

Shaking Things Up

Good teachers are always looking for new ways to reach students, searching out new methods to help them enjoy and understand the subject of the class, trying to motivate them to be more active seekers and learners. TAs can help undergraduates stretch their imaginations and enlarge their vision of the world by devising creative ways to open students' minds to new experiences, to unconventional ways of thinking and seeing. One simple and rewarding way of doing this is to involve students in a cultural activity--outside the classroom, even outside the discipline--that demands a different kind of attention and introduces students to a new vocabulary.

Although at first it may sound frivolous to suggest sending students off to movies, plays, or concerts, the rewards can be great. Going to the theatre may *seem* a digression from or an avoidance of work, but such activity can effectively recharge a person's energies and refocus the mind in, perhaps, a fresh and interesting way, sometimes shedding new light on an old problem. Knowledge is an amalgamation of ideas, with nothing absolutely pure; oftentimes, the most interesting ideas are those that encompass diverse views, those that demonstrate a flexibility in making connections.

The boundaries that exist among disciplines are much less rigid than we sometimes pretend. Scientists, for example, depend upon metaphor to elucidate their most difficult concepts; philosophers may use examples from opera or sports to support their arguments. Teachers should encourage students to bring their own life experiences to bear on the materials of the class, but they also should provide opportunities for their students to expand the range of their own experience. Send a philosophy class to a Shakespeare play to consider theories of personal identity; ask students in a physics class to attend a dance performance or a gymnastics demonstration and then describe the physics of one kind of motion; assign a math class to attend a poetry reading or a jazz concert to get them to think about meter or rhythm; chemis-

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Learning Resource Centers Offer Support to Undergrads

TAs responsible for students in introductory courses have a welcome new resource this semester: the Learning Resource Centers (LRC) instituted by President Lawrence to give undergraduates the support they need to succeed in the university. Dr. Karen Smith is the Director of the Centers. The objectives of the Centers are to provide study skills assistance through individualized and small group methods; to offer additional instruction to students who need help in regular coursework through peer tutoring and supplemental instruction programs; and to refer students to other university services as appropriate.

The Learning Resource Centers provide peer tutoring in the following courses: Accounting 273 and 274; Biological Sciences 101 through 191; Chemistry 159-164 and Organic Chemistry 307-308; Computer Science 110-230; Economics 102-206; Engineering, Electrical and Computing 221-225; Engineering,

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try students could visit a photography exhibition to consider the subtle effects of different chemical processes on an image; language classes could attend an opera and discuss the problems of translation as evidenced in the libretto.

Arranging such activities is not at all difficult at Rutgers. TAs in New Brunswick are fortunate because there are so many rich resources at hand; if they will just look around the campus they will be able to find most of what they need. Many departments hold their own "film festivals"--next semester, for example, the Medieval Studies department plans to sponsor a series of films on medieval life, potentially of interest not only to history students but students in almost all disciplines--linguistics, psychology, art, science, literature (call 7342 for information). The Mason Gross School of the Arts offers an extensive schedule of music, dance, and dramatic performances; TAs would

be wise to obtain a schedule for next semester as soon as possible so that they can work an event into next semester's syllabus (call 7511 for information). For example, in April "Marat Sade: The Persecution and Assassination of Jean-Paul Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton under the Direction of the Marquis de Sade," by Peter Weiss, will be offered; the potential for inter-disciplinary connections are apparent. Contact the English department to find out when poetry readings are scheduled; find out what exhibitions will be presented at the Zimmerli gallery or by the Mason Gross School of the Arts at the Downtown Arts Building. The possibilities are endless, and a little pre-planning can enrich a class immeasurably.

Start a chain reaction. Involve your students in the exploration of other media, other disciplines. Some students will be interested enough to take another course that more directly deals with this extra-curricular material; perhaps that teacher, in turn, will spark the imagination of the students in a different way. For the involved learner, each new experience tantalizes and leads onward to another. So, shake students up a bit; give them the push that may start them on a new path, a new way of looking at the subject you are teaching, or, indeed, at the world.

