Welcome to Connections - Your Teaching & Learning Resource

Peter Smith - Acting Director, Centre for Leadership in Learning

This is the first edition of our newsletter since the sad passing of our former Director, Dr. Sue Vajoczki. We all have fond memories of her unwaveringly positive outlook and her unique ability to view any challenge as a learning opportunity. I would like to thank the McMaster community for the support that it gave to Sue’s colleagues and family.

Since being appointed Director in 2009, Sue transformed the Centre for Leadership in Learning into a site for connection and creativity focused on support for, and research into, teaching and learning at McMaster University. She established close collaborations with the Faculties, the School of Graduate Studies, the Library, and other units. She advocated for the importance of the scholarship of teaching and learning, and she developed numerous programs and opportunities for faculty engagement. Her work culminated with McMaster hosting the 2012 International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Conference, which brought leading researchers in the scholarship of teaching and learning (SOTL) from around the world to Hamilton.

The University Senate recently approved a selection committee for the new Associate Vice President (Teaching and Learning) (see committee membership at http://bit.ly/Zepgmr). The committee is seeking nominations for candidates who could lead the CLL to greater impact on student experience, educational technology, and research on teaching and learning at McMaster. The person fortunate enough to be chosen for the role will be able to count on the support of the outstanding team of dedicated professionals housed within the CLL, as well as the broader teaching community.

In the coming months, we anticipate that several of the initiatives emerging from the University’s Forward With Integrity discussions will provide opportunities for the CLL to contribute and further strengthen its collaborations with the teaching community. In particular, the proposed learning portfolios offer exciting possibilities for developing new and imaginative pedagogical approaches that will benefit students. In this newsletter, there are additional examples of creative and scholarly teaching currently underway at McMaster University.

I conclude by reminding the reader that the CLL was created to help develop a richer learning environment at McMaster and, as such, we are eager to discuss and support any proposals that you might have in this regard.
Planning for Accessible Teaching: Selecting Course Materials

Clark Cipryk - Assistive Technologist, Student Accessibility Services
Marie Vander Kloet - Educational Consultant, Centre for Leadership in Learning

The eagerly awaited spring weather will hopefully arrive soon and with it the opportunity for rest and renewal in the summer months. It is a time when university educators may experience a rare time for reflection on their teaching and consideration of revision to their courses, including selection and organization of course material. The summer offers the possibility that we can begin to more earnestly consider how we could continue to build accessibility at McMaster University.

At Student Accessibility Services (SAS), staff are highly attuned to how course materials that are inaccessible can impact students with disabilities. A key concern is time: students often spend considerable time seeking out course materials that are accessible (for example, compatible for use with screen readers), emailing instructors regarding course materials and working with SAS to address concerns that arise with publishers, library materials and online sources. Time spent sorting out access to materials often delays students in beginning their course work; this impacts their learning experiences and the pace at which they complete their degrees.

Time is precious – and all of us at McMaster are eager to find a bit more of it. We have gathered some suggestions here that instructors can implement when planning their courses with the hope of leaving students and teachers time to focus on teaching and learning.

Accessible Approaches:

Documents:
- Post handouts, PDFs, PowerPoint presentations and Word documents discussed or distributed in class on Avenue to Learn.
  - Why?
    - Saves scanning time/expense.
    - Compatible with screen readers (used by students with visual impairments, students with learning disabilities and students who may need to listen to, rather than read, notes).
  - Use Math ML on Avenue for mathematics related work.
  - New to MathML? Read this first.
  - Why use MathML instead of handwritten notes?
    - Students needing screen reading software can have math read back to them, right in the browser.
    - Typing notes out can save time in the long run by having resources that you can copy and paste.
- In Ontario, websites that are accessible will meet at least the WCAG 2.0 single ‘A’ level.
- Not sure what this means? Ask anyway … even if you are not sure about why it is (or is not) accessible it will mean you have used accessibility standards to measure the suitability of particular materials before including them in your course.
- Choose texts and materials that are accessible.
  - Why?
    - Ensures that alternate versions of texts will rarely need to be created or requested. This reduces delays in access to materials for students.
    - Encourages publishers to produce materials which are accessible which eliminates future time spent, by faculty and students, locating accessible materials.
- Understand the challenges that e-books pose for accessibility.
  - E-books frequently are encoded with Digital Rights Management – this is not compatible with screen readers.
  - Library Accessibility Services at McMaster University has a list of publishers that produce accessible e-books. Find the list here.

