Director’s Note

As the leaves turn and the piles of tests and papers grow higher, I am mindful of how easily tunnel vision sets in. The goal becomes to just get through the semester. That's one reason I appreciate the time you take from a busy schedule of courses, meetings, and research to read our monthly newsletter and, one hopes, discover something of value to help you teach well. TMAC welcomes your recommendations of resources--articles, books, websites, news of upcoming conferences and other events- to share with your colleagues. Indeed, we have designed this newsletter to address the needs of full-time faculty, part-time lecturers and graduate students across all disciplines.

One item of particular note we are excited to announce is the beginning of a Camden Faculty Book Club, open to anyone teaching at Rutgers Camden. Here’s the idea: we meet once a month in small groups to read together a book on pedagogy and learning. We'll run one or more "sections" of the club pending interest and schedules and create an online version of the club as well for those who cannot come in person. For this year, beginning next month and continuing through early May, we will read Engaging Ideas by noted educator John Bean, emeritus professor of English at Seattle University. Engaging Ideas: The Professor’s Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom has been well received in many quarters and promises to provoke lively conversation and a wealth of practical ideas to apply to our own teaching. And for those who sign up, TMAC will supply the text. So email TMAC at teaching.matters@camden.rutgers.edu to indicate your interest, and we will organize a doodle poll to find the most opportune time.

Enjoy this lovely Fall!

Faculty Spotlight

Welcome to our continuing series of conversations with Rutgers Camden faculty on teaching and learning. This month, TMAC sat down with James Genone, Assistant Professor of Philosophy, to discuss the value of taking the pulse of student learning mid-semester.

James: In the past, students in my classes would report that they didn’t know where they stood with respect to participation and overall performance. Initially, I responded by giving mid-semester participation grades, but some claimed they didn't understand why grades were low, even though expectations were outlined on the syllabus and discussed in class. To prompt greater reflection, I have instituted a mid-semester self-evaluation in which students report how much time and effort they are putting into class and rate themselves on participation (whose criteria were reproduced on the self-evaluation sheet). Now, I return this evaluation with feedback, particularly if I disagree with their assessment. However, I find most students are fairly realistic about their performance.
**TMAC:** And what would you say is the most tangible benefit to this self-evaluation exercise?

**James:** I notice that this self-assessment stimulates considerably more improvement in participation than if I just provide feedback myself. In the past few years, since incorporating learning goals in my syllabi, I ask students to assess their progress with respect to each goal both mid-semester and again at the end of the semester. Most report significant progress, and I think that the exercise has helped them keep in mind the goals of the course at times when the material can be very abstract.

*Because James had recently returned from a conference, we asked about “Schools for Tomorrow,” (sponsored by the New York Times) and what he took away from this gathering of educators, consultants, and corporate sponsors.*

**James:** Though many issues were addressed at “Schools for Tomorrow” [see the agenda], I took away two main points from the conference: first, that mentoring is a highly effective intervention when it comes to student retention; and second, that how you implement new technology and technologically enhanced pedagogy matters more than hardware. On the first point, I was very impressed by several presentations suggesting that having students check in regularly with mentors—not academic advisors or counselors—provides strong retention outcomes, particularly if mentors are well trained. One strategy, since faculty have limited time and availability, is peer mentoring, where experienced students from similar backgrounds (veterans, disabled students, parents, working students, etc.) offer advice and strategies to incoming transfer or four-year students during regularly scheduled meetings or in support groups. Students who come through these effective and low-cost alternative programs often volunteer to serve as mentors later on.

**TMAC:** As you know, Rutgers is currently undertaking a comprehensive review of all facets of instructional technology—an outcome of the strategic plan completed last year. What did you learn about technology at this conference that all Rutgers faculty should know?

**James:** That nearly all college and universities are making significant investments in technology, but many are not considering how resources can be most effectively allocated. Large hardware infrastructure expenditures are not effective unless they are accompanied by appropriate training. I spoke with a higher ed. consultant about technology training and implementation strategies that promote coordination between different campus constituencies and provide incentives for a strong culture of best practices among faculty. I tend to be skeptical of consultants, but I was impressed by the thoughtfulness and thoroughness of their approach.

