

# Proceedings of the Roosevelt University Mini-Conference on Teaching

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## Volume Three 2006

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## Editorial Preface

The Third Roosevelt University Mini-Conference on Teaching (“RUMCOT 3”) was held at the Chicago Campus on April 21, 2006. Sixty-five full-time and part-time faculty members, administrators, and staff attended the event which focused on enhancing teaching at the university. The conference featured 12 interactive workshops, teaching roundtable discussions, and showcase presentations about online learning as well as exhibit displays. These proceedings provide a summary of many presentations from the conference. The authors address topics that are relevant to teaching at Roosevelt University, such as enhancing student assessment, using innovative teaching strategies, addressing diversity, and incorporating technology into your classroom.

I hope that you find these readings helpful. For additional information about effective college teaching, you can explore related book and video holdings in the university’s libraries. The complete list of titles is available by clicking the link labeled “Resources for Effective College Teaching” under the Special Collections heading of the Library’s webpage at <http://www2.roosevelt.edu/library/>. The Center for Teaching and Learning, located in Room 1046 inside the Auditorium Library, has even more resources for you to peruse. Ask a reference librarian for the key code to enter the Center.

RUMCOT 3 and these proceedings are sponsored by the Office of the Provost and Executive Vice President and the Center for Teaching and Learning.

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# Self-Assessment: Grading or Knowing?

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By posing the question, “How do they know they know?” adult educator Jane Vella (Vella, Berardinelli, & Burrow, 1998) challenges those of us in professional educational settings to closely re-examine our assessment practices. This question suggests two points: it is ultimately the learner who truly knows what he or she knows; and it is the responsibility of the instructor to ensure there is a means of making such knowledge possible on the part of the learner. This question also begs another question: “How satisfied are they with their level of knowing?” This further question can be addressed adequately neither by an instructor-assigned grade nor by a self-assigned grade. This instead requires explicitly asking learners to reflect on their learning and level of competence, and to clarify or to authenticate such learning and competence not merely for purposes of grading, but for performance beyond the classroom. For learners to determine whether they are satisfied with their knowledge and skills, they must participate in some form of self-assessment.

## SELF-ASSESSMENT IN PROFESSIONAL PROGRAMS

The importance of self-assessment in professional programs has been explored and documented by several investigators (Fitzgerald, White, & Gruppen, 2003; Jackson & Popovich, 2003). In academia, self-assessment is often viewed as a means to increase responsibility on the part of the learner for his or her own learning. It is enacted through a wide spectrum of techniques: from individual learning contracts to portfolios to formal surveys. Because student self-assessment is thought to shift some of the responsibility for assessment from the instructor to the learner, it may also be thought of as a technique used to further authentic assessment.

Self-assessment in professional programs is clearly aligned with the proliferation of competency-based programs. These seek to produce individuals who can think and perform as novice professionals. Such programs emphasize case-based and problem-based instruction (Ryan & Marlow, 2004). The development of case-based and problem-based curricula seeks to embed learners in situations that resemble, as closely as possible, the environment beyond the classroom. According to Frank and Barzilai (2004), “the real learning is often in the doing or in the process leading up to the product” (p. 44).

Professional competence and expertise are difficult to attain, and it is unlikely that the utilization of case-based and problem-based curricula alone are enough to ensure their attainment. Nieweg (2004) asserts that “professionals have to be able to control and assure their own quality” (p. 207). If we agree with Nieweg, that students in professional programs must learn to assure their own quality, then these students must be given ample opportunities to control and assure their own quality through practicing self-assessment.

Traditionally, self-assessment in professional programs—and in formal educational settings in general—has been inextricably linked to self-grading. Often, studies focus on how closely students’ self-assessments match those of their teachers (Fitzgerald, White, & Gruppen, 2003; Pope, 2005) or of their peers. The results of such studies have been inconsistent. According to Pope (2005), both student self-assessment and peer assessment, “are highly correlated with faculty-awarded marks” (p. 60). Yet, Regehr, Hodges, Tiberius, and Lofchy (1996) maintain that, “educators find it troubling that researchers who have attempted to establish the validity or accuracy of self-assessment have often come to the conclusion that people’s ability to self-assess is quite poor” (p. 52). Establishing the validity or accuracy of self-assessment by correlations with instructor grading evades the crucial issue of control. By eliminating the element of self-grading from self-assessment, we can facilitate the students’ control and assurance of their own quality in professional programs.

## STUDENT SELF-ASSESSMENT AND INSTRUCTOR GRADING

It is unlikely that grading will disappear from professional programs in the foreseeable future. It is possible, however, to encourage students’ assessment of their satisfaction with their own knowledge and skills and to encourage simultaneous performance-based, formative, and summative assessment by instructors.

Rather than asking students to grade themselves on projects or performance, we can ask them to remark on their own progress toward competencies. Using a simple form listing the competencies to aspire towards, we can ask students to periodically indicate whether they are competent in the aspired concept or skill, not competent, or if they need more work. This periodic reporting positions student self-assessment as both formative (“How am I doing?”) and predictive (“Could I perform this task on the job?”). In addition, we can ask them to provide open-ended comments on their ratings, encouraging further reflection. Instructors would assign grades only on tangible student products or on demonstration of a skill.