Textbooks/course resources:
- Ask publishers about the accessibility of texts (and accompanying materials such as CDs, online materials, etc.).
- A question to ask publishers or webmasters: Does this webpage meet WCAG 2.0 website guidelines?
- In Ontario, websites that are accessible will meet at least the WCAG 2.0 single ‘A’ level.
- Not sure what this means? Ask anyway … even if you are not sure about why it is (or is not) accessible it will mean you have used accessibility standards to measure the suitability of particular materials before including them in your course.
- Choose texts and materials that are accessible.
  - Why?
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    - Encourages publishers to produce materials which are accessible which eliminates future time spent, by faculty and students, locating accessible materials.

Websites:
- Making your own website for a course (instead of using Avenue or Moodle)? Plan for accessibility … and teach your students how!

Did you know?
- Flash based platforms are rarely accessible (e.g., Prezi).
- Java platforms often have accessibility issues (e.g., webinar software, online discussion forums).

Considering accessibility in assembling your course materials is one important step towards fostering inclusion at McMaster University. With the introduction of the AODA, we know that accessible teaching is our shared responsibility. Importantly, planning for accessibility results in a more inclusive teaching environment – and this is helpful for all students (and teachers) who may seek to read, think and work with materials in a variety of ways. With more resources for teaching, we can build accessibility and manage to squeeze in some rest and relaxation this summer.

Have more questions about accessible course planning? Please contact us:
- Marie Vander Kloet vandema@mcmaster.ca
- Clark Cipryk ciprykc@mcmaster.ca
Signature Pedagogies

McMaster Conservation Corridor - Teaching and Research Facility

Chad Harvey - Assistant Professor, Department of Biology and Integrated Science Program
Susan Dudley - Associate Professor, Department of Biology and Integrated Science Program

Situated just south of McMaster University, the McMaster Conservation Corridor is a 50 hectare expanse of diverse habitats, including rare old growth forest, easily accessible by bus or bicycle from the campus. Owned by McMaster since the 1960s, this property serves as a natural connection between the Dundas Valley Conservation Area and Cootes Paradise (RBG), and in turn, as part of the emerging Cootes to Escarpment Park System. With support from a Forward with Integrity grant and monies from the Faculty of Science, Drs. Susan Dudley and Chad Harvey are developing this property as a facility for teaching and research. By establishing this property as a novel, out-of-doors facility, this space will deliver an unprecedented opportunity for interdepartmental experiential learning, integrating active, collaborative research with undergraduate courses and ecological stewardship.

Key to the success of this project is the creation of a 20m by 20m spatial grid across the extent of the property. The grid will facilitate research surveys to study what flora and fauna are present. Students, through course-based lab work and independent projects, can research the conservation status of a species, measure their numbers across the grid, and determine population demography. Of particular interest will be the identification of species at their range limits, where interesting genetic diversity may be present and changes in population status may reflect global change.

The McMaster Conservation Corridor shows little human impact considering its urban surroundings. Given its unique location, control and prevention of further impacts are paramount to the preservation of long-term biodiversity within the facility. Protection of natural properties requires education and public awareness. Establishment of this facility provides an innovative opportunity to educate future leaders in both the sensitivity and the resilience of the land. The success of this project will be achieved with changes in student perception toward the environment. The hope is that active, research-based learning will be a catalyst for this change.
**International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching & Learning: Conference 2012**

**Erin Allard - Educational Consultant, Centre for Leadership in Learning**

From October 24-27, 2012, McMaster University’s Centre for Leadership in Learning was honours to host the 2012 International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching & Learning (ISSOTL) Conference at the Hamilton Convention Centre and Sheraton Hamilton Hotel. ISSOTL is an international professional and scholarly organization devoted to fostering and disseminating research on teaching and learning. The society serves “faculty members, staff, and students who care about teaching and learning as serious intellectual work” (www.issotl.org).