**TMAC:** Anything you can share with colleagues?

**James:** Yes, two videos: "Who Finishes College" and "The State of the Online University." The last video, in particular, discusses competency based education (in contrast to the current, long-standing Carnegie credit hour model).

**TMAC:** We’d like to follow up sometime on this growing trend of corporate sponsorship of educational innovation by the Gates Foundation, Walton Family Foundation and others.

*A summary of the conference James attended last month can be found at Eduventures.*
Announcing…

Faculty of Arts and Sciences New Faculty Connections Event:
Workshop on Grading and Rubrics with Dr. William FitzGerald,
Friday, November 7th, from 12 p.m. – 2 p.m. in Armitage Hall Faculty Lounge.
Visit the FASC website for a detailed schedule of New Faculty Connections presentations.

A New Camden Faculty Book Club open to anyone teaching at Rutgers Camden. We will
meet once a month and create an online version of the club as well for those who cannot come
in person. We will start with Engaging Ideas by noted educator John Bean, and for those who
sign up, TMAC will supply the text. So email TMAC at teaching.matters@camden.rutgers.edu to
indicate your interest, and we will organize a doodle poll to find the most opportune time.

Rutgers University’s Sixth Annual Online and Hybrid Learning Conference
January 14 and 15, 2015
Call for Presentation Proposals: Deadline for submissions is November 10, 2014.
You are invited to submit a Presentation Proposal for the Sixth Annual Online and Hybrid
Learning Conference. Greatly expanded in scope, this year’s conference is offered by the
Center for Online and Hybrid Learning and Instructional Technologies of Rutgers University, in
partnership with the New Jersey Institute of Technology; Ocean County College; and Pearson
Online Learning Services.
For more information on the conference or to submit your proposal, click here.
Please contact TMAC at teaching.matters@camden.rutgers.edu or Emily Corse at
corse@rutgers.edu if you have any questions.

In The News

We’re All in This Together: Techniques for Student Engagement: Engineering professor
Alan Russell shares his award-winning teaching techniques for connecting to an ever-changing
student population. Russell discusses how to improve student investment in your classroom,
create classroom community, and help students visualize how disciplinary knowledge connects
to exciting future careers. Watch a video of his presentation!

For Adjuncts, a Lot Is Riding in Student Evaluations, an article from The Chronicle of Higher
Education, covers the ground even-handedly, and points to some better practices, what's at
stake, and what’s unfair for so many now. (10/6/14)

"Structure Matters: Twenty-One Teaching Strategies to Promote Student Engagement and
Cultivate Classroom Equity" suggests specific teaching strategies that biology instructors can
utilize to engage students, but these strategies can be adapted and adopted across the
disciplines to help all instructors become “architects of the learning environment in our
classrooms.”

The Chronicle of Higher Education cites a new online journal that offers “daily dips into JSTOR’s
Deep Archive” and "bridges the gap between news and scholarship.” (10/1/14)

Do you encourage your students to think critically? Do you wonder if your students enjoy
thinking at all? This New Yorker article explains that Actually, People Still Like to Think.
**Reading is Fundamental**

We live in a changing world: global economies, new technologies, and exponential growth in information are transforming our society. As new technologies shape literacies, they bring new opportunities for teachers at all levels to foster reading and writing in more diverse and participatory contexts. NCTE’s Policy Research Brief breaks down common myths about 21st-Century Literacies.

Given the ample evidence showing the benefits of leisure reading, the International Reading Association (IRA) and the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) take this position on leisure reading.

**The Write Stuff**

**Teaching the Thesis:** Most writing teachers agree that the thesis occupies a very important position, both in student papers and in teaching. Accordingly, most writing instructors have a repertoire of methods to help students find a thesis that will focus and guide an interesting academic paper. The Dartmouth Institute for Writing and Rhetoric offers some of those methods here, with the observation that these instructors teach the thesis in multiple ways in their classrooms.

An app for ESL (and native English) writers? Consider Writefull.

**Featured Site for Writing Across the Curriculum:** Quinnipiac University (Quinnipiac CT) is transforming the way writing is infused into their curriculum. In the process, QU has put together useful materials on assignment design, peer review, linking critical thinking to writing and more.