The table below shows a proposed progress-tracking sheet for a graduate course in instructional design.

Progress Tracking Sheet for Instructional Systems Design				
I can...	Yes	No	Needs Work	My thoughts about my competence with this concept or skill
<i>Analysis and Planning</i>				
1. Conduct a learner analysis				
2. For a given problem, determine if instruction is an applicable solution				
3. Create an instructional strategy				

The following considerations should be taken into account when implementing this proposed self-assessment practice: (a) clarity of purpose; (b) the use of feedback; and (c) the mechanics for implementation.

First, students must understand that their self-assessments do not influence the grades they receive. Instructors must spend ample time at the beginning of a course ensuring that this concept is clear.

Second, though there is general agreement that feedback on student performance is extremely important (Hampton & Reiser, 2004), it is unclear how instructor feedback would influence this proposed self-assessment practice. Taras (2003) asserts that, “traditionally, student self-assessment (SA) has not included feedback, either from tutor or peers, as an integral part of the process” (p. 549). In a study on enhancing the self-assessment skills of medical general practitioners through feedback, Jansen, Grol, Crebolder, Rethans, and van der Vleuten (1998) conclude that “self-assessment is more closely related to generalized self-attributions and only minimally influenced by external feedback” (p. 150).

If we want students to take responsibility for their own learning and to measure their own level of satisfaction with that learning, it is prudent for instructors to refrain from commenting on students’ tracking sheets. Instructors should merely note whether tracking sheets have been received. At the start of a course, instructors should explain to students that they will not be receiving feedback on their tracking sheets. Students must come to understand that only they can measure their satisfaction with their own learning.

Third, to help ensure the successful implementation of this practice, the following recommendations are offered. The frequency for collecting progress-tracking sheets depends on the competencies being gained as well as the timing for instruction related to those competencies. When planning the frequency of collecting progress-tracking sheets, instructors should remember the Boud’s (2000) recommendation that, “frequent self-evaluation is highly efficacious in enhancing student achievement” (p. 157). Instructors should supply students with an electronic template on which to record their progress. This places the emphasis on the content, not on the format. Additional benefits of using a template include the elimination of having to interpret poor handwriting, and the potential for electronic storage, and for subsequent review and data analysis by individual students and instructors alike.

## CONCLUSION

There is little doubt that student self-assessment fosters learning. However, to foster learning beyond the course and beyond the classroom, separating self-assessment from self-grading should be explored in professional programs.

The value of this proposed student self-assessment practice must be substantiated by rigorous research, initially of a qualitative nature. At a minimum, we must ascertain and document the following: how students determine whether they are competent or need further work for a particular skill, and what plans, if any, students make to ameliorate their lack of competency. Only by obtaining the answers to these and

additional questions, can we build an effective model for self-assessment that strives to authenticate student knowledge for the student, not for the instructor or institution.

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## Student Assessment of Learning Gains: A Way to Learn About Learning

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Most college instructors continuously refine their courses to reflect advances in their discipline and to keep their teaching

“fresh.” Many also make changes in the interest of improving student success, such as tweaking test questions, adding assignments, or introducing new techniques. But how do we know if those changes are working? Are students really gaining anything as a result of our efforts? The Student Assessment of Learning Gains (SALG) is a versatile tool for student assessment, and the measurement of student knowledge, skills, and beliefs. The SALG instrument is a customizable, convenient, and free way to answer these questions and determine what students are getting from their Roosevelt courses. This article provides a brief description of the SALG instrument and a few examples of its use in a variety of teaching situations and disciplines. The instrument is especially useful for Roosevelt courses, both as a stand-alone tool and in combination with other assessment methods, including standardized course evaluation forms such as the SIR II.

### WHY ANOTHER ASSESSMENT TOOL?

Research into student learning and pedagogy has found that effective teachers—those whose students feel they have had positive, enriching learning experiences—share many common characteristics regardless of their discipline or institution type (Angelo & Cross, 1993; Hinton, 1993). Two of these characteristics are relevant to the area of student assessment. First, effective teachers regularly solicit feedback to evaluate what they do in the classroom and whether their students are really learning. Second, they try to anticipate the concepts that will be difficult for their students and develop teaching strategies that present these concepts in ways that make them more accessible. Both of these characteristics require that educators become familiar with students’ preparation, knowledge, and abilities, and then adjust their teaching strategies from one semester to the next or even within a term.

While many measures of student learning have been developed, one of the most comprehensive and widely adopted is the Student Assessment of Learning Gains (SALG). In the words of its designer, “the SALG instrument is designed for instructors from all disciplines who wish to learn more about how students evaluate various course elements in terms of how much they have gained from them” (Seymour & Hewitt, 1997). This tool provides a different type of information than a typical course evaluation. Student responses are generalized for all courses and the results are intended for a summative, normalized comparison of faculty and course quality. In contrast, the SALG solicits formative feedback and is focused on the students’ evaluation of their own progress (which also speaks volumes about the instructor, albeit indirectly).

