

Editorial

The Road to Excellence

By Dr. Waddah Nasr, Department of Philosophy, FAS

The Center for Teaching and Learning at the American University of Beirut was officially founded ten years ago (2004). It is perhaps appropriate, after ten years of its foundation, to take a reflective look at the Center's history. We look at the Center's history to better understand the present and to more effectively and imaginatively plan for the future.

Looking Back

The letter of appointment of the newly appointed Associate Provost (Sept 1991) included the charge "to manage the University's initiative, funded by the Mellon Foundation, to enhance the quality of undergraduate teaching." The first Annual Report of the interdisciplinary university wide Task Force on Undergraduate Teaching Excellence submitted to the Provost (July, 2000) included a recommendation to the administration of the university "to... establish a Teaching and Learning Center at AUB. The Center should help faculty members improve their teaching effectiveness on voluntary basis. The Center will offer centralized teaching development programs throughout campus and across different disciplines." The recommendation proceeds to spell out, in some detail, the characteristics that the envisioned Center "is perceived to have." The preamble to the recommendation is worth quoting in full: "Teaching and Learning Centers at US Universities have been established as a shift in pedagogy and teaching occurred from teacher-centered classrooms to student-centered learning and with the infusion of technology into the culture of education. The emphasis that accrediting bodies now place on outcome-based programs, and the need to provide tools for assessing student performance as well as teacher performance, have driven universities to give more attention to the teaching learning process and to the skills the students are expected to acquire. Quality assurance of undergraduate education and teaching at AUB is essential if the University is to attain, and maintain, accreditation. However, our commitment to such assurance is a matter of principle and professional pride, and not merely the result of 'accreditation pressures'."

The recommendation of the Task Force to establish a center for teaching and learning was

based primarily on visits that the members of the Task Force made to the teaching and learning centers at selected US universities (April 20-30, 2000). After a similar visit that Drs. Saouma Boujaoude and Amal BouZeineddine took in 2003, they recommended the establishment of a CTL at AUB. This recommendation was updated in 2004 and submitted to the Provost by the Associate Provost and Dr. Amal BouZeineddine.

Looking Ahead

The CTL has been true to its stated mission, and has lived up to the mission of the university as well. The Center's numerous activities have quite effectively served the teaching and learning needs not only of the university, but, to some extent, also those of the country and the region. A lot has been accomplished; but much more still needs to be achieved. Of the many challenges that the Center faces, two should be singled out and given priority.

The absence of well thought out, clearly stated effectively and equitably implemented criteria and policies for the assessment of teaching effectiveness at the university constitutes a serious disincentive for faculty members to invest the requisite time and energy essential for the improvement and enhancement of the quality and effectiveness of their teaching.

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Teaching effectiveness is given little or no weight when it comes to decisions on important matters such as promotion, renewal of contracts, or merit pay! This lack of emphasis upon teaching effectiveness in the assessment of the overall performance of a faculty member is inconsistent with the University's commitment to the provision of "excellence in education" affirmed by the Mission Statement of the University.

The Advisory committee of the CTL meets, at least, twice a year. I have the honor of being a member of this committee. Two standard items on the agenda of the committee's meeting are, first, a report on the recent activities of the Center; and, second, a report on the activities planned for the coming year. The lists of activities in both reports are long and impressive. The high rates of 'satisfaction' with these activities, and evidence of the successful accomplishment of the intended outcomes, become all the more remarkable in view of the fact that all of this was achieved by a staff consisting of a Director on a half-time appointment, a half-time Associate Director, and an Administrative Officer! The dedication and hard work of the current staff of the CTL is certainly commendable. We should not, however, count on super-erogation as a permanent state of affairs. If we review the justifications given in support of the various recommendations to establish a teaching and learning center at the university (in 2001, 2003, and 2004), we will discover that some of the important expected outcomes have yet to be achieved. If the CTL is to fully live up to its stated mission and objectives, the budget allocated by the University to support CTL must

be substantially increased. The University Administration should not count on the CTL to continue to generate most of the income the center needs.

The CTL Advisory Committee could play a more active role in helping the CTL leadership develop and implement a strategy to insure that Administration of the University (Particularly the Provost, as the chief academic officer) to more actively support the CTL. The message should come 'from above' and should be very clear: teaching effectiveness is essential and will be sufficiently weighted in the assessment of the performance of each faculty member. Moreover, there should be a clear, continuous, and unwavering commitment on the part of the Administration to insure that the legitimate needs of the CTL for staffing, space, and resources are met.

