

# Instructional Development

Editor:

LeAnne H. Rutherford

Published as a service for  
UMD faculty by the  
Instructional Development  
Service



Reaching  
higher

University of Minnesota  
Duluth

FALL SEMESTER, 2009  
VOL. XXVI, NO. 1

## Pointers for Productivity – When You Are Doing More with Less or Less with More

Expected to do more with less? Then it's time for basic arithmetic—a lot of subtraction and a little addition but, of course, without loss of course integrity. In what ways can we cope and compensate when resources show signs of diminishing? What's already on the shelf? What resources are available just for the taking? For example, how can we use the “long tail” of the internet for **outsourcing some of our teaching with Web 2.0 tools** such as YouTube?

Rather than spend precious time creating all of our own motivators and illustrations, we can find some of what we need on the Web. In *Philosophy of Language* (Phil 2011), to illustrate that babies learn and use linguistic cadence before they use words, Jason Ford directs students to YouTube's *Funny Baby Makes a Speech* which dramatically demonstrates the theory with great impact. Before having access to this low-hanging internet fruit, instructors might spend hours devising stunning ways to make a point. Now the net can pull in what we were individually fly casting for.

Not only can we browse through what is available and select whatever suits our purpose, but our students can prepare YouTube submissions that help us meet our learning objectives. See <http://itunes.umn.edu>.

For groups or individuals, other easily accessible web formats include wikis and blogs. Wikis work for group projects as do Google Docs. Everyone knows that blogs are a newer approach for journaling and reflecting. However, few of us acknowledge the power that these means represent for sharing the load, of having the option of letting more than the instructor read of students' hopes, fears, and aspirations, and broadening the audience for as well as the authenticity of verbal products. From a practical standpoint, too, all of these electronic formats do not require use of a wheelbarrow to cart student products and notebooks to and from classrooms and offices.

We can also augment what we have by **getting professional help**, that is, help from the profession we are preparing students to enter. Mark Harvey in Theater enlists professionals practicing in his field to electronically critique student work and give reality a chance to work its transformative magic. Writing Studies refers students to excellent, professionally developed online resources such as Purdue's writing site, OWL. It is a sign of wisdom to ask for help; you don't have to do everything yourself.

Affiliating with the community via the Office of Civic Engagement creates another path to professional input and connections with the world outside academe. What professional sources of assistance and augmentation from the community have you tried?

Counter the “little red hen syndrome” by using another set of eyes and ears and delegating. Students can learn by helping one another. Set up systems that decrease the number of times you handle or view papers. Let students “head off problems at the pass” with peer review or rubrics.

If you want your students to learn more from your tests, work from individual grades to group grades. Give a test to individuals for one separate grade. Return the tests and, instead of going over the test for the entire class, let groups retake the tests together for another, better grade and greater learning.

**Delegate** some of the grunt work of creating and responding to out-of-class assignments by using high quality programs from text publishers that automatically grade and give feedback, e.g., Homework Manager. (Check first to see that they are institutionally- approved and FERPA-functional.)

For tips for teaching large and larger classes, you can deputize <http://serc.calteton.edu/NAGTWorkshops/earlycareer/teaching/Large Classes.html> to provide you with more than 15 active links which are full of ideas to energize and economize. This site and others like it can

*Continued on page 2*

### Inside...

Pointers for  
Productivity  
pgs 1 - 2

Great Wall to a  
Great Lake  
pg 3 - 4

Preparing for the  
Flu Crisis That May  
Never Happen  
pgs 4 - 5

Assessment  
Books  
pgs 5 - 6

Continued from page 1

help you with engaging your classes or getting groups to work well, for example. IDS' instructional library can also be a source of strategies for working with large classes.

Anything not worth doing is worth doing badly or not at all. Here is where wise subtraction is useful. We use the **delete** key all the time on our e-mail. Why not look inquiringly at your syllabus and delete the least effective or the most controversial assignment? It is probably the one that is flawed in some way anyway. Rethink it, redesign it, or delete it. Come at it from another direction after considering student reactions. At the end of a segment or a semester, have students rank your assignments from most helpful to least helpful. Then do what needs to be done. Better yet, ask the Instructional Development Service to conduct a mid-semester Focused Feedback in your class to anonymously determine what works to help your students learn and what suggestions they have making learning in your class more fruitful and even fun.

