

DEANotes

September 15, 2005

Vol. V, No. 2

WheelerNotes

Too Much of a Good Thing??

An exercise that occurs each semester in the bowels of Solms Hall is a review of the grade distributions of the previous semester. Of course, one concern involves courses in which students are struggling to succeed. Courses with high F/W ratios always jump to our attention, and we puzzle over ways to bring additional resources to bear in serving these students. However we also worry about courses on the other end of the spectrum. On occasion we see courses in which the instructors seem to have missed the catalog description of our grading system: A (Excellent work), B (Good work), and C (Satisfactory work). In discussing this problem with department heads, we have acknowledged (1) that grades have different functions in different disciplines and that these different functions will affect grade distributions and (2) that grade distributions in upper level courses will certainly differ from distributions in core courses. However we have identified the following two symptoms that may suggest that grade distributions in certain courses need to be reexamined:

- Courses for which the grade of "A" is the modal (most often assigned) grade *on a regular basis*
- Courses that *regularly* have grade distributions in which 65% or more of the grades awarded are "A's and "B's"

Both of the symptoms are most troublesome when they occur in core courses, but individual disciplines should also discuss whether there are upper level courses for which these symptoms are also inappropriate.

Preliminary Results from Learning Communities

As we began our learning community effort in Fall 2002, we had many aspirations for the project. We hoped that the experience would enable new students to more quickly form academic and social connections; we hoped that the program would provide faculty members an enjoyable option in delivering core curriculum. However, we also hoped

that through the learning communities, our students would develop the kinds of connections with the university that would result in their staying with us longer and more successfully. We have just begun our statistical analysis of the first two years of learning community work and are happy to report the following preliminary results. In Fall 2002 and Fall 2003, we divided our first year, full-time cohort into three disjoint pieces: learning community students, honors program students, all other students.

Fall 2002	Learning Community Students	Honors Program Students	Other Students
N	76	25	425
% in school after two full years	55%	72%	50%
Fall 2003			
N	97	36	477
% in school after two full years	66%	83%	59%

This data, of course, proves nothing. Since our groups were formed by self-selection rather than random assignment, statistical analysis is not appropriate. However, when coupled with very positive anecdotal information from students who have participated in the learning communities, the fact that both the Fall 2002 cohort and the Fall 2003 cohort of learning community students were retained at a higher rate than those who did not choose to participate in learning communities is at least suggestive of good results from these learning community experiments.

Report from Learning Communities, Fall 2005

We presently have 191 students enrolled in eight learning communities for Fall 2005. This year's learning communities fall into one of three categories. Two of the learning communities are

focused on a specific group of students: students with weak mathematics backgrounds and students contemplating a major in Education. In two of the learning communities, faculty members have organized 2–3 core courses across a theme. Professors Howells, Nordenhaug, and Todesca teach an English composition course, a history course and a philosophy course linked on the theme, *Warriors, Wise Guys, and the Written Word*; Professors Brock and Rinalducci teach an English course, a section of AASU 1100, and a sociology course linked on the theme, *Individualism and Community*. Finally, in four of the learning communities, a faculty member teaches both a core course and a section of AASU 1100 and links the two courses with a theme. Students in these four learning communities take another core course together. For example, Professor Baker teaches a course centered around ENGL 1101 and AASU 1100 and the theme *Leadership: Its Past, Present, and Future*. These students also take a section of Civilization together. [For a full description of the eight communities presently in session, you might like to visit the Advisement Center web site <http://www.advise.armstrong.edu> and follow the trail to learning communities.]

In the next issue of DeaNotes Dr. Finlay will call for proposals for next year and would be pleased to entertain suggestions along any of these three models described above. Last year's learning community faculty members were quite enthusiastic about their connection to this program. Please give thought to whether you or you and colleagues would be interested in participating in next year's learning community efforts.

FinlayNotes

Early Alert Program

I would like to offer additional publicity to the notice that Greg Anderson sent to all faculty members: "In an attempt to improve student performance, particularly for freshmen and sophomores, the Office of Academic Orientation and Advisement is initiating a voluntary *Early Alert Program* this semester. If you have students, particularly those in your survey courses, you can identify as at risk of earning lower than a C in your class, please contact the office at andersgr@mail.armstrong.edu or 921-5465. We will make every effort to counsel these students toward academic success. My hope is that we can prevent some student issues from becoming worse as the weeks go by.