The "Fifth International Conference on Effective Teaching and Learning in Higher Education" will be held between February 6 and 8, 2015 -- [http:// www.aub.edu.lb/conferences/etlhe/ Pages/index.aspx](http://www.aub.edu.lb/conferences/etlhe/Pages/index.aspx)

CTL Staff

Director: Dr. Saouma BouJaoude

Associate Director: Dr. Amal BouZeineddine

Administrative Officer: Miss Lamia Hussein





Teaching Excellence Award

Teaching Excellence Award Committee has voted to present this year's teaching excellence awards to **Dr. Lina Choueiri**, Associate Professor, Department of English, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, and **Dr. Victor Araman**, Associate Professor, Business Information and Decision System Track, Olayan School of Business.

A ceremony to celebrate the awardees, and through them, the many valuable efforts that AUB's faculty make to excel in teaching their students was held on **May 5, 2014 at 12:00 noon in West Hall, Malhass Common Room.**

Why does teaching matter to me?

It would be easy for me to list the reasons why I enjoy teaching: it puzzles my mind and, after many years, it keeps being a source of excitement. But, why does teaching matter to me? That is a more difficult question to answer. To many, teaching is about imparting knowledge. In its leading sense, teaching focuses on what the teacher does and knows, rather than on what results from teaching, namely learning. And learning is a process of change, facilitated by an expert guide. A teacher merely shows the way, prepares the students for learning, and guides them through the change. Teaching matters to me because it can potentially change a life.

By Lina Choueiri, Department of English, FAS; Winner of the AUB Teaching Excellence Award 2013- 2014

Career turns are basically the context for professional reflections. I say this because although what brought me to academia has been my research interests, teaching (in particular, elective courses) has created for me an environment in which I discuss my research in a simplified and practical way. Teaching is

an opportunity to ponder on the value-added of some of these research questions we devote most of our time on. Actually, teaching is by itself a source of research problems.

The most rewarding part of my responsibilities remains the interaction with students/candidates/executives, and the impact, through teaching, one has on people's lives. Teaching is somehow sharing the most constructive memories of the past for a better future. Teaching is an act of trust and hope. It is about trusting a new generation and hoping it will benefit from the aggregate learning passed on to it. But, teaching is also about educating.

At a personal level, teaching is the opportunity to distill and share some of my understanding of a topic, or a concept, I deem important, in a structured way; a way that would govern the educating cycle I usually follow: i.) explaining the main message and analyzing its implication, ii) probing the understanding of my audience, and iii) incorporating all kind of feedback into the process.

Finally, being able to contribute to the education arm of a society is by itself rewarding and terrific.

By Victor Araman, Olayan School of Business, Winner of the AUB Teaching Excellence Award 2013- 2014

"The aim of education should be to teach us rather how to think, than what to think—rather to improve our minds, so as to enable us to think for ourselves, than to load the memory with the thoughts of other men."

John Dewey

"The main part of intellectual education is not the acquisition of facts but learning how to make facts live."

Oliver Wendell Holmes



Rafic Harriri School of Nursing (HSN): Assessment Strategies for Knowledge Transfer

By Lina Abi Fakhr Kontar, School of Nursing

The rhetoric surrounding the integration of learner-centered strategies in higher education is believed to pave the way for a better preparation of graduates. Among an array of strategies, reflection, inquiry, and knowledge transfer are touted as core to the assessment of nursing students. Educators at the HSN strongly believe that assessments are valuable means to understand how learners use and transfer knowledge to solve problems of the workplace. Assessment for transfer, deemed essential to prepare graduates for practice, requires the higher order thinking skills (HOT) of application, analysis, and synthesis. Reflective journaling, simulation, and objective structured clinical examination (OSCE) have been adopted at the HSN to provide the means to assess HOT and transfer skills.

Reflection allows an in-depth exploration of one's own learning experience, leading to a new understanding, appreciation, and development of self-awareness, auto-evaluation, and HOT skills. Through reflective journaling, students record their thoughts, attitudes, beliefs, and challenges experienced during practice; they analyze the situation at hand and examine the decisions against evidence-based practice. A rubric is devised to assess application of the reflective process.