You may also **profit from planning for pandemics**. Use groups to generate ideas, to co-author papers and to react to them before they are submitted for grading. By being facilitative, you thereby increase the number of eyes that have seen a paper, the number of chances for productive revision, and the fewer times you will have to process it. Should face to face interaction be impossible because of H1N1 or any other health crisis, all of these activities can be electronically transacted.

eSchool News recently reported, "Educators are increasingly seeing the value of having students collaborate in small groups on classroom projects—and whether such projects involve producing a written or multimedia presentation, solving a math problem, or creating a video, technology can facilitate the group process." We have known this all along. But electronic capabilities now make it possible to proceed in ideal or even less-than-ideal circumstances.

*“But electronic capabilities now make it possible to proceed in ideal or even less-than-ideal circumstances.”*

- Guaranteeing greater productivity but with less effort, other ideas arise from planning for pandemics. Keep things as simple as possible electronically by using the lowest tech possible. Don't further complicate the situation by making the form more important than the substance. Remember that you could leave a message with assignments or directions for your classes on your office phone if you are suddenly struck down by illness. Getting the job done doesn't get more basic than that.
- Furthermore, you can use some form of classroom capture (UMConnect or Camtasia) to record your class for absent students. Recently, Helen Mongan Rallis returned to her family home in South Africa for an emergency. She taught her UMD classes on UMConnect live from South Africa.
- Creating a buddy system works to decrease instructor dependence. In addition to a buddy system, a well-articulated syllabus reduces the number of times a student might ask, "What did I miss?" If a student is battling the flu, s/he need not also battle keeping pace with your class.
- Put course notes online (or post on your office door if you are averse to online), for absent students to stay abreast of the class.
- Finally, here is a recommendation to ease student minds and decrease the demand for make-up exams. Give more tests, e.g., 5 instead of 2, then drop the lowest score. You do not have to write more test questions. You simply have to spread large packages of questions into smaller units, which may be sounder pedagogy anyway.

Less is often more when it comes to teaching. And, conversely, more can lead to doing less when we approach our planning with questions of what we want our students to achieve in our courses and how we can most efficiently get there.

	<b>The Instructional Development Service</b>
	125 Bohannon Hall University of Minnesota Duluth 1207 Ordean Court Duluth, MN 55812 <a href="http://www.d.umn.edu/ids">http://www.d.umn.edu/ids</a>
	<b>LeAne Rutherford</b> , Editor, Director & Educational Consultant <b>Shelley Smith</b> , Educational Consultant & Web Editor <b>Jamie Aspenson</b> , Graduate Intern <b>Bruce Reeves &amp; Amanda Evans</b> , ITSS Faculty Technology Consultants <b>Jason Ellis</b> , Administrative Assistant

The University of Minnesota is committed to the policy that all persons shall have equal access to its programs, facilities, and employment without regard to race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, age, marital status, disability, public assistance status, veteran status, or sexual orientation.

# The Great Wall to a Great Lake: 10 Questions for our Guest

IDS welcomes **Fang He**, visiting scholar from Beijing, China. Fang will be on our campus for six months observing, participating in, and attending a variety of classes and events, as well as researching her interest in the development of teaching.



## **What brought you to UMD?**

The Beijing Municipal Education Commission organizes several programs to support teachers to study abroad. Our program sent 60 teachers working in different universities in Beijing to study in several universities in the U.S. and Australia this semester. Faculty who are associate professors/full professors under 45 years old and who have been working in the university for more than 5 years are eligible to apply. Then we need to pass English proficiency exams to finally get the chance.

## **What is your professional background?**

My bachelor's degree is in English from Beijing Normal University; my master's degree, English Education, is from Beijing Foreign Studies University. An associate professor, I have been working as a teacher of English at Beijing Union University for 12 years.

## **What do you hope to take away from your experience at UMD? In other words, what are your learning goals?**

My goals are to improve my teaching and research abilities, particularly in teaching development. That is why I have been interested in IDS.