The conference brought together approximately 600 scholars, students, educators, and government representatives from around the world and was centered on the theme “Integrating Practices”. A pre-conference symposium offered by the Council on Undergraduate Research was devoted to international discussion of strategies and opportunities for engaging undergraduate students in meaningful research. The main conference offerings included workshops facilitated by leading scholars in the field, distinguished international plenary speakers, panel presentations, individual paper and poster presentations, and ISSOTL’s signature Conference Commons (for informal idea-sharing and networking). A new feature at the 2012 conference included international collaborative writing groups. The groups, which included faculty and students from a range of disciplines and countries, began working together to collaboratively author an article on a pre-selected topic about SOTL for submission for publication.

This conference served as a unique and stimulating experience for members of the teaching and learning community at McMaster and beyond to connect and collaborate. Sincere thanks to all of those who helped to make the conference a reality.

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**Education 750: Principles & Practices of University Teaching**

This graduate level credit course is about the principles and practices of university teaching. The course is offered three times per year to McMaster graduate students and postdoctoral fellows. The focus is on assisting participants in honing essential pedagogical and practical teaching skills, including:

- curriculum design
- teaching and assessment strategies, and
- developing a teaching portfolio.

The course is full for the Spring 2013 semester. Registration for the Fall 2013 semester will open in July through SOLAR.

For more information, go to cll.mcmaster.ca/pedagogy/pro-grams/education750.html?l=en or contact Catherine Swanson (swanson@mcmaster.ca).

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**CLL Profile**

In August 2011, Jon Kruithof joined the Centre for Leadership in Learning at the Learning Technologies Help Desk.

Jon completed his diploma in Media Arts at Sheridan College and a diploma at Mohawk College for Software Engineering. He is currently undertaking his Bachelor’s of Education (Adult Education) at Brock University.

Jon began his career as a technician embedded within the Language Studies department at Mohawk College, which quickly grew to develop and support e-learning within the department. His work expanded further to include providing support to second/additional language learners who used technology and media to acquire English skills at a higher education level. Over eight years of working with Language Studies lead to an opportunity in the eLearning Department at Mohawk College where Jon served an important role in the transition and migration from multiple Learning Management Systems to one sole platform. In 2010, in his role as a developer, he converted delivery of CELBAN, the Canadian English Language Benchmark Assessment for Nurses, to an electronic format. This was one of the first language assessments to be delivered online through a LMS, and the first time in the history of the CELBAN test for it to be delivered electronically.

Always interested in Web 2.0 technologies and how social media intersects with learning, Jon brings a wealth of LMS development experience and has extensive knowledge of how Avenue to Learn works. If you are wondering how to set up a tool on Avenue, you can contact Jon at ext. 27497 or kruithj@mcmaster.ca for support.
The Sustainable Future Program is the product of collaboration amongst cross-campus stakeholders from each of the various faculties, administrative departments and members of the community. The goal is to engage students in learning about sustainability through experience, research and community engagement. The first major initiative of the program is the development and implementation of the course, Sustain 2A03: The Sustainable Future Project. Sustain 2A03 has been initiated by the Faculty of Engineering, through the Sustainability Task Force, as a way to align with the objectives of their strategic plan to enhance the undergraduate experience by offering a course with a sustainability focus (Faculty of Engineering, 2009). The course began in January 2013 and aims to create more knowledgeable and effective change agents to champion a culture of sustainability.

To achieve this goal, and to enhance the opportunity to engage in multidisciplinary learning, 84 students distributed across all faculties enrolled in Sustain 2A03 are engaging in practical research and application through working with individuals, groups and organizations within the community, both at McMaster and in the city of Hamilton. Students work with members of the community to develop their sustainable project idea, which encompasses concepts from lecture and each student’s individual passions and interests. Over 20 members of the community provided support by acting as community project champions or as community mentors to assist in project planning, development and implementation.

In one project, four undergraduate students focusing on growing the McMaster Teaching and Community Garden held a fundraising event at which members of the community could purchase a plant or learn how to grow their own. Over $500 was generated, which will provide financial support for an upcoming garden workshop and to purchase supplies for the remainder of the project. In another group, students participating in the Adaptive Design project, an initiative that teaches students how to build furniture out of cardboard, have held their first workshop where furniture pieces such as chairs and stools were successfully designed and created. Another group of students have begun conducting consultations with the University on how to incorporate sustainability into all courses available at McMaster.