Three basic identifiers of "at risk" could be:

- 1) Erratic or otherwise problematic attendance
- 2) Unacceptable or missing work
- 3) Troublesome quiz/test grade(s)

Leaders Among Us: Fern Illidge

Fern Illidge, Staff Assistant in College of Arts of Sciences, has been elected chair of AASU's Staff Advisory Council. This new organization is designed to improve communications among AASU's staff, faculty, and administration. The SAC helps involve staff members in the decision making process of the University, thus promoting a positive and collaborative work environment. For more information on their activities, see <http://www.hr.armstrong.edu/sac/>. When you see her next, please also congratulate Ms. Illidge for competing the requirements for her B. S. in Legal Studies from South University.

Middle East Workshop

Drs. Stone, Rinalducci, Howard, and Arens from AASU are strong promoters of the University System of Georgia's annual workshop on the Middle East. This year, the workshop dates are November 4-6, 2005. The target audience is non-specialists in the arts, humanities and social sciences who teach general education courses and would like to learn more about the Middle East from top scholars. The program includes a weekend of lectures and discussions, complemented by plenty of Middle Eastern food, film, music, and dance.

Only full-time faculty of the University System of Georgia may apply. Application's must be postmarked by September 30, 2005.

If you have questions, contact Dr. Tom Keene of Kennesaw State University at 770-423-6232 or tkeene@kennesaw.edu.

Phi Kappa Phi Visitors

I have just heard good news from Dr. Perry Snyder, Executive Director of the national honors society Phi Kappa Phi. He and his colleague, Dr. Marya Free of Augusta State University will conduct a campus visit on September 27 and 28 as the final step before approving AASU's charter for membership, which he hopes to finalize at the PKP board meeting in October.

Their campus visit will involve meetings with various administrators and officers, and with members of AASU's official Phi Kappa Phi Chartering Group. If you are a member of Phi Kappa Phi (or Phi Beta Kappa or Sigma Xi), and have not yet joined the chartering group, please let me know if you are interested.

The main goal of this visit is to build support for AASU's Phi Kappa Phi chapter, which should become an important focal point of AASU's commitment to academic excellence.

New Faculty Notes

“Shaken, Not Stirred”

For **Dr. Brett Feske**, Temporary Assistant Professor of Chemistry, the quip made famous by James Bond is more than just a line to use when (or if) he orders a martini. That’s because Feske has brought to AASU a whole collection of bioengineered *E. coli* that he and his colleagues developed at the University of Florida. The reaction catalyzed by these *E. coli* is relatively simple, although it is important that the *E. coli* is shaken, not stirred, in the biocatalytic process. Feske already has a team of AASU students helping him in the laboratory, research that expands on that being conducted in Gainesville.

The project has many potentially significant ramifications. Since the process utilizes organisms to do the chemistry, it is an example of “green chemistry” and does not require toxic solvents or reactants. The process also could be attractive to pharmaceutical companies, since it yields very pure, pharmaceutical-grade compound that could be scaled up in the production of taxol and other pharmaceuticals.

A former Division I track and field athlete, and a late bloomer in the classroom, Feske also understands the importance of making chemistry interesting and relevant for his introductory students. To that end, he brings a critical-thinking approach to his classes: students will be asked to seriously investigate the risks of “natural” herbal medicines, the ramifications of global warming, the operations of microwave ovens, and other examples of the chemistry’s everyday implications.

A Vita with Three Hundred Publications

With due respect to Dr. Cebula and his hundreds of publications, it is possible that **Dr. David Taylor**, Temporary Assistant Professor of Business and Technical Communication has even more. As a managing editor and then an executive editor of the Rodale Press for ten years, Taylor wrote a monthly column for *Scuba Diving* magazine, and contributed hundreds more articles for other magazines in the Rodale lineup—*Prevention*, *Organic Gardening*, *Men’s Health*, *Runner’s World*, and more. He also was responsible for training several magazine staffs, including the company’s experts in online marketing, community development, and the like. Taylor brings his expertise in freelance journalism to one of his books, *The Freelance Success Book: Insider Secrets for Selling Every Word You Write*.

Before this, Taylor taught for fourteen years at Hampden-Sydney College and Moravian College, and he returned to academia with his appointment to AASU in January 2005. Responsible for many of the communications courses, Taylor passionately argues

that today’s communications professionals need to learn a new style of writing. Once AASU students leave, they no longer are paying someone—their teachers—to read their work. Instead, in the real world, employees are paid for the words they write. Further, while students in college are expected to work in solitude, much writing in the business world takes place in teams. Therefore, the real world writer must develop the appropriate skills in order to have an impact on peers, subordinates, and superiors. With his hundreds of publications, Taylor just might know what he is talking about.