## **What are similarities and differences you have identified between teaching and learning in the U.S and China?**

All faculty in the U.S. and China face the pressure of publishing.

The differences are more numerous. For example:

- Internet and technology are fully employed in teaching, learning, and life in the U.S. Online teaching and webinars work really very well. However, the Smartboard is brand new to me.
- Lots of seminars and workshops are offered here. Faculty and students have many chances to know and discuss a variety of issues to broaden and deepen their understanding of teaching, learning, and being at a university. But at our universities, seminars are relatively rare.
- Faculty here collaborate more with those from different departments, disciplines, and even those from high schools where the undergraduates student teach or tutor. Doing this helps students develop a comprehensive understanding about what they are learning and how useful it will be.
- Major and non-major students have classes together here, while we have very clear-cut separation of majors and non-majors in our education system.
- Individuals are cared for here, and disabled people have excellent access to services and facilities. Students with disabilities are accommodated in all classes. In China they go to special schools for disabled students. I was surprised to see two interpreters take turns working for one student with hearing problems in a class. I have seen interpreters in many meetings, too. I was even shocked to see people with hearing problems at a musical, with two very professional interpreters using sign language for everything in the musical. This never happens in China. I feel sorry about this.
- Students here seem happy to learn and to take responsibility for their own studies. Many students in China do not enjoy learning, but they feel obliged to learn in order to get better scores and then better jobs.
- Students in the U.S. are willing to express themselves and speak in public easily. They do fairly good presentations, and all group members contribute their talents.
- Critical thinking is embedded in teaching here. Students have research training from a very early age.
- Instructors in the U.S. encourage and praise their students very often.
- Instructors here talk about themselves in their classes. I think it may be to reduce the sense of remoteness between themselves and their students. In China we seldom talk about our families to our students.
- People in the U.S. eat in most circumstances such as classes, seminars, and meetings. We seldom eat in these circumstances, maybe based on the idea of showing politeness and respect to the speaker.

*Continued on page 4*

Continued from page 3

**What do you miss about home?**

Family.

**What would you like to take back home?**

I would like to take back new friends. I would also like to take back gifts for my friends and family. Famous brands are much more expensive in China than in the U.S.

**What are some gaps in your experience that you would like to fill in?**

Research ability, cultural things. I'd like to go to more plays.

**What are some specific things you have enjoyed about Duluth, Minnesota, UMD...?**

Lake Superior is beautiful. At UMD, I enjoy have a great mentor and friendly colleagues. I also like my new experiences here.

**If you were to take faculty back to China with you, what three things would you want them to see or experience?**

Chinese culture and food like roast duck. Famous scenic spots such as the Forbidden City or the Great Wall, and the fact that China has developed quickly.

**What would you want them to learn about teaching and learning in China?**

Both teachers and students face great burdens today. Teachers in our university have to teach 350 periods a year, plus publish papers. Students face the pressure of finding good jobs, and learning is very instrumental, which I don't think will benefit them in the long run if they are learning just to get a job.

## Preparing for the Flu Crisis That May Never Happen

*Bruce Reeves, ITSS*

### 2009-2010 is Upon Us

The start of the academic year arrived, as it often does, on a wave of energy, hopes, and challenges. This year, the looming threat of the H1N1 flu added a dimension of uncertainty we do not often encounter. Added to usual early semester concerns: Why is the publisher late with the books? Am I ready for the first day of class? Did my article get accepted? What will class attendance be? How many committees will I serve on this year? Questions about H1N1 swirled in and out of our thoughts: How many will get sick? Is this pandemic real? Will the campus close? How are the new hires going to do? How will I teach during this uncertainty? What if I get sick? What will my students be like? Will many die from this disease? And, of course, there was the occasional feeling that I just don't have time to think about this right now!

The internal noise can be deafening.

E-mails on preparing for teaching during the pandemic came fast and heavy. A workshop on "Teaching and Learning During a Pandemic" occurred at the end of the first week of classes. More pandemic e-mails appeared in people's inboxes. How do those e-mail filters work? What's that? Students are having problems getting into the course Website? Where did I save that syllabus? Another e-mail about the pandemic in the inbox arrives.