### WHAT DOES THE SALG MEASURE?

The typical SALG instrument addresses many aspects of a course. It often inquires about students’ perceptions of their learning gains from:

- The general format of the course (i.e., lecture, discussion, laboratory, and practical experience)
- Assessments (i.e., tests, graded activities, and assignments)
- Resources (i.e., textbook, assigned readings, library, and Web research)

- Pedagogical innovations (i.e., problem-based learning, case studies, and small group discussions)

Instructors often employ the SALG to gather quantitative data on student skills, cognition, and attitudes toward the subject and course material. They may also obtain information about specific topics, such as the usefulness of an assigned textbook or the amount of time spent studying outside of class. Most importantly, the results are anonymous and directly accessible by the instructor. In the next lecture or the next semester, instructors can use the results to gauge advances in student learning and make changes to their classes.

### SAMPLE SALG QUESTIONS

Below are a few sample questions from the SALG instrument. Students respond to questions using a scale ranging from 1 (not helpful) to 5 (very helpful). This scale allows for the quantitative analysis of student responses and provides data about both particulars of and general approaches to a course.

*How helpful are the following aspects of the class for your learning?*

Components of the course

\_\_\_ Class presentations (including lectures)

\_\_\_ Discussions in class

Resources

\_\_\_ Textbook

\_\_\_ Text and study guide problems

\_\_\_ Course notes or lecture notes

\_\_\_ Blackboard and Web resources

Individual support as a learner

\_\_\_ The quality of contact with the instructor

\_\_\_ Communicating with peers outside of class

\_\_\_ How the class activities, reading, and assignments fit together

\_\_\_ The pace at which we work

*Using a scale of 1 (not at all) to 5 (a great deal), to what extent have you made gains in any of the following as a result of what we have done so far?*

\_\_\_ Understanding the main concepts

\_\_\_ Understanding the relationship between concepts

\_\_\_ Understanding the relevance of this field to real world issues

\_\_\_ Feeling comfortable with complex ideas

\_\_\_ Enthusiasm for subject

### HOW CAN ROOSEVELT UNIVERSITY FACULTY USE THE SALG INSTRUMENT?

SALG forms may be developed and tailored for individual courses or used to assess an entire program. They may be accessed through Web sites at the end of a term or completed in class as a source of formative feedback at a defined point in the semester. Several Roosevelt faculty have already used

the instrument in courses ranging from Liberal Studies to Biology to Education.

### Online SALG

In LIBS 201 (Writing Social Justice), one of the authors (P. Perkins) coordinated an end-of-course SALG assessment for students in all sections in order to compare student outcomes between campuses, and for a global evaluation of course quality. In BIOL 301 (Molecular and Cellular Biology), instructors administer pre- and post-course versions of an SALG that included questions on social justice and civic engagement. The results of these evaluations were compared to those from other institutions using the same version of the SALG.

### Mini-SALG

A smaller version of the full-scale SALG can be used to gather data on student learning even during a semester, rather than waiting until the end of term. Mid-term questions can be exactly the same as those in the full SALG, or designed for specific course components such as a midterm exam or project. One of the authors (R. Seiser) has used a one-page printed SALG in BIOL 355 (Biochemistry) as an informal survey of student impressions halfway through the semester.

### SALG-like Questions

The current course evaluation form, the SIR II document from Educational Testing Service, provides up to ten supplemental questions at the end of a standard evaluation. Some departments, including the Department of Biological, Chemical, and Physical Sciences, use this section of the SIR II form to include questions on student learning outcomes for all courses in the department. Faculty members and administrators can use the results of student responses to guide curriculum evaluation and identify effective teaching strategies.

### GETTING STARTED

Faculty members who are interested in assessing student learning as part of their professional development can get more information and register their own courses at the SALG Web site. It is maintained as a free service by the Wisconsin Center for Education Research. The following procedure to get started with the instrument is adapted from Seymour, Weise, Hunter, & Daffinrud et al. (2000):

- Register with the SALG web site at <http://www.wcer.wisc.edu/salgains/instructor/default.asp>
- Review the standard SALG format and questions
- Look for templates matching your course or choose the standard SALG form
- Add one or more of your courses to the web site
- Select options for student registration and access
- Add and change questions to the instrument that suits your course
- Invite students to participate and give them a time frame (Note: be sure to tell students whether their responses will be anonymous)

- Monitor responses and analyze data after all responses are submitted

Alternately, instructors may choose to use existing SALG questions to make up their own versions of a student assessment instrument. In either case, the inclusion of student assessment of learning gains material will provide an opportunity for reflection—both for students to look upon their educational experience and for teachers to evaluate the efficacy of their work in the classroom.