Simulation offers an additional approach to assess transferability of information. At the HSN, simulation is integrated in all nursing courses. The sessions are conducted using real-life situations which emulate a nurse's actions and decisions in practice settings. Guided by learning outcomes, the scenarios are developed and implemented using manikins or standardized patients. Reflection on one's actions takes place during debriefing, being core in the simulation experience. Evaluation tools are developed using the nursing process as a framework.

OSCE, a promising assessment strategy in health professional education, aims at assessing the psychomotor learning domain of students. Two parameters drive this type of assessment: context and timeframe. Competencies are assessed using checklists and simulated patients.

Teaching and assessing for transfer influences how students learn.

CTL Activities during the Academic Year 2013/2014

Fall Semester Activities

CTL organized two presentations in the New Faculty Orientation on August 29, 2013 then CTL hosted a group from the Queen Rania Foundation for Education and Development (QRF) who gave a presentation on creating the first Arab Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) platform on September 19, 2013. This was followed by a seminar entitled *General Education Program: Present and Future* held on October 3, 2013 and a panel discussion on *Faculty Learning Communities (FLCs)* at AUB presented by chairs of the active AUB FLCs on October 10, 2013. On October 22 and October 24, 2013, CTL held two activities on *Liberal Arts Education*: A workshop given by Richard Detweiler on *Liberal Arts Education: Purpose, Content and Context* and a panel on *Liberal Arts Education in the Professions* with Richard Detweiler, Dean Patrick McGreevy and Dr. Maher Jarrar. CTL also organized a workshop on *Interactive Lecturing* on November 5, 2013, a brown bag session on *Project-based Learning* on November 7, 2013, and a seminar on *Compiling and Assessing Teaching Portfolios* on December 12, 2013. Additionally, CTL continued its efforts in assessment of program learning outcomes by organizing a workshop on *Developing Program Learning Outcomes and Assessment Plans* on November 28, 2013.

Spring Semester Activities

CTL organized two presentations in the New Faculty Orientation on Jan. 17, 2014, gave a presentation to the Lebanese Army officers on January 30, 2014 and organized a workshop on *RefWorks* on April 28 in collaboration with Jafet Library. Additionally, CTL organized its annual faculty seminar on *Teaching and Learning Excellence*. The Seminar included seven sessions and was held every Tuesday between 5:00 and 7:00 pm from March 11th to April 29th, 2014. Each session discussed a different topic. Participants in the Seminar included 20 faculty members and PhD students. In addition, other faculty guests attended a number of Seminar sessions because of their interest in the topic. CTL organized its 2014 annual conference and has also been working on preparations for the 2015 annual conference which will be held on February 6 - 8 in cooperation with IT-ACPS and the Communication Skills Program of the English Department. Further, the newly established Faculty Learning Community on *Higher Order Thinking* continues its work with support from CTL. Finally, year three of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) grants program **was launched and seven proposals were received, reviewed, and three proposals were supported.**

CTL Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

CTL conducted a study entitled *Perceptions about the Program Learning Assessment Process: The Case of the American University of Beirut* which Dr. BouJaoude and Dr. BouZeineddine presented at the 2013 Lilly International Conference in Oxford Ohio, USA (Nov 21 – 24, 2013). In addition, Dr. BouJaoude presented a keynote session in the same conference.

Individual consultations based on faculty requests were held. Discussions in these consultations ranged from program learning outcomes, to course syllabus design, compiling a teaching portfolio, and writing proposals for conducting scholarship of teaching and learning. In addition, CTL provided feedback to the School of Nursing and the Faculty of Health Sciences on their proposed Inter-professional Services Program.

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Consultations

CTL presented four workshops and other services to Princess Noura Bint Abdel Raman University in Riyadh, KSA as part of a REP agreement with the University.



Liberal Arts: Means, Ends or More?

By Richard A. Detweiler, President of the Great Lakes Colleges Association; and founder of the Global Liberal Arts Alliance

Higher education as practiced around the world today is rooted in the Mediterranean basin: the first universities were in the MENA region 1200 years ago where science, medicine, and math were preeminent. European institutions were later founded as knowledge flowed back across the sea to Europe.

In 1810 the founding of Germany's Humboldt University defined an approach to higher education that was subsequently adopted in most of the world: the research university. Designed to create bureaucrats and contribute to the economy of monarchical nation-states, faculty were specialized scholars and students were required to develop a particular expertise. At about that same time, however, a different model emerged in the United States where this newly independent nation needed liberated, creative, and thinking citizens who could contribute to their society in a time of change and adapt their professions and their lives to newly emerging needs.