The internal noise is deafening.

As one faculty member exclaimed, "If I'm dealing with what is, how do I prepare for what might be?" This is a perplexing question, but with challenge comes opportunity. The greatest gift the "what if" of the pandemic presents is the opportunity to examine the essential elements of our courses. This ability is highlighted on the "Teaching and Learning During a Pandemic" Web site:

#### **Initial Teaching Considerations: Flexibility, Flow, & Simplicity**

- Consider what the essential elements of your class are. This is not about the perfect class but a class that can confront a semester that may require greater flexibility while maintaining its academic integrity.
- Adaptability may be crucial. With this in mind, ask yourself:
  - What are the expected learning outcomes for my course?
  - What are alternative ways to accomplish the desired results with my students?
  - What variations in student assessment methods can be made should face-to-face be impossible?

*"If I'm dealing with what is, how do I prepare for what might be?"*

*Continued from page 4*

### **What Are the Expected Learning Outcomes for Your Course?**

Making the implicit explicit can be both a difficult and liberating exercise. This process asks us to be honest with ourselves about our teaching and our expectations for our students. Although this may initially feel like a burden, the increased clarity of our expected learning outcomes makes achieving these outcomes easier to design. Less time is wasted on the non-essential, but time spent on the intentional is maximized.

### **What Are Alternative Ways to Accomplish the Expected Results with Your Students?**

Envisioning a different path to the same destination may seem difficult at first because doing what you've been doing is likely the result of planning and searching for the "best method" to meet your needs in a face-to-face class. However, this method may be only one of several acceptable options, particularly if you are exchanging face time for more independent student work time. Think of it as if you were visiting a restaurant for the first time.

Perusing the menu offers many enticing options. What to choose? You decide, order, and the meal is mouth-watering. On the next visit to the restaurant, you order the same lamb with couscous because it was so good. Here's where preference and habit collide. Could it be pure chance that the meal you first chose is the only one of all the attractive options on the menu that could result in an exceptional meal? In reality, it is likely that other enticing options could have had equally excellent results. How about walleye in butter sauce? Another selection can fill the bill and be just as satisfying.

In teaching, a different method tailored to a new situation can accomplish the same desired results. Perhaps having students take an open-book test online instead of a traditional bubble sheet test in person would allow learning to happen just as effectively. Matching the method to the particular situation instead of forcing a familiar method on it can reduce the stress created by a changing environment.

### **What Variations in Student Assessment Methods Can Be Made Should Face-to-Face be Impossible?**

This is one of the most challenging tasks to undertake because it involves assessing what the students are learning. Is it possible a project could take the place of a written exam? If yes, what would the project need to look like to achieve this? How can you convey the requirements to the students? What if the project you intended needs to be done as a paper due to the interruption in attendance? What question or questions would need to be addressed in the paper to make it as effective a learning tool as the existing project? What if students are allowed to choose among a variety of options for a particular assessment? How could you suggest changes, yet grade all of them in a timely fashion? Do you need to grade them? Can the students do peer or self-assessment to hone some of the projects before you see them? How do you help them do an honest and effective peer or self-assessment?

The variation in assessment methods opens options for both the teacher and the student. Sometimes these different methods can create more work, but, because they are more gratifying, seem like less work.

### **What Does This All Mean?**

Thinking about the essentials of a course often involves energy up front, but the clarity it can bring to teaching your courses can pay valuable dividends. Even if no flu-related attendance crisis occurs on campus, just creating an alternate plan of action for your classes can be stimulating and profitable to learning.

## *Assessment Books*

**Available in the IDS Library, Bohannon 213**

**You are welcome to stop by, peruse, and borrow these useful resources.**

### ***Assessment Clear and Simple***

Barbara E. Walvoord

"Assessment 101 in a book – a concise, step-by-step guide written for everyone who participates in the assessment process."

### ***Assessing for Learning***

Peggy L. Maki

"This book presents inquiry into student learning as a core process of institutional learning – a way of knowing about our work – to improve educational practices."