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### SALG home page - Faculty

<http://www.wcer.wisc.edu/salgains/instructor/default.asp>

### More information on SALG

<http://www.flaguide.org/cat/salg/salg7.php>

### Instrument templates

<http://www.wcer.wisc.edu/salgains/instructor/TemplateViewOptions.asp>

## Can Transformative Pedagogy Change the Way You Teach?

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Consider the following challenges related to college teaching:

- Do your students know how their own experiences and values shape how they define important issues in your content area?
- Do they realize how their beliefs guide their decision-making about preferred solutions or courses of action?
- Do your students understand how or why other people (especially those dissimilar to them) approach issues differently?
- Can your students analyze an issue from multiple perspectives to generate different solutions?
- Do your students feel that they can take action to make a difference? Are they engaged in their communities in ways consistent with your content area?

These challenges reflect the important educational objectives of promoting students' critical thinking, fostering self-examination, encouraging a tolerance of difference, and

facilitating civic engagement. Many professors, however, may be uncertain about how they can accomplish these goals in their own teaching. The paradigm of transformative pedagogy (Mezirow & Associates, 2000) can provide faculty with a useful theoretical perspective to guide their efforts toward this end. In this article, I summarize core principles of this approach to teaching and learning, and provide a series of concrete steps for its implementation.

## **WHAT IS TRANSFORMATIVE PEDAGOGY?**

Descriptions of transformative pedagogy originated in adult education literature. Mezirow (1991) argued that students experience personal and intellectual growth when they grapple with disorienting dilemmas in class, examine their assumptions related to the contradictory information, seek out additional perspectives, and ultimately acquire new knowledge, attitudes, and skills in light of these reflections. Transformative learning goes beyond the focus on oneself by encouraging students to critically examine their experiences in light of social issues, and then by facilitating action to create broader change (Cummins & Sayers, 1997).

In more specific terms, professors who teach from this perspective provide students with information that contradicts their current knowledge frameworks (Cranton, 1994). Often, this material focuses on societal inequalities, such as racism, classism, or sexism (Friere, 1970; hooks, 1993). In the context of a supportive and open classroom environment, students then collaboratively examine relevant issues, reflect on their assumptions and biases, weigh evidence, and consider solutions (McAuliffe, 2001). An emphasis on transformative learning does not replace subject-oriented learning, but it complements and enriches more traditional approaches to college teaching (Cranton, 1994).

## **HOW DO I IMPLEMENT TRANSFORMATIVE PEDAGOGY?**

In my roundtable presentation at RUMCOT, I offered the following series of steps for faculty members to implement transformative pedagogy: (a) create a safe environment in class; (b) encourage students to think about their experiences, beliefs, and biases; (c) use teaching strategies that promote student engagement and participation; (d) pose real-world problems that address societal inequalities; and (e) help students implement action-oriented solutions.

### **Create a Safe Environment**

One cornerstone of transformative pedagogy is the creation of a supportive learning community in the classroom. This climate of acceptance is a prerequisite for the self-reflection and implicit challenges to students' ideas that are integral in this teaching approach (Cranton, 1994). More specifically, professors create safe environments by validating students' contributions and opinions, remaining attentive to students' reactions and emotions, establishing a norm of cooperation, facilitating positive peer interactions in class, mediating conflicts when they occur, and remaining open and available (Taylor, 1998).

In my own classes (in my syllabus and throughout class), I emphasize the necessity of students' participation, mutual

respect, and tolerance for differences. To promote cohesion, students introduce themselves to their classmates on the first day. In subsequent weeks, students regularly participate in collaborative discussions. I also place students in stable, small groups to allow for in-depth dialogue. Students develop mutual trust as my course progresses; they share their opinions and experiences with greater ease.

### **Encourage Students to Think About Their Experiences, Beliefs, and Biases**

Transformative pedagogy involves critical questioning that raises students' awareness of their assumptions (Cranton, 1994). This process marries contemplation about the subject matter with self-scrutiny. I accomplish this objective primarily through weekly written assignments and in-class activities that help students to self-reflect, to connect their experiences with social issues, and to reach a collective understanding of course material. I choose topics that purposefully encourage the clarification of students' values and beliefs to allow them to articulate their opinions. One core element of transformative pedagogy is to help students become increasingly aware of others' perspectives. Thus, discussion topics and activities explicitly direct students to consider different aspects of an argument and weigh the merits and limitations of each side before stating their own opinion.

### **Use Teaching Strategies that Promote Student Participation and Engagement**

Transformative pedagogy assumes that students are active learners in the classroom. Professors who teach from this perspective frequently use strategies such as collaborative learning, problem-based instruction, discussions, or role-plays (Cummings & Sayers, 1997). This differs from the "banking model" of teaching (cf., Friere, 1970), in which instructors rely mostly on lectures and consider students primarily to be recipients of information in the educational process. Instead, transformative learning occurs when students feel a responsibility to contribute to the class, become empowered, and believe that their ideas matter (hooks, 1993).

One of the most compelling ways to engage students is through service learning, in which they volunteer and connect their site experiences to coursework while also meeting the site's needs. As a pedagogical tool, service learning has a positive impact on reducing stereotypes, facilitating cultural and racial understanding, and enhancing civic responsibility (Astin & Sax, 1998; Eyley, Giles, & Braxton, 1997). Most of my undergraduate classes require a significant experiential component. Students work with children who experience adversity. In the absence of fieldwork, advocates of transformative pedagogy have emphasized the utility of case studies and reading other narrative accounts that maximize students' engagement and enhance their interpersonal empathy (Russo, 2001).