The basic premise of this other approach, labeled "liberal arts," was that the mastery of a narrow body of knowledge as the primary goal of a higher education is short-sighted; in a time of change it is critical to first educate people who

will be active seekers of knowledge, have an open-minded mode of inquiry, see every issue from multiple disciplinary perspectives, and think of themselves as responsible contributors to the ever-changing needs of their society.

Liberal arts folk believe that these attributes need to be well developed before a student delves too deeply into narrow disciplinary study, otherwise they will be forever captured by the constricted perspectives of their specialized discipline. And indeed, the argument in favor of liberal education is stronger today than ever before: change is faster, tomorrow's needs less clear, and the major contributors to intellectual, economic, and societal progress are increasingly made by those whose thinking is not limited by traditional disciplinary boundaries.

And because of the focus on the development of intellectual and citizenship capacities, liberal arts educators also have an inherent interest in questions of pedagogy and seek the help of educational researchers as they look for answers to this question: what are the most effective methods of educating people who have the competencies necessary to be successful – for themselves and their societies – not only for today's needs but also tomorrow's?



Faculty Learning Communities at AUB

By Dr. Milton D. Cox, Miami University, USA

I am pleased that faculty learning communities (FLCs) are in their initial phases at AUB. When a teaching and learning center begins an FLC Program, there can be start-up concerns that need some time and experience to run smoothly. At our FLC Institute each year we have questions raised by colleagues in their early stages of FLC development, and I take this opportunity to address some of the issues that we encounter. Consult your CTL colleagues!

First steps include a review of the definition of an FLC to confirm expectations: An FLC is a yearlong, structured community of practice of 8-10 faculty and staff who meet every 3 weeks for two hours to build community, evidenced based learning, and the scholarship of teaching and learning (Cox, 2004). The definition speaks about FLC goals and infrastructure, but the behavior of FLC participants is an important key to success.

- 1 Each FLC member must have commitment to participate cooperatively and work productively with his or her colleagues. Do not join an FLC unless for that year you have time, interest, and curiosity to enable this commitment.
- 2 Have a teaching/learning/institutional project in mind that is connected to the FLC topic. For example, if you are initiating team-based learning (TBL) in a course, use your first semester to learn about TBL, design your project, and plan a way to measure resulting student learning. Share your steps with your FLC members. In the second semester, try out the TBL, share your successes and sticking points with your FLC members, and present the results to campus.

In the U.S., FLCs have brought enhanced learning and community to faculty and students (Beach & Cox, 2009). You have productive times ahead (Cox, 2004).

Faculty learning communities create connections for isolated teachers, establish networks for those pursuing pedagogical issues, meet early-career faculty expectations for community, foster multidisciplinary curricula, and begin to bring community to higher education (p. 5).

References

- Beach, A. L. & Cox, M. D. (2009). The impact of faculty learning communities on teaching and learning. *Learning Communities Journal*, 1 (1), 7-27.
- Cox, M. D. (2004). Introduction to faculty learning communities. In M. D. Cox & L. Richlin (Eds.), *Building faculty learning communities* (pp. 5-23). *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*: No. 97, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Faculty Learning Community on Higher Order Thinking

By Dr. Colin Smith, Department of Biology, FAS

The faculty learning community on higher-order thinking (HOT-FLC) started in October 2013 with the aim to support members' attempts to improve their students' higher-order thinking. To keep discussions focused, everyone designed and implemented a specific HOT project in one of their undergraduate courses. Members spanned many disciplines and levels of experience with trying different teaching methodologies, and projects ranged from yet-to-be-conceived to already underway. HOT-FLC intended to meet once a month, but with many conflicting duties and schedules, December and March meetings did not occur. Several venues were tested, and all included meeting around a table with food and drink.

In a typical meeting, everyone provided brief updates on their projects, immediate crises or concerns were raised (IRB applications), and then the many ideas relating to HOT were discussed as they emerged. The value of the HOT-FLC was simply to exchange ideas, to hear each other's suggestions and experience, and to be encouraged to test new approaches.

