

Creating Passion for Learning and Teaching: A Professional Development Model

by Emily Hixon, Ph.D., Instructional Design Specialist

The faculty members in the School of Public and Environmental Affairs (SPEA) at IU Northwest are a unique bunch. Unlike most academic units where the faculty come from similar intellectual and professional backgrounds, the faculty members in SPEA represent a large range of disciplines, including economics, sociology, geology, criminal justice, political science, and public administration, and have quite varied professional experiences. The SPEA faculty recognize their unique interdisciplinary nature and have created a culture that values the academic knowledge and practical experiences each individual brings to the group.

At their graduate student orientation held each fall, the SPEA faculty celebrate their diversity, proudly sharing their backgrounds and telling their stories. They encourage their students to do the same. Tim Sutherland, M.P.A., a prior adjunct professor in SPEA, said, "It was important to let students see who I am and for them to understand that I was there to help them learn." Rick Hug, Ph.D., associate professor in SPEA agrees, "The students need to know us in order to connect with us and vice versa," says Hug. SPEA students are reminded that their existing knowledge and life experiences are relevant to their future learning and will be valued by faculty members. The faculty explains to students that they care about teaching, and that everyone there (faculty and students alike) is helping one another become better professionals.

The SPEA faculty take pride in their teaching and have recently employed an innovative professional development strategy as part of their continuing commitment to improve teaching and learning. For the past three years, the SPEA faculty have selected a book related to teaching and purchased a copy of the book for each faculty member to read and discuss. Some faculty members have made explicit changes to their teaching based on their reading and discussions, and many have shared their revelations and innovations with their colleagues at a national conference.

The first two books read by the SPEA faculty were *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* by Donald A. Schön, and *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life* by Parker Palmer. These two books do not cover specific teaching techniques or pedagogical theories, but instead address teaching by focusing on what is within the teacher. Karen Evans, Ph.D., associate professor in SPEA, found the discussions of these books with colleagues "liberating." "I feel that I can risk doing things differently, that I can experiment with my teaching," Evans said. Ellen Szarleta-Yancy, J.D., Ph.D., assistant professor in SPEA, admits that she was the skeptic in the group. "My background is in economics, which is very mechanical – it doesn't encourage self-reflection." So implementing some of the ideas from these books was at first uncomfortable for Szarleta-Yancy. But with the support and respect of her colleagues, she is examining her teaching and experimenting with new approaches.

This year, the SPEA faculty built on what they learned from the first two books and jointly examined Maryellen Weimer's *Learner-Centered Teaching: Five Key Changes to Practice*. The author examines the link between instructional practice and student learning, identifying five areas that change when teaching is more learner-centered. The five areas identified are: 1) the balance of power, 2) the function of content, 3) the role of the teacher, 4) the responsibility for learning, and 5) the purpose and processes of evaluation. After reading the

book, five SPEA faculty members agreed to implement a change in their teaching based on Weimer's ideas. The faculty members will analyze the effectiveness of the changes and report their findings in a session entitled, "Creating Passion for Learning and Teaching: A Panel Discussion," to be held at the Annual Teaching Public Administration Conference in February.

Among the faculty presenting at this year's conference is Dr. Ellen Szarleta-Yancy. She chose to explore how she might encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning. "I wanted students to understand that how they interact with others affects how much they get out of the course. I wanted them to know that they can teach each other and learn from one another." To accomplish these goals, Szarleta-Yancy implemented structured group presentations and included online discussions where students were required to respond to one another's postings. To encourage students to do the readings before class, she also required students to respond to a "Question for Review" prior to the start of each class session. Szarleta-Yancy is pleased with the changes she made, and feels that the students have gotten to know each other better and are taking more responsibility for their own learning.

Another panelist at the upcoming conference is Susan Zinner, J.D., associate professor in SPEA. After reading Weimer's book, Zinner stated, "I was moved and intrigued by the possibility of changing the balance of power in the classroom and was curious to see how it would change classroom dynamics." To change the balance of power, Zinner decided to give students options in the assignments that they chose to complete. She explains, "If a student feels that he/she traditionally does not perform well on exams, I emphasize that it is possible to receive an excellent grade in the class by completing assignments such as book reviews, Power Point presentations on health-related topics and discussions on subjects such as whether there should be a constitutional right to health care." Students have been very responsive to this new approach and Zinner expects her "experiment" to prove successful once she evaluates the results more thoroughly.

Although the SPEA faculty are not able to get together to discuss their teaching as often as they would like, the ideas have found their way into many aspects of their professional lives. The professional development activities they have engaged in have helped shape their departmental culture and create a shared focus that is evident to both faculty and students.