### **Pose Real-World Problems that Address Inequalities**

Transformative pedagogy not only focuses on developing students' understanding of alternative perspectives and experiences on an individual basis, but also aims to expand their awareness of how societal forces impact people (Johnson-Bailey & Alfred, 2006). This analysis often includes

consciousness-raising and acknowledging the existence of oppression (Brookfield, 2000; Cranton, 1994). Connecting course content to sociopolitical issues may be straightforward in some disciplines (e.g., sociology, political science, cultural studies), but parallels may be relatively less apparent in others. In general, professors address inequalities by critically questioning the subject material (e.g., Who benefits from this approach to knowledge? Who or what is excluded from what is known? Whose experiences have been studied in this subject area?) (Byars-Winston et al., 2005). Instructors can also systematically consider the influence of culture, race, social class, gender, and sexual orientation on the material to be covered, and can ultimately ask the question: “What are the implications of this information for society and the disenfranchised?” (Meyers, in press).

### Encourage Action-Oriented Solutions

Finally, transformative pedagogy is characterized by a cycle that alternates between promoting students’ reflection and helping them take action in the service of the common good (Daloz, 2000). Professors encourage students to develop the skills needed to participate in a democracy and to become agents for social justice (Cummins & Sayers, 1997).

Social action can take many forms for college students. For example, Palmer and Standerfer (2004) described an exercise in which their students chose a social issue, connected their interests with a civic group, participated in a local project, created a speech forum to educate others, and finally analyzed their project in a class presentation. Other activities that generate social action include writing advocacy editorials to local or university newspapers, creating or participating in relevant co-curricular activities, conducting campus-wide education projects, or organizing demonstration activities on campus or in nearby communities (Meyers, in press).

### CONCLUSION

At its core, transformative pedagogy encourages professors to aim for more than transmitting information. This approach to teaching seeks to fundamentally and respectfully change students’ attitudes and analytic skills to facilitate their growth. At its best, students leave these classes not only more knowledgeable about course content, but with an expanded world view, greater compassion, heightened self-awareness, and a commitment to produce change.

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### NOTE

Contact me to request a more detailed version of this article that presents qualitative data about my implementation of this approach in one of my classes (e-mail: [smeyers@roosevelt.edu](mailto:smeyers@roosevelt.edu)).

## A Year with Ken Bain: Teaching as Distinctive Scholarship

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### INTRODUCTION TO KEN BAIN

My year with Ken Bain began in the summer of 2005 when I attended his lecture, “Thinking about Learning: What the Best College Teachers Do,” at the Kaneb Center for Teaching and Learning at the University of Notre Dame. His lecture was based on his recent book, *What the Best College Teachers Do*. While driving home, I knew a professional transformation was on its way for me; little did I realize that his words would

resonate and have such a long-lasting impact on my teaching. In retrospect, one lecture and a book have enlightened much of my thinking about teaching and learning. It's exceptionally rare to find a book that captures the essence of blending theory and practice into a unique confluence of ideas; the result of fifteen years of research. I have dedicated my life to teaching teachers how to teach reading, and this supremely well-written book has swept me off my feet in directions that years ago were unknown. Some of those new directions have included a reexamination of all aspects of my teaching, developing a faculty book club to discuss these ideas, and viewing teaching as a scholarly activity.

Recently, much criticism of the state of undergraduate education has come to public attention with an outcry for reform in higher education. Derek Bok's (2006) book, *Our Underachieving Colleges: A Candid Look at How Much Students Learn and Why They Should be Learning More*, contends that courses are taught in ways that have proven to be less effective than other available methods. He further argues that the lasting impact of college learning and student success will almost certainly depend much more on how courses are taught. This shift in teaching style will require new ways of forward thinking. Bain's book is in total alignment with the tools needed to begin a self-reflective initiative for teaching as a distinctive form of scholarship.

## **DEFINING "THE BEST TEACHING": MAJOR CONCLUSIONS**

Bain (2004) begins chapter one with questions and answers that define what constitutes the best of college teaching. Each question and answer is then expanded throughout the book's chapters. Each question is stated and briefly noted below. These questions have served as the guiding force behind much of my year-long thinking and new conceptualizations regarding teaching and learning:

- What do the best teachers know and understand? The best teachers know their subjects extremely well and are active and accomplished scholars.
- How do they prepare to teach? The best teachers treat their planning as serious intellectual endeavors, intellectually demanding, and as serious as their research and scholarship.
- What do they expect of their students? The best teachers expect "more" from their students.
- What do they do when they teach? The best teachers create "natural critical learning environments" (p. 99) when they teach.
- How do they treat students? The best teachers reflect a strong trust in students.
- How do they check progress and evaluate efforts? The best teachers assess their own efforts as they teach, and give frequent and honest feedback to students.