It is anticipated that The Sustainable Future Program will expand to include a second course beginning in the Fall term of 2013/2014, which will continue themes from Sustain 2A03, including: community engagement, multidisciplinary and experiential learning. To learn more about Sustain 2A03, its community partners and projects and how to become involved, visit http://www.mcmaster.ca/sfp.
Teaching and Learning News

Paul R. MacPherson Teaching Fellowship: Creating a Guidebook on Quality Assurance

Lynn Martin  Assistant Professor, School of Nursing

The Paul R. MacPherson Teaching Fellowships at McMaster University were established in 2011 as the result of a generous donation from Paul R. MacPherson. The fellowship identifies faculty members who have demonstrated exemplary teaching practices and who show promise of becoming outstanding educators and of inspiring others. The inaugural winner of the 2012 Fellowship was Lynn Martin, a Teaching Professor in the School of Nursing. Lynn’s project focuses on building capacity in quality assurance (also known as program review) initiatives at McMaster.

Traditionally, quality assurance occurred in the form of ensuring accountability and was often linked to expectations of external stakeholders. Internal processes linking quality assurance with teaching and learning were limited. This project is based on the assumption that curriculum should be reviewed regularly with the purpose of improving the program and ultimately enhancing the student learning experience. The goal of the project is therefore to move departmental quality assurance from an accountability-driven model, to one that informs and empowers departments to improve student learning. By engaging in an ongoing process of quality assurance, student experiences are enhanced and McMaster will continue to lead internationally in its reputation for innovation in teaching and learning and the quality of its programs.

The primary objective of the Fellowship, this year, is the development of a Guidebook on Quality Assurance (modeled after the current CLL series of Guidebooks) that provides departments with the tools needed to complete a comprehensive process of program review leading to the enhancement of teaching and learning in the program. The guidebook includes key principles/practices of the quality assurance cycle, including planning program review, collecting information, interpreting the results and acting on the information gathered. Numerous activities, exercises and links are included to facilitate integration at the department level. The guidebook will be available online on the CLL website and in hard copy.

The second phase of the Fellowship will include a workshop on quality assurance at McMaster in Spring 2013. This workshop will be targeted at those participating in the Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP) at McMaster in 2013/14, but is open to all interested individuals. Further dissemination of the guidebook will occur through a workshop or presentation at a national education conference.

While the primary focus of the Fellowship is the development of the Guidebook, it is hoped that this project will also enhance collaboration and sharing of knowledge, expertise and practice related to quality assurance across campus. While each department is different in the complex ways and settings that learning occurs, the ultimate goal of enhancing student learning through program review is the same.

Communities of Practice

Communities of Practice (CoPs) are groups of people who share a set of interests or a passion about a topic, and who increase their knowledge in this area through discussion and shared experiences. Communities of Practice create a body of shared expertise and promote best practices.

There are currently 8 Communities of Practice:
• Accessibility
• Community Engagement
• Level 1 Instructors
• Pedagogy
• Teaching Professors
• Teaching with Technology
• Research on Teaching and Learning
• Social Justice and Critical Pedagogies

If you would like more information regarding a Community of Practice (about how to join an existing or establish a new CoP), please contact:
Chair(s)
http://cll.mcmaster.ca/cop, or
Kris Knorr, ext. 24539, knorrk@mcmaster.ca
Partnerships

McMaster Seminar on Higher Education - Class Action: Human Rights, Critical Activism, and Community-Engaged Learning
Elizabeth Jackson - Postdoctoral Fellow, Centre for Leadership in Learning

On January 24th, the McMaster Seminar on Higher Education: Practice, Policy, and Public Life welcomed Ajay Heble for a keynote talk and panel discussion. Dr. Heble is a Professor in the School of English & Theatre Studies at the University of Guelph, Project Director of the SSHRC Major Collaborative Research Initiatives project: Improvisation, Community, and Social Practice, and founder and artistic director of the Guelph Jazz Festival and Colloquium.

In his talk, entitled “Class Action: Human Rights, Critical Activism, and Community-Engaged Learning”, Dr. Heble explored the ways in which community-engaged teaching and research can open up “alternatives to dominant systems of knowledge production” and lead students and instructors alike toward new forms of grounded, socially responsible and directly-engaged scholarship. Incorporating theories of improvisation, the philosophy of legendary jazz musician Sun Ra, and a broad range of critical pedagogical theorists, Heble made an impassioned and compelling argument that educators hold a compelling “ethical responsibility...to articulate principled arguments about our commitment to advancing alternative forms of social mobilization, new (and more just) ways of understanding, new (and more just) ways of participating in a world of human responsibility.” Heble, and respondents Dr. Walt Peace and Dr. Amber Dean, then explored the possibilities and the challenges of taking part in community-engaged teaching and learning. The general consensus was that institutional and other systemic structures can make community-engaged work difficult, and that there is a need for caution and slowness when establishing and implementing community-engaged projects, but that, when done mindfully and in genuine collaboration with community partners, community engagement can offer a productive and rewarding opportunity for students to engage in what often becomes mind- and life-changing work.