Faculty Notes

Richard Wallace and **Will Lynch** gave a talk at the 230th American Chemical Society National Meeting in Washington entitled “Enhancing the Undergraduate Chemistry Experience with High-Field NMR.” Co-authors were **Suzanne R. Carpenter**, and **Delana A. Nivens**. The paper was a byproduct of the department’s NSF grant in nanotechnology and part of a symposium entitled “NSF Catalyzed Innovations in Undergraduate Curriculum.”

At the same meeting, **Will Lynch**, Chemistry and Physics, gave a talk entitled “Application of Nanotechnology Laboratories in Inorganic Chemistry and Instrumental Analysis.” Co-authors included faculty members **Delana A. Nivens**, **Maria Schiza**, and students Nguyen Nguyen, Jennifer Fiser, and Beverly Harris.

Richard Wallace and **Suzy Carpenter**, Chemistry and Physics, have published “Using Spreadsheet Software in a ‘Value-Added’ Review of Infrared Spectroscopy in the Organic Chemistry Laboratory Course,” in *The Chemical Educator* 10 (8 June 2005): 308-309.

Jerry Silverman, Instructor in Political Science, has published “The Missing Link: Creating Mutual Dependencies between the Poor and the State,” in *International Public Management Journal* 7 (2004): 227-247.

The Dickinson State University Alumni Association has named **Dr. Lucinda Schultz**, AASU Professor of Music, as an Alumni Fellow for 2005. This distinction is the highest honor bestowed upon alumni by the University’s various academic departments. Dr. Schultz has been invited to present a solo recital and to teach a series of vocal master classes.

Richard Cebula, and his colleagues in Economics have another pile of publications. These include: **Richard Cebula** and **Yassaman Saadatmand**, "Income Tax Evasion in Historical Perspective," *Journal of the American Academy of Business* 2 (2005): 122-127; **Richard Cebula** and **Richard McGrath**, "Evidence of Liquidity Constraints Found in Theme Park Ticket Prices," *Journal of Economics and Finance* (Spring 2005): 112-121; and **Richard Cebula** and L. Lawson, "A Framework for Teaching the Rational Voter Model," *Journal of Economics and Finance Education* 2 (2005): 52-58.

In addition, **Cebula** has published the following papers on his own: "Recent Empirical Evidence on the Impact of the Primary Budget Deficit on Nominal Longer Term Treasury Note Issues," *Global Business and Economics Review* (June 2005): 47-58; and "Strong Presidential Approval or Disapproval Influencing the Expected Benefits of Voting and the Voter Participation Rate," *Atlantic Economic Journal* (June 2005): 159-167.

A number of AASU faculty and students delivered papers at the annual meeting of the Southeastern Psychological Association in Nashville. These include: **Jonathan E. Roberts** and Vanessa Lombardo, "Correlations between lexical decision-making and verbal fluency task performance"; Meredith E. Jackson and **Jonathan E. Roberts**, "Task difficulty, dimension of rotation, and mental rotation tasks: A replication"; Meredith E. Jackson and **Jonathan E. Roberts**, "Type-C Behavior Scale: Development and Validation"; Kristen L. VonWaldner and **Vann B. Scott**, "Contingencies of self-worth and academic success"; and Daniela Salas and **Vann B. Scott**, "Expressive Writing as an Intervention for Emotional Non-expressiveness."

Similarly, a group of AASU faculty and students delivered papers at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Society convention in Los Angeles. These include: **Keith Douglass** and Vanessa Lombardo, "Anxiolytic Effects of Soy Phytoestrogens on Rats in the Elevated Plus-Maze"; **Jonathan E. Roberts** and **Vann B. Scott**, "Observations on the Use of Standardized Test Scores in Program and Curriculum Assessment"; Kristen L. VonWaldner and **Vann B. Scott**, "Rumination, Self-Esteem, and Contingencies of Self-Worth as Predictors of Academic Success"; Kristen L. VonWaldner, Bonnie Craven, and **Vann B. Scott**, "Validation of the Pediatric Attention Disorder Diagnostic Screener"; and Sara L. Holcombe and **Jonathan E. Roberts**, "Four-Year-Old Girls' Spatial Visualization: Effects of Sex-Typed Play Preferences and Art Training." The latter project was part of Ms. Holcombe's work as a graduate of the AASU Honors Program.

Deadlines and Dates

- Sept 19** Deadline for Items for September Curriculum Committee
- Sept 23** Fall FARs due to dean's office
- Oct 5** Last day to withdraw w/o penalty, Session 1
- Oct 7** Promotion and tenure recommendations due to dean
- Oct 7** Faculty Forum: Mediations issues
- Oct 12** AASU Day
- Oct 14** Deadline for items for October Curriculum Committee
- Oct 14** Retention recommendations of 2nd-year faculty due to dean
- Oct 21** October Curriculum Committee
- Oct 31** Advisement begins