### ***Assessing Student Learning – 2nd edition***

Linda Suskie

"This edition includes expanded coverage of vital assessment topics such as promoting an assessment culture, characteristics of good assessment, audiences for assessment, organizing and coordinating assessment, assessing attitudes and values, setting benchmarks and standards and using results to inform and improve teaching, learning, planning and decision-making."

*Continued on page 6*

Continued from page 5

### ***Designing and Assessing Courses and Curricula – 3rd edition***

Robert M. Diamond

“Reflects the most current knowledge and practice in course and curriculum design and connects this knowledge with the critical task of assessing learning outcomes at both course and curricular levels.”

### ***Effective Grading***

Barbara E. Walvoord & Virginia Johnson Anderson

“Enables faculty to go beyond using grades as isolated artifacts and helps them make classroom grading processes more fair, time-efficient, and conducive to learning.”

### ***Assessing Online Learning***

Patricia Comeaux, editor

“Conceptual and pragmatic, this book addresses the salient issues of assessment and offers a variety of assessment tool and strategies for online classrooms and programs.”

### ***Assessment for Excellence***

Alexander W. Astin

“Presents a detailed critique of traditional assessment policies and attempts to address all of the major issues related to assessment.”

### ***Assessing Academic Programs in Higher Education***

Mary J. Allen

“A realistic, pragmatic guide for developing and implementing meaningful, manageable, and sustainable assessment programs that focus faculty attention on student learning.”

### ***Beyond Tests and Quizzes***

Richard J. Mezeske & Barbara A. Mezeske, editors

“This book is written for college instructors who are striving to creatively change assessment practice to better reflect learner-centered teaching.”

### ***Assessing the Online Learner***

Rena M. Palloff & Keith Pratt

“This book is filled with illustrative case studies, authentic assessments based in real-life application of concepts, and

collaborative activities that assess the quality of student learning rather than relying on traditional methods of measuring the amount of information retained.”

### ***Promoting Integrated and Transformative Assessment***

Catherine M. Wehlburg

“Outlines an integrated and ongoing system for assessment that both prepares for an accreditation visit and truly enhances student learning.”

### ***Introduction to Rubrics***

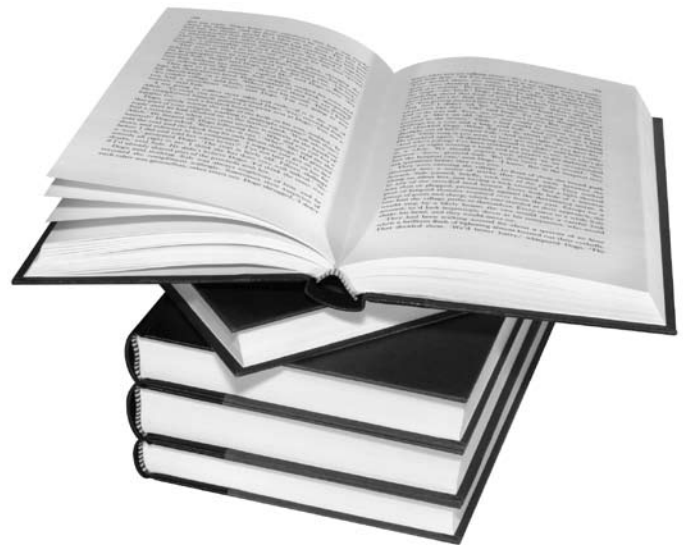
Dannelle D. Stevens & Antonia J. Levi

“This book defines what rubrics are, and how to construct and use them. It provides a complete introduction for anyone starting out to integrate rubrics into their teaching.”

### ***Assessment Essentials***

Catherine A. Palomba & Trudy W. Banta

“Outlines the assessment process from the first to the last step and is filled with a wealth of illustrative examples to show how assessment is accomplished on today’s academic campuses. It is especially useful for faculty members who may be new to the assessment process.”



## *Keep an Eye Out For...*

- An IDS Faculty Needs Survey coming soon to computers near you
- Prospects for engaging in the Early Careers Spring Series
- The tri-fold announcing IDS Spring Workshops
- Opportunities for IDS-conducted, mid-semester Focused Feedback sessions to “take the pulse” of your classes
- Additions to the IDS web site at <http://www.d.umn.edu/ids>