## **FACULTY BOOK CLUB**

I was fortunate to lead a faculty book club through the new Roosevelt University Center for Teaching and Learning

during Spring 2006. This book club brought together faculty from many different disciplines and colleges to share ideas, thoughts and questions about our reading of best practice pedagogy. Some joined the discussion without reading the book because they had heard about it and were curious about such a title. Thus, this informal forum brought together a range of faculty who care about their teaching and wanted to talk about it in a collective social setting.

Each book club began with a "Welcome to the book club," and an anchoring question of "Who would like to begin?" The session discussions flowed with both intensity and enjoyment. A question regarding the author, Ken Bain, always emerged: wanting to know about his background, life, etc. What was clear during these sessions was that we all had many sections of the book that we wanted to revisit and discuss. Most had pages bookmarked or paragraphs underlined and eagerly awaited a moment to discuss. Praxis of sorts (or a mutual shaping of theory and practice) began to emerge from the dialogic nature of these discussions about teaching. Our conversations were very rich and deep with what Bakhtin (1981) would call "dialogic imagination." Our discussions were both informed and influenced by all the responses shared by the group. Having the multiple teaching perspectives from the various disciplines, allowed for new meaning to be constructed.

Many of us left with more questions to ponder than questions we came to discuss. Self-inquiry and assessment of our own teaching began to take center stage as we danced with the notions and ideas of teaching as a scholarly endeavor. Finally, the book club afforded the faculty an opportunity to discuss and reflect on their own practices and share new thoughts and ideas regarding the book. "I would really like to learn how to be a better professor. I would like to try out the ideas that this book talks about," and "This book made me think hard about every thing that I do when I teach and work with students. I want to add these ideas to my syllabus." These were just a few of the comments shared during our faculty book club. Personally, I don't know that I will ever be finished learning from this book and I look forward to the future scheduled book clubs.

## **REFLECTING BACK AND LOOKING AHEAD**

The past year has, indeed, been a joyful learning experience. As I begin to prepare for the next academic year, the major findings will begin to weave through my thinking. For those considering reading the research that this book has drawn upon, or those who might be curious about the research findings, here is a summary of the major points:

- Students tend to learn most effectively when they are trying to solve real world problems or to create something new or beautiful that they find interesting, intriguing, and important.
- It is critical that these problems are solved or projects created in a challenging and supportive environment, and in which their work will be considered fairly and honestly.
- Students learn best when they are able to work collaboratively with other learners to solve problems and they can try, fail, and receive feedback from experts.

In conclusion, the best college teachers are indeed implementing a “best practice” form of pedagogy that in many respects results in a distinctive form of scholarship that could hold promise for our underachieving colleges and universities.

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## Teaching the Adult Learner

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Compared to many universities, Roosevelt has a varied and diverse student body. Classrooms are filled with traditional students from many different backgrounds. In addition, Roosevelt has catered to the needs of non-traditional students, specifically adult learners. In his 2006 State of the University Address, President Middleton explicitly cited the decline of enrollment by adult learners in the university as a priority concern. Overall, the adult market is growing, but the traditional institutions’ share of that market is declining. This is not good news for Roosevelt University, not just because of its impact on enrollments, but more significantly because we have an historic commitment to these students that lies at the core of our mission.

How then, as educators, can we improve the learning environment to better meet the needs of these students? Adult learners tend to differ from traditional students in a variety of ways. Specifically, researchers have shown that as we age, our *fluid intelligence* declines. Fluid intelligence is the processing and reasoning component of intelligence that measures the overall aptitude for learning (Horn & Cattell, 1966). *Crystallized intelligence*, on the other hand, is defined as the knowledge acquired through education and experience. These factors show differential relations with age. For adults, increased age has been associated with a decline of some intellectual abilities associated with fluid intelligence, including memory and processing speed, but increased crystallized intelligence. Essentially, adults tend to have different abilities, and therefore, it seems reasonable that they tend to learn differently.

There are three main categories that instructors need to be aware of when teaching the adult learner. Adult learners tend to have different and unique motivations for being in school. Additionally, adults tend to seek out concrete information that is relevant to their own lives and to their own mental blueprints for viewing and understanding the world. Finally, adults tend to place a higher emphasis on the outcome of their schooling.

## MOTIVATION

Adult learners are often motivated to seek out learning experiences in order to cope with certain stress-inducing and life-changing events. Often adults will find themselves back in school because of certain events, such as the death of a loved one. They find themselves in a place in life that they desire to change, and subsequently they determine that returning to school will allow that change to occur. Most adult learners tend to have more intrinsic motivations for learning. The obvious reason is that they are voluntary learners who place great importance on their decision to return to school. Traditional students often find themselves going to college because it is what they are supposed to do as young adults, or because their parents “made them go.” Adult learners are motivated by the desire to gain education to make fundamental changes in their own lives. Academic counseling is extremely important for adult learners for this reason. Because adults are looking to attain a specific goal as the result of their education, they need to be clear on what it takes to reach this goal. Far too often, adults come back to school with preconceived and inappropriate ideas of what their education will mean for the real world, and as a result, they find themselves leaving school shortly thereafter.