Those who missed Dr. Ajay Heble’s talk can watch it at: http://youtu.be/hWpRKmoLPg.

Teaching Development

Reflecting on the Facilitator Development Workshop (FDW)
Jon Kruithof - Learning Technologies, Centre for Leadership in Learning

I am always a bit sceptical when attending workshops – I have been to many that don’t seem relevant. I was pleasantly surprised with how the Facilitator Development Workshop (FDW) immediately made sense to me because of the connections to the model it builds on from the Instructional Skills Workshop (ISW). It felt particularly relevant to my understanding of teaching, learning and facilitating. The framework of both the ISW and FDW felt familiar. Both are useful for helping me to analyze what happens in various teaching contexts.

The FDW was far more intense than the ISW – it was more draining and, as a result, far more revealing. It was interesting that in facilitation feedback circles I tended to be highly reflective; I took much more time to respond than I normally do when facilitating or teaching (I am usually inclined and able to respond almost immediately). It was an interesting difference. I found I was more deliberate, taking time to craft my answers carefully, almost labouring over the language and words. I’m still thinking about the difference and considering how it will shape my work. I would have never made those discoveries had I not gone through the FDW. Ultimately, this is what the FDW did for me – it prompted me to develop and enhance self-reflection skills that were in need of a tune-up. It also modeled how one should strive to work with students and faculty. Despite the hard work, it was a lot of fun. It allowed me free reign to try out ideas that, in a classroom, would feel too risky to try (if they failed); it was refreshing to be able to experiment and explore how things might turn out.
Teaching and Learning News

Petro-Canada Young Innovator Award: Re-imagining McMaster as Bike U

Michael Egan - Associate Professor, Department of History

The Petro-Canada Young Innovator Award is designed to foster collaborative research between scholars and their undergraduate students. In initiating the project, my preliminary challenge to my students and to the McMaster community at large was: how do we re-Imagine McMaster as Bike U? While students have engaged in all manner of research, the idea was to bring our collective energies and creativities to the streets (quite literally, though I try to refrain from making bike puns). In addition to interdisciplinary analyses of local and more general issues surrounding bike lanes, bike safety, and women and cycling, students have participated in making recommendations for greater integration of bicycle topics in the MTO (Ministry of Transportation) driver’s education manual, preparing a series of options to the City of Hamilton to build a bike lane along the Cannon Street corridor, and a manual to encourage their peers to think about making the bicycle their primary mode of transportation. The project has organized The McMaster Rolling Seminar: La Vie Vélo, a series of talks from such cycling luminaries as the best-selling author, Bike Snob, and retired Canadian professional cyclist Michael Barry. Spring efforts will include a suite of roundtable discussions on putting “butts on bikes,” and an on-campus bike festival designed to celebrate and educate. For more information on any of the above, contact egan@mcmaster.ca and/or follow on Twitter @EganHistory.

TA Notes

Graduate Student and Teaching Assistant Winter Workshop Series

Greg Van Gastel - Educational Assistant, Centre for Leadership in Learning

During the Winter term of 2013, the Centre for Leadership in Learning implemented a new series of workshops for Graduate Students and Teaching Assistants. This new workshop series aims to provide teaching assistants with the opportunity to develop their teaching and learning skills during their time at McMaster. This past series included workshops on topics such as accessibility and teaching, facilitating discussions and efficient marking. These workshops were well received by the community of graduate students and TAs across campus and the CLL intends to continue offering this program in the future. A new series of workshops is currently in development for the Spring term and will add to the already diverse repertoire of workshops that were conducted this past term. In addition to these new offerings, the CLL will also be hosting an array of introductory teaching and learning sessions during Graduate Student Week this September. Watch http://cll.mcmaster.ca/events/ for updated information and to register for upcoming events.