Learning Resource Centers

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General 125 & 127; Mathematics 025-252; Philosophy 201 (Introduction to Logic); Physics 115-128; Psychology 200 (Quantitative Methods); and Statistics 101-285. In addition, the Centers offer assistance to students in writing research papers (in fields other than English) and assistance in study strategies such as effective notetaking, critical thinking, stress management, and time management. Students can stop by the Learning Centers to find out the timetable for the various sessions; a new weekly schedule for tutoring is available every Monday morning at each Center.

The three centers on the New Brunswick campus are: College Avenue LRC, Gail Kluepfel, Director, Brower Commons Annex (932-1443); Cook/Douglass LRC, Joan Kraft, Director, Loree 124 (932-1660); and Livingston LRC, Marilyn Rye, Director, Tillett 111 (932-0986).

TapTalk is a monthly newsletter produced by the Teaching Assistant Project (TAP), Graduate School, New Brunswick. Letters and suggestions for articles should be directed to the editor:
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There's still time to make an appointment to have a class videotaped!

TAs who would like to improve their teaching skills through a videotape analysis should call Beth Griech or Jay Crosson at 932-7747 to set up an appointment.

IN THE PROGRAMS

The Graduate Program in **Psychology** has announced its plans for 1992-1993 TA Training. During the fall semester, TAs will attend a lecture series that focuses on such topics as developing course and lecture plans, structuring exams and grading, and dealing with cheating. During the spring semester, TAs will, as a group, organize and run an Introduction to Psychology course. Each TA will give one or two lectures to the other TAs and these lectures will be constructively reviewed.

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For TAs in **Economics**: On Friday, October 23rd, Professor Michael Shafer of the Political Science Department presented a talk, "The Best Class You Ever Had." Shafer discussed teaching strategies and ways of improving teaching skills. . . . On Friday, November 13th, Janice Warner of the University Counseling Service will discuss "Stress Management," identifying sources of stress and exploring ways of coping with it.

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The Graduate Program in **Music** will be videotaping all TAs as they teach a class. Afterwards the tape will be reviewed by a member of the faculty who will analyze the effectiveness of the TA's presentation.

NOTES ON THE UNDERGRADS

The Fearful Student

Certain subjects (including, but not limited to, calculus, chemistry, expository writing) seem to trigger almost irrational anxiety in large numbers of students. This can result in a highly unpleasant situation for both the students and the teacher because when students are required to take courses for which they harbor a deep-seated fear, there is little chance that they will do well in the course unless these anxieties are allayed in some manner. Teachers have a responsibility to acknowledge and to deal with these fears in a constructive way.

Performance anxiety can cripple a student from succeeding in a situation where, had the stress been minimized or removed, s/he would have had a fair chance of doing well. Of course not everyone can be a great writer or a brilliant mathematician--some people are naturally better at some things than others--but students here at the university have the intellectual ability if not always the practical background to succeed in most subjects. TAs should assume that *all* of their students can succeed and then work to help them get over whatever problems they have in facing the subject.

The first step, of course, is to recognize the baggage that students carry with them from high school. Whatever bad experiences they had there will haunt them in college unless the teacher works to dispel them at once. At the beginning of each semester, ask students what their feelings are about the subject. Be honest about the level of difficulty of the work, but be positive about their ability to master it. Encourage them to come to you with questions and problems; let them know that no question is a stupid one if it helps them to understand more fully, that students should not be ashamed of incorrect answers if they can, with the help of the teacher, use them as vehicles to higher understanding. Acknowledge that students may have different levels of high school preparation and make suggestions as to how those with deficiencies might catch up through extra work or tutoring. Pace the class more slowly at the beginning of the semester so that students will more thoroughly understand the basic concepts upon which the course will be structured. Moving more slowly at the beginning also gives the students an opportunity to perform successfully in a sub-

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TA
Helpline
Call
932-11TA

Monday-Friday
between
the hours
of
8:30-4:30

The Fearful Student

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ject where they may never before have done well, easing some initial fears.

Most important, perhaps, is to remember that undergraduates are human. Treat them as individuals, with individual abilities and needs, and they will be able to get beyond the fear and the tension to a mastery of the subject.



- 23 As of this date, requests for course withdrawals will not be approved. Students are subject to final grades assigned by the course instructor.
- 24 Thursday classes meet.
- 25 Friday classes meet.
- Dissertation workshop
- 26 Thanksgiving day

Teaching Assistant Project

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