## CLASSROOM PARTICIPATION

As a result of many adult learners’ desire to make real change in their lives, their education becomes more of a high-stakes game. Going back to school as an adult is often a significant decision. Most do not go back to school simply for the pursuit of knowledge. They return because they want to better their own lives in some concrete way. Subsequently, adults place a strong emphasis on their desire to do well, particularly because they see their education directly relating to their own life outcomes. As a by-product of such strong emphasis, adults may be more prone to significant self-esteem loss when they are asked to perform in front of peers. Adults place more emphasis on their own self-efficacy as related to their performance. As a result, many adults may be hesitant to speak out in class because of their fears of seeming incompetent. This is a substantial loss for any classroom because many adults have a wealth of life experiences that can benefit other students’ learning. Adults do have a variety of experience and information that can be an asset to the development of knowledge in the classroom. The classroom structure must be safe and harmonious in order for some adult learners to participate.

## CURRICULUM

Adults generally have more information about specific topics relative to their younger counterparts in the classroom. However, they tend to have a more difficult time integrating information that may be in conflict with their prior knowledge. They are likely not going to accept material that conflicts with their relatively well-established ways of viewing the world. Additionally, adult learners tend to be pragmatic. As stated previously, adults are motivated by learning about specific topics that can be applied

directly to their own lives. They are more problem-focused and results-oriented. Classes with abstract theories that are difficult to relate to one's own life may not be particularly interesting for adults. Adults tend to prefer some degree of control over their learning. Tasks that allow adults to synthesize and relate the material to their own lives are often the most beneficial for their learning experience. Overall, adults tend to learn best by applying concepts of the class to relevant problems.

Another important point to note is that adults may have a significantly harder time learning through the use of multimedia. Most adults did not grow up using technology as have traditional-aged students. Instructors need to be aware of this and allow for more time in class to ensure everyone has the prerequisite abilities with regard to multimedia.

## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Use adults in the classroom as resources. Provide ample opportunities to increase their participation and discussion by using open-ended questions.
2. Help clarify expectations.
3. It is okay to disagree.
4. Have students participate in structuring and designing the course.
5. Use problem-solving groups as a way to immediately apply newly acquired knowledge.
6. Don't be too theory focused.
7. Use problem-based learning as it relates to real life challenges. Adults desire and need to approach learning through problem-focused activities.
8. State the benefits of each task.
9. Provide immediate feedback featuring praise and constructive criticism.
10. Use reflection assignments to allow students to incorporate their own meaning into the material.
11. Ensure that students have ample opportunities to discuss their education with student advisors and career counselors.

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# On Beyond Google: Improving the Quality of Student Research

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Scholars approaching library research automatically ask themselves a series of questions, perhaps unconsciously, that direct the path of their research. However, most undergraduate students, as well as some graduate students, need training to develop the critical thinking skills required to conduct successful library research. Some of the questions that students should ask themselves are:

- How is information in this discipline organized? What exists and who produces it?
- What format (books, journal, newspaper, Web site) is best for finding information on my topic?
- Do I need popular or scholarly sources, current or historical information, primary or secondary documents?
- What index/online database is the best one to use for my topic?
- What search terms and search strategy should I use?
- How should I evaluate and cite the sources that I find?

Many students don't really know how to approach library research. In fact, they often bypass the library altogether when collecting sources for their papers and projects. Today's students are looking for speed, convenience, and ease of use when doing research, and they are increasingly turning to the Internet. According to a study done by OCLC Online Computer Library Center, Inc. in 2005, 72% of college students turn to search engines first when looking for information. The physical library runs a distant second with 14%, followed by the online library with 10%. When searching electronically, 89% of students use search engines first, with only 2% going directly to the library Web site, and an additional 2% starting with online databases (DeRosa, 2005).

While students are happy with the sources they can find on the Internet, faculty members are increasingly unsatisfied with the quality of these resources. Students are listing fewer

scholarly journals and books in their bibliographies and are increasingly citing whatever they can find on the Web.

There are a variety of things that faculty and librarians can do to help improve the quality of student research. Faculty could require their students to cite a variety of scholarly resources in their bibliographies, perhaps limiting the number of Web sites that can be used. The results of a study conducted by Philip M. Davis showed that, “In 2001, students tended to cite scholarly sources when the professor provided clear and enforceable guidelines in his class assignment.” (Davis, 2003).

Faculty members can also provide scholarly articles and other high quality materials on their course Web sites or the library’s electronic reserve system (ERes). Roosevelt University faculty member Elizabeth Meadows uses the library’s ERes extensively to supply her Education students with high quality required and supplementary readings that they can access 24/7 from their home or office. Pam Kimmel of the Chicago College of Performing Arts uses the library’s Naxos database to create play lists for her music students. Students can listen via streaming audio to the complete recordings of classical music pieces chosen by Professor Kimmel. Any Roosevelt faculty member can obtain the ability to create a Naxos playlist, perhaps for a history or liberal studies course, by contacting the Performing Arts Library Director.

