Garcia-Castañon. I am very surprised that there is thought to eliminating the foreign language requirement for undergraduates. I agree with all the statements that have been conveyed in the posting. We are a nation that is opening our arms and hearts to immigrants, becoming a multi-cultural/ diverse society but we are not opening our hearts and minds to the fact that we are the nation that supposedly thinks we are in the forefront of education, we have conducted research stating that language development is important and that the earlier we expose students to a new language the easier it is to learn it and acquire it without an accent. In the great majority of European nations all students are required to take English and another language. In college they are expected to continue this knowledge, and in fact some courses are taught in English.*

*If we are to continue to prepare students for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century- which is a global society- then acquiring a foreign language is a must. Statistics show that we are a multi-lingual society. Are we so arrogant to think that we do not have to learn a second language that the world has to meet our demands and learn our language? As we prepare future teachers/students, it is imperative that these students understand the dynamics of cultural/ethnic diversity and learn to communicate with them. One way is acquiring a second language. Research also shows that learning a second language also helps in the acquisition of content in other subjects and in brain development. I think it is time not only to inform nations about what is “research-based/scientifically-based evidenced, but also to put the results into practice in our own” turf.”*

**Iris Rouleau, Ed.D.**  
**Special Education Instructor**

**Editor’s Reminder:**

**Don’t forget to post your comments to this month’s excellent article on the WCU role regarding the rising teen pregnancy rate, directly onto the Faculty Forum webpage. Scroll to the bottom of the page and use the wiki to post your comments directly. <https://media.wcu.edu/groups/facultyforum/wiki>**

**Thanks!**