To contact the
Center for
Excellence in
Teaching and
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call 219-980-6755,
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www.iun.edu/cetl.

CETL awarded Professional Development Grants

The Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning offers professional development grants for innovative pedagogical projects and programs that enhance the teaching of individual faculty members, help promote a vibrant teaching community at IU Northwest, and improve student learning. CETL is proud to announce that the following individuals have received professional development grants:

Subir Bandyopadhyay, Ph.D., Professor of Marketing
TITLE: Cross-Cultural Teaching Through Virtual Immersion

Marie Eisenstein, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Political Science
TITLE: Creating Passion for Learning and Teaching: A Panel Discussion (Conference Support)

Karen Evans, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Public and Environmental Affairs
TITLE: Creating Passion for Learning and Teaching: A Panel Discussion (Conference Support)

Taylor Lake, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Communications
TITLE: Attending Short Courses at Central States Communication Association Conference (Conference Support)

Ruth Needleman, Ph.D., Professor of Labor Studies
TITLE: Designing & Delivering Multidisciplinary Curriculum within the University Using New Pedagogical Methodologies

Manoj Pardasani, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Social Work
TITLE: Infusing Gerontological Content in Social Work Curriculum: A Service Learning Project

Surekha Rao, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Economics
TITLE: Symposium on Asia

Lary Schiefelbusch, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Mathematics and **Stela Pudar-Hozo**, Lecturer of Mathematics
TITLE: Grant to Support Student Involvement in IU Northwest Calculator Tournament

David Strupeck, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Accounting
TITLE: Assessing the Critical Thinking Skills of Entry Level Business Students at IU Northwest and PNC

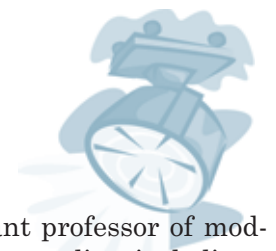
Ellen Szarleta-Yancy, J.D., Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Public and Environmental Affairs
TITLE: Creating Passion for Learning and Teaching: A Panel Discussion (Conference Support)

Karen Venditti, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Education
TITLE: A Personal, Professional Electronic Portfolio Addressing the Association of Teacher Educator (ATE) Teacher Educator Standards to Document Quality in a Teacher Preparation Program

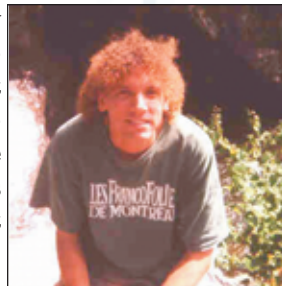
Susan Zinner, J.D., Assistant Professor of Public and Environmental Affairs
TITLE: Creating Passion for Learning and Teaching: A Panel Discussion (Conference Support)

Congratulations!

Faculty Spotlight: Scooter Pégram



Dr. Scooter Pégram, assistant professor of modern languages and minority studies, is dedicated to teaching and is fully committed to helping his students learn, no matter what it takes. Believing that it is important to take an interest in the lives of his students, he reaches out to his students to ensure that no one slips through the cracks. He states, “On our campus, students are often juggling many



Pégram

responsibilities at the same time (jobs, children, etc..) and as I get to know about the off-campus lives of all of my students, I can help make their overall university experience be a positive one.” He also recognizes the learning benefits of such an approach, pointing out, “Through my interest in the things that are important to students, they subsequently feel more connected to the course materials.”

Dr. Pégram uses pop culture and other topics of interest to engage students in the French language and culture. By using authentic materials, he hopes to help his students better relate to French and the world surrounding them. He comments, “Many years from now, while my students may not remember the complexities of conjugating verbs in the *passé composé* tense, it is my goal that they recognize and embrace the world’s beauty and diversity.”

Dr. Pégram recognizes that students learn differently and employs a variety of teaching techniques to get his students excited about learning. He states, “I always arrive to class with a smile on my face and with boundless energy and enthusiasm in my voice, and I will use any and all types of visual props and games to aid with my lessons so that students are able to grasp the lecture materials in a much stronger fashion and be able to remember what they learn in different ways.”

Dr. Pégram is clearly dedicated to helping his students succeed and continues to engage in professional development to ensure that he is doing all he can to reach his students. He serves on the CETL Advisory Board and is always willing to share his teaching experiences and expertise with his colleagues at CETL events. Although he is relatively new to campus, he has already distinguished himself as an award-winning teacher by winning the 2005 Trustee Teaching Award. He was also a finalist for the 2005 Founders Day Teaching Award.