Another option is to employ information technologies to make accessing the quality resources on the library’s Web site easier and faster. Recently installed article linker software allows students who are searching an online database to access the full text of an article even if it is located in another database. The software provides users with a menu of choices by clicking the “Get Article” button. If the full text is not available in a library database, they can easily check to see if the journal is available in print/microfilm or request the article through interlibrary loan. Another new technology called federated searching will be introduced in Fall, 2006. This system will mimic Google’s simple search box and will allow students to search multiple databases at the same time.

The library is also taking steps to meet students where they already are—on the Web. Connections have been established with Google Scholar to link students to the library’s subscription databases and online catalog. Students searching Google Scholar will find links to the full text of articles in library databases. They will also see “Library Search” links that will direct them to Roosevelt’s online book catalog for items located during their Google Scholar search.

Faculty members can also bring their classes to the library for supplementary instruction in information literacy skills. The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) defines information literacy as a set of abilities requiring individuals to “recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate and use effectively the needed information.” (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2000). Librarians are developing learning outcomes based on core information literacy competencies and they design their instruction sessions to meet the needs of the faculty member and the course.

Librarian Lenora Berendt shows students how to evaluate resources for authority, accuracy, objectivity, currency, and coverage with a special emphasis on evaluating Web sites. Such evaluation skills are increasingly important. A study done at the Stanford Persuasive Technology Lab in 2002 showed that, “46.1% of their participants mentioned ‘design look’ as a chief criteria for judging the credibility of Web sites (Fogg et al., 2002). Librarian Linda Irmen uses active learning techniques during her instruction sessions to help students understand the difference between popular and scholarly literature. She gives small groups of students several print journals, asks them to decide whether the journals are scholarly based on criteria established earlier in the session, and then report back to the whole class.

Faculty member Joel Okafor brings his classes to the library to underscore its central role as the primary research center of the university. As good research begins with quality materials, he feels that the librarian is best qualified to give that assistance. Prior to the session, Joel sends the course syllabus to the library instructor with some key research questions which students would likely be researching and some important journals in the field to enable him/her to prepare for the session. He requires all of his students to attend the library instruction session and to have decided on possible topics so they can tap the expertise of the librarian during the session. An assignment should be tied to library instruction, so the students can do part of their research during the visit. Joel feels that instructors should accompany their classes to the library to reinforce the importance of what is being taught, as library instruction is a professional collaboration between the librarian and the teacher. Joel believes that the library is like a gas station for knowledge. Faculty and students should visit the library regularly to fill up on the latest information and look for favorite journals.

Many students in Anna Marie Schuh’s introductory public administration class have limited skill using scholarly literature, library data bases, and computer retrieval of journal articles and often do not know how to evaluate literature sources. Consequently, a major objective of her introductory class is the development of students’ skills in these areas. Professor Schuh involves the class in three activities specifically designed for the development of such abilities. The first activity is a library instruction session to provide hands-on experience with computer retrieval of pertinent scholarly sources, discussing the attributes of scholarly sources, and introducing the student to the services available in the library.

The second activity involves the weekly retrieval of a journal article from the library’s electronic data bases so the student can read the article and respond to a Blackboard Discussion Board question. The final activity is an annotated bibliography based on scholarly, peer-reviewed journal articles, no more than eight years old, directly related to an approved public administration topic. The student then uses these sources in a research essay later in the course. Professor Schuh has found that assignments requiring students to use library services not only increase student

library skills in the introductory course, but the assignments increase future student use of scholarly literature and library services.

University College faculty member Mike Bryson uses an interrelated set of assignments and interactive online resources to guide students through the research and writing process of an analytic research project. While the specifics of the assignments vary from seminar to seminar, depending upon the course theme and goals, the sequence for his online natural science seminar illustrates this web-intensive approach and models how students in fully online courses can get instructional support in lieu of formal library instructional sessions. The first resource students consult is an Introduction to the Research Project, which provides a comprehensive overview of the scope and purpose of the seminar's major research assignment, as well as an explanation of and links to the assignment sequence students will complete along the way (Bryson, 2006).

Students then submit a formal Research Proposal that constitutes an early road map for their project in terms of focus, organization, argument, and research methods; contains a working bibliography that will be expanded later; and allows Bryson to provide critical feedback on the topic and approach. Supplementary Web pages on finding, using, and documenting sources then serve as interactive references for students as they move into their research more deeply and eventually develop their final presentations, which require a minimum number of peer-reviewed and print sources. The entire process emphasizes that thinking, writing, and research are integrated rather than separate activities, and encourages critical analysis of a modest number of credible sources rather than superficial citation of many low-quality references.

Faculty and librarians working collaboratively can empower students with the skills necessary to locate quality scholarly resources. These skills will not only help them to successfully complete their current coursework, but will enable them to find and critically evaluate information sources throughout their lives.

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## Words, Myths, and Images: Challenges and Opportunities of Teaching About Africa and “Far Away Places”

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Africa's enduring negative images present both challenges and opportunities for all students of African Studies. This article, derived from a roundtable presentation at RUMCOT, explores the origins of these images and recommends new learning opportunities from them. I examine the following major questions:

- What are the origins of Africa's negative images?
- How can the teacher change these negative images into positive learning opportunities for students without resorting to censorship?
- What is the