Learning Theories

“**The Value of Troublesome Knowledge: Transfer and Threshold Concepts in Writing and History**” - Using "threshold concepts" as a lens, this article examines several issues related to learning within and across two general education courses. The article ultimately suggests that threshold concepts might prove a productive frame through which to consider questions related to writing and transfer, and also to general education more broadly.

**RU Teaching with RUbrics**

Is your Rubric a Hot Mess? Fix it!

David Gooblar (who blogs at Pedagogy Unbound) on “Why I Don't Like Rubrics”: “How do we get the benefits of a rubric without falling prey to its drawbacks? How do we explain our assessment philosophy without making our students’ eyes glaze over?”

TMAC resources on grading and rubrics.

**Teaching with Technology**

We continue to build an ever-expanding list of apps and technology that our faculty here at Rutgers Camden are using…

Check out the apps and technology resources on our website!

Are you using an app or teaching tool not on the list? Send it to us at teaching.matters@camden.rutgers.edu
**From our Teaching and Learning Peers**

**Iowa State University's Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching** provides a variety of resources for instructors who wish to practice effective teaching strategies and enhance student learning in and out of the classroom.

**The Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning** at Harvard University offers services and resources for faculty that focus on pedagogical innovation, classroom dynamics, course design, creative assignments, and the uses of multi-media in the classroom.

**Looking for writing assignment ideas?** The University of Maryland’s Writing Center provides descriptions of 36 types of writing assignments across the curriculum.

**From the Bookshelf**

*Reconnecting Reading and Writing*, edited by Alice S. Horning and Elizabeth W. Kraemer, explores the ways in which reading can and should have a strong role in the teaching of writing in college. It examines research in such areas as basic writing and information literacy, and offers practical advice on useful textbooks and appropriate classroom practices. Thanks to a joint publishing effort by Parlor Press and The WAC Clearinghouse, you can read certain sections or the entire book here!

Graff, Birkenstein, and Durst’s *They Say, I Say*, published by Norton, is a required text in Rutgers-Camden’s Composition 102 classes and a useful one across the disciplines in teaching academic argumentation. Read a review.

Joseph Williams and Joseph Bizup give practical, effective advice to both beginning and established writers in *Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace*. Published by Longman, *Style* is an excellent book to assign in writing-intensive courses across the curriculum. Read a review.

**Conferences and Workshops**

**New Institute on Project-Based Learning, June 25-27, 2015**  
**Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI), in partnership with AAC&U**  
**Application Deadline February 16, 2015**

The Institute on Project-Based Learning is a 2.5-day intensive workshop where teams of five or more faculty and administrators from colleges and universities will gain knowledge about project-based learning and make tangible progress to integrate those learnings into their own curricula. The Institute curriculum is a mix of interactive workshops on project-based learning, consultations with Institute faculty, and collaborative teamwork.

Participants will come to the Institute with a proposal outlining a specific goal or project they would like to advance and will leave the Institute with an enhanced understanding of project-based learning and a tailored plan to advance work on their own campuses. The Institute is designed for faculty and administrators from a wide variety of institutions including public, private, liberal arts, STEM, community colleges, and research universities.

**Institute Keynote Speaker:** Randy Bass, Vice Provost for Education, Georgetown University. Founding Executive Director of Georgetown’s Center for New Designs in Learning and Scholarship, Randy Bass is a thought leader in pedagogical research, and an authority on inquiry-based learning.
Learn more about the Institute on Project-Based Learning online, or download the Institute brochure. For additional information, contact Kelly Army at 508.831.6590, or email kmarmy@wpi.edu.

Biennial Critical Thinking and Writing Conference
Thinking and Writing Beyond Two Cultures: STEM, WAC/WID and the Changing Academy
Quinnipiac University Hamden, CT., Friday–Saturday, Nov. 21–22, 2014


Visit the website for more information, keynote speakers, and to register for the conference.

Follow us on Twitter: @RUCamdenTMAC

If you’re interested in being interviewed for the Faculty Spotlight, or if you have a link or topic you’d like to share, please email us at teaching.matters@camden.rutgers.edu.