



Beyond Sugar, Cream, and Froth: Serving Up *Venti* Thoughts for the Mind

The CAFÉ has had a very successful spring, with your barista of the intellect, Ray Giguette, serving up stimulating blends of lecture topics, as well as styles. Jeffrey Galle, Chair of English at The University of Louisiana at Monroe, was brought in to whet the appetite, at the suggestion of David Middleton, and his talk about increasing student retention in English was well-timed, given our recent forays into that topic, and well-received. The second of our three lectures, Keri Turner's talk about creating discipline-specific writing assignments, woke up the faculty in attendance as it introduced the possibility of innovative uses of writing, and gave us all a crash course on exactly what makes one version of an assignment a more appropriate and more effective measurement of objectives than a similar version of the same assignment. Faculty who have not seen her handout containing gems like the Ask Dr. Science assignment or the Entrance and Exit Cards writing assignments truly are missing out on some very useful tools. And after Dr. Turner gave us our dose of creativity, Myron Tuman followed up with a standing room only presentation on thinking critically about critical thinking, after which many of us truly understood why analysis was not completely objective, how "large" could come to be the smallest sized cup, and why it is a good idea to avoid having more than one "ruminator" on any given committee.

And now that the CAFÉ has had a successful semester of stimulating the mind, the next goal of CAFÉ Director Giguette and the members of the Faculty Development Committee (FDC) is to create an energizing physical environment where faculty can engage in conversation, or sit comfortably while participating in one of the CAFÉ events. Giguette and the committee fully expect to "pimp" (intellectually) Elkins 211 by the fall, as three FDC members—Anne Parr, Tony Fonseca, and Melissa Goldsmith—will be taking care of getting art, furniture, and computer equipment into the CAFÉ. In addition, Giguette will be overseeing both the painting and the refurbishing of the CAFÉ, while Fonseca will be working with Ellender Library director Carol Mathias to help launch the CAFÉ satellite library, which will house much of the faculty development collection. The Virtual CAFÉ will also be underway by the Fall. Web space has been procured via Stephanie Detillier and Jess Planck, who have graciously offered their help in establishing a web presence for the CAFÉ. Goldsmith and Fonseca have offered to serve as webmistress and webmaster. In time Giguette would like to have video files and pictures of past CAFÉ events available in the Virtual CAFÉ.

Our barista and the FDC aim to hit the ground running in the fall, with a new slate of presenters. The tentative schedule includes a visiting lecture by Rich Rice of Texas Tech (thanks to Windy Rachal for suggesting him), who will speak on engaging freshmen in composition courses, a presentation on why getting funded is not just for the sciences, by the University's Research Council, and a one-day workshop by educational consultant Barbara McCombs, author of *Learner-Centered Classroom Practices and Assessments: Maximizing Student Motivation, Learning, and Achievement* (Corwin, 2006). She will be demonstrating professional development tools and techniques designed to increase retention, without grade inflation or dumbing down the curriculum. November will mark the most difficult challenge for the FDC, with the CAFÉ hosting a one-day colloquium on bridging the gap between the worlds which our students inhabit, and the one to which we are accustomed. Goldsmith and Fonseca are in charge of organizing the event, and will draft a preliminary Call for Papers before semester's end, to be disseminated among various universities in South Louisiana. Topics addressed will include the technological schism between students and faculty, the cultural rift, fashion sense and nonsense, and literacy issues, as well as others. Nicholls faculty and graduate students will be invited to submit proposals, and students will be encouraged to submit entries for poster sessions. In addition, the SGA will be invited to host a panel of students and faculty at the end of the day.

Giguette and members of the FDC certainly have their work cut out for them in the next year, but there is no doubt in their minds that they will be successful—especially with the help and encouragement of faculty and administration. And with tea and coffee. Lots and lots of tea and coffee.

—Tony Fonseca and Melissa Goldsmith

LASSI: Helping Students Escape from the Depths of Educational Despair

Several studies have demonstrated that students at risk of failure improve their use of effective learning strategies after completing computer-based LASSI (the Learning and Study Strategies Inventory) instructional modules.

At the beginning of Fall 2006, we had all first-time freshman enrolled in University 101 complete the LASSI, which assessed their awareness and use of effective learning and study strategies. At the end of the Fall 2006 semester, students completed a follow-up LASSI. Students in the experimental group scoring below average on the LASSI were required to complete the LASSI learning modules. Students in the comparison group, that is those who reported adequate use of learning strategies, were not required to complete the modules.

Students who completed the learning modules reported a significant increase in all LASSI scores, while the control group demonstrated a slight decrease in all scores. While there were significant group differences at the beginning of the semester, these differences disappeared at the end of the semester.