Hopefully, the HOT-FLC will produce a report in support of HOT at AUB, including member reflections, experiences, and recommendations on learning outcomes, means of achievement, assessment, and support. Some interesting ideas emerged on how to continue the HOT-FLC. One idea is that of a *Stammtisch*, a regulars' table, in which all faculty interested in discussing HOT would meet in the cafeteria fortnightly, with no set agenda, restricted to those with defined projects, but with the encouragement of bringing guests. Indeed, a *Stammtisch* could be used by many types of FLCs or working groups, and is similar to "brown-bag" series. A spin-off of this idea would be a similar venue where faculty discuss research interests with each other across the disciplines, and in which graduate students would be guests. This would provide for inter-disciplinary dialogue for both faculty and students.



Fourth International Conference on Effective Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (Held at AUB on February 7 and 8, 2014)

By Fatima Alban, Student, FAS

“Innovation comes from people meeting up in the hallways or calling each other at 10:30 at night with a new idea, or because they realized something that shoots holes in how we’ve been thinking about a problem,” an inspiring quotation by Steve Jobs resonated by Dr. Tracy Mitrano, a keynote speaker in the Fourth International Conference on Effective Teaching and Learning in Higher education, who saw that such conferences create a forum for professionals to meet, share experiences, and exchange perspectives on problems underlying educational systems.

Faculty from universities in Lebanon such as AUB, St. Joseph, Balamand, Lebanese Army Staff Academy, Lebanese Military School, Lebanese International University, Notre Dame University, LAU- and universities from the Arab world such as Qatar University, American University of Kuwait, Baghdad University, AUC, BeirZeit University, filled the Suhail Bathish Auditorium in West Hall on February 7th for the Opening Ceremony of the two-day conference organized by the AUB Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL), IT ACPS, and the Communication Skills Program. Provost Ahmad Dallal welcomed all attendees with an inspiring word about meaningful learning, effective teaching, and student engagement in scholarly discussions. Dr. Dallal highlighted the significance of e-learning as being “indismissable in the 21st century;” assessment being integral to providing feedback “on both student and institutional levels;” community-based learning as a means to “advance learning goals into the real world;” and finally writing as exceeding mere self-expression to “shape how one thinks” about the surrounding world.

Seven preconference workshops were given, facilitated by Dr. Boujaoude, Dr. BouZeineddine, Dr. Arnold and Dr. Khoury, Dr. Zenger, Dr. El-Hajj and Ms. Salem, Ms. Fayed, and Mr. Hamam. The Conference hosted three keynote sessions, one on e-learning titled What Traditional Liberal Arts Liberal Education, MOOCS and On-line Have to Offer International Education by Dr. Tracy Mitrano; the second keynote was The Challenge of Writing at the University by Dr. Charles Bazerman; and the third one was titled The challenges of Assessing Student Learning by Professor James Volkwein. For the third consecutive year, Dr. Milton Cox, Professor and Director of the International Lilly Conference on College Teaching, was in attendance. He gave two workshops on the second day of the Conference, titled Flipping Your Classroom and

Building an Interdisciplinary Curriculum.

Around 200 attended the Conference coming from Lebanon, Malaysia, Qatar, Iraq, Kuwait, Egypt and other countries. Twelve concurrent sessions offered topics ranging from pedagogy, to outcomes assessment, and online teaching and learning. Participants attended these sessions, held discussions with presenters and shared their experiences on the topic in session. Commenting on his Conference experience, General Ali Makki, of the Lebanese Army Staff Academy emphasized the significance of collaboration among different universities in Lebanon and beyond as in this Conference in order to improve education and generate effective teaching and learning practices. Dr. Dalal Moukarzel, Director of the Office of Faculty Instructional Development at Qatar University and a presenter in the Conference, emphasized the role of Liberal Arts Education in a MOOCs context, which in her opinion could improve the process of teaching and learning. Dr. Kathryn Lincoln, of the AUB Communication Skills Program indicated the importance of raising students’ thinking levels and eliciting “original thoughts” as they write, which was a focal point in Dr. Bazerman’s talk.

In conclusion, this conference proved that teaching and learning practices in education constitute a complex process which integrates civic engagement, IT, assessment and novel writing techniques, accompanied with continuous endeavors for improvement. As Dr. Volkwein put it in his keynote address, there is a need to employ varied assessment methods and teaching techniques to better cater for students’ needs and to build confident and capable leaders. This statement summarizes the core of the Conference which was reiterated by many participants who were in attendance.

Deadline for receiving proposals to the “Fifth International Conference on Effective Teaching and Learning in Higher Education” to be held between February 6 and 8, 2015 is October 30, 2014.

For more information about the conference please refer to the conference website at <http://www.aub.edu.lb/conferences/etthe/Pages/index.aspx>