



Coffee or Cappuccino? When Generational Worlds Collide

Amazed by what your students know? Astounded by what they don't know? Ever wonder why there is such strong resistance towards active learning? Why is it that, even though we were students once upon a time, we now view ourselves as being so different from today's students that we speak in terms of "their world" and "our world?"

The truth is simple: the generational and cultural gaps that exist between ourselves and our students is often impossible for to bridge, and if we can't bridge the communication gap, it is that much more difficult to disseminate information and create a meaningful relationship with our students.

By considering our students' world—and sometimes worlds—we can more effectively help mold them into becoming well-rounded lifelong learners, so that when they leave the university, they are more informed, more engaged, and are all-around better people than when they came to us. By getting a better handle on who our students are and by learning how they tick, we may be able to find intriguing ways to facilitate the process, as we can hone our own skills that determine the balance between doing enough and doing too much for them.

To this end, The Center for Advancement of Faculty Engagement (The CAFÉ) announces its first Symposium on Teaching Engaged Learning, here at Nicholls on November 14, 2007. Our goal is to bring together administrators, faculty, staff, and students from across all disciplines to explore how educators can better understand students' interests and skills, their priorities, their use of time in their daily lives, and their learning styles. We hope to encourage discussion of pedagogical questions such as the following: Why do some forms of communication work while others fail? How do we engage in the classroom and in other campus activities? What does it take to inspire the motivation to learn?

Director of the CAFÉ, Ray Giguette, along with librarians Tony Fonseca and Melissa Goldsmith, who lead the organizing committee, back in July put out a Call for Papers which invited presentation abstract submissions by both faculty and graduate candidates. They asked for workshop ideas, presentations, and panel discussions that focus on better understanding our students' world from a variety of perspectives, looking for presenters to emphasize issues such as technology, fashion, personal space, attitudes, cultural beliefs, and educational expectations.

With some 18 sessions planned, topics will be addressed across all disciplines and fields. Some of the cultural issues slated for presentations include music, dance techniques (moves), art, and relating to countercultures (such as neo-hippies and Goths). There will be panel discussions on the assimilation issues faced by international students, as well as on bridging the age gap when working with students in the library. Other workshop or presentation topics will include (but will not be limited to) the use of Youtube in the classroom, wireless student response systems, designing interesting and relevant writing assignments, teaching French to today's students, making information literacy exciting, dealing with gender issues, understanding different "mindsets," engaging freshmen, and advising sophomores. Many sessions will also include student respondents, and student-based panels will open and close the symposium.

While most presenters will be Nicholls faculty and staff, six other institutions will be represented: McNeese State, LSU, Southeastern, ULL, and Xavier.

We Think (Critically), Therefore We Are

When you sit down and listen to some of them talk, they sound as if they are describing a religious or transformational experience, rather than talking about how thoughtful, introspective people view any given situation or problem. But then again there is a good reason that Richard Paul and Linda Elder, along with their protégées who run Criticalthinking.org, are often called critical thinking gurus. This past summer, CAFÉ Director Ray Giguette, along with librarians Tony Fonseca and Melissa Goldsmith, attended the 27th Annual Critical Thinking Conference hosted by the experts at CriticalThinking.org.

While it was difficult to concentrate on the task at hand while taking in the beautiful scenery of San Francisco and the majesty of The University of California-Berkeley, the three managed to learn some very valuable information about various definitions and approaches to critical thinking, including problem solving using a technique that requires a problem statement/definition, elaboration, and illustration/application. The conference also featured sessions about using critical thinking strategies for teaching in all disciplines, creating fundamental and pivotal points of learning for courses and classes, shared critical thinking, and thinking analytically. The most valuable aspect of the conference was learning to structure classes based on lifelong learning objectives.

Speakers such as Rush Congrove gave practical advice for policy statement and syllabus creation, as well as for assignments, class participation methods, and engagement, while Gerald M. Nosich talked about his theory of Fundamental and Pivotal Concepts, which is to say that virtually every course can be boiled down to three to five important concepts, which can be internalized by students so that even if they forget details, they can fall back on the concepts when they encounter a problem. Also in attendance were representatives from Thrive.com. They facilitated discussions which helped the Nicholls representatives to understand that there are forms of communication which best address and lead to solutions when faced with problems or disagreements.

Read While You Sip

The CAFÉ hosted its first session of Fall 2007 on October 2, as David Madden of Louisiana State University's Department of English visited Nicholls to talk about writing across the curriculum. Madden's presentation, held in the Archives of Ellender Memorial Library, was well-received by those who attended, and among the audience was a representative from Thompson Learning, Madden's publisher. The Thompson representative was not only helpful and cordial, but she donated the remainder of the books which she had carried with her (approximately 50) to The CAFÉ.

These books will form the beginning of what is to become a satellite library here on campus, as Library Director Carol Mathias has agreed to help create the satellite library, which will house many of the faculty development titles which the library currently owns, thereby making them accessible to faculty when they visit The CAFÉ's main office in Elkins. The books should begin making their way to Elkins as soon as the logistics of creating a satellite location are ironed out. In the meantime, faculty can contact Ray Giguette about the café's hours, and bring their laptops.

If you are interested in serving on the Faculty Development Committee, contact Ray Giguette. The subcommittee is particularly interested in having faculty from nursing and one of the hard sciences become involved. Come help make the CAFÉ what you envision it to be.

The CAFÉ Presents

Its October Menu

Lunch

Served Oct. 23

Time TBA

by Barbara McCombs

(University of Denver Research Center)

"Are You a Learner-Centered Teacher?"

Dinner

Served Oct. 26

12:00 pm

by Rich Rice

(Texas Tech Writing Program)

"Increasing Retention in Freshman English"

Newsletter staff: Tony Fonseca, Managing Editor; Ray Giguette, Editor; Melissa Goldsmith, Editor. 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.