We can tentatively conclude that first-time freshmen entering the university with poorly developed learning strategies can improve their learning and study skills—*anxiety management, concentration, motivation, time management, information processing, study aids, self-testing*—when given the opportunity to learn more effective learning strategies.

Unfortunately, completing the learning modules did not affect overall GPA, and there are hypotheses for this phenomenon: Is it possible that GPA is not a very reliable indicator of learning? In addition, increased student learning is difficult to predict, since it involves general cognitive ability, prior achievement, and effective instruction, as well as appropriate use of effective learning strategies.

—Chris Rachal

Is Jan Brady Too Young to Go Steady? Too Old to be Engaged?

In a recent article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (“After the Freshman Bubble Pops,” Vol. 53, Issue 3, p. 42), Sara Lipka describes college sophomores as “higher education’s middle children.” Much like Jan Brady, who is riddled with anxiety over her older sister’s popularity and her younger sister’s cuteness quotient, college sophomores find themselves longing for two worlds—the one they just left (that first-year experience with all of its support and amenities) and the one they long to enter (the upper-division experience of junior and seniors thoroughly engaged in the major). Sophomores are our neglected “children,” successful enough to have endured the trials of the first year but still not fully immersed into their major programs, caught in a kind of academic purgatory, waiting for vacant seats in essential general education courses, working through prerequisites, and generally wondering if all of this is worth the effort.

As the QEP continues to evolve, the Student Engagement Committee is looking at the unique challenges faced by sophomores and how the University can help students navigate the obstacles that may be deterring their progression toward degree completion. Yes, the QEP is focused on the first-year experience, but it is also a plan that can grow, and as we continue in our efforts to “frontload” the first-year with lots of initiatives designed to help freshmen succeed, we want to build upon that success and see that our second-year students are provided with tools and opportunities to make the sophomore experience more than just a holding area.

So, is Jan Brady, our representative sophomore, too young to go steady? Well, she’s not married to the major. She may be taking courses in the major, but the offerings may be a bit sparse and, in some cases, not terribly tantalizing. She is probably at the point where she is ready to go steady (with the major), though she could still be looking around at some alternatives. The question, then, is whether we faculty are ready to welcome this fledgling major into our program. Do we still see our sophomores as the “unwashed,” as students who still have to prove themselves to us by passing through the flaming hoops of courses long on tedium and short on engagement? Or are we prepared to build upon the momentum established in the freshman year by designing challenging courses that showcase the possibilities within our disciplines and the professional opportunities that await?

The point is that Jan Brady is not too old to be engaged. No student (or faculty member, for that matter) ever is. And, yes, the Student Engagement Committee is very interested in your *proposals*, your ideas regarding how we can spring Jan and her fellow “middle children” from the blandness and frustration of those middle years.

—R. Allen Alexander

If you are interested in serving on the Faculty Development Committee, contact Ray Giguette or Tony Fonseca. The current members are Giguette (chair) and Fonseca (his man Friday), along with Anita Tully and Connie Sirois from English, Stephen Triche from Education, Anne Parr from Culinary, Lori Soule from Computer Science, Melissa Goldsmith from Ellender Library, and Sherry Rodrigue from Computing. The subcommittee is particularly interested in having faculty from nursing and one of the hard sciences become involved. Come help make the CAFE what you envision it to be.

The Master Advisor Workshop Series Presents

The Eminem of Recruiting: Master P(lan) and Matriculation, Admission’s 50 Cent Worth, with Facilitators Courtney Cassard (Director of Enrollment Services), Becky Durocher (Director of Admissions) and James Irwin (Assistant Director of Enrollment Services). Elkins 209: Wednesday, April 25 at 1:00-2:00 and Thursday, April 26 at 1:30-2:30.

Electronic Amplification: Advisor Tools Advancing Software, with Facilitator Amy Hebert (Manager of Information Technology, University College). Elkins 209: Monday, April 30 at 1:00-2:00 and Tuesday, May 1 at 1:30-2:30.

Mood Verdigris: Understanding Financial Aid & Scholarship Opportunities for Students, with Facilitators Rachel Babin (Assistant Director, Financial Aid) and Amanda Fremin (Assistant Director, Financial Aid). Elkins 209: Wednesday, May 2 at 1:00-2:00 and Thursday, May 3 at 1:30-2:30.

Contact Allen Alexander at 4096 or robert.alexander@nicholls.edu if you are interested in attending a workshop.

Newsletter staff: Tony Fonseca, Managing Editor; Chris Rachal, Editor; R. Allen Alexander, Editor; Windy Rachal, Design Consultant. The statements and opinions included in these pages are those of the newsletter staff only. Any statements and opinions are not those of Nicholls State University or the University of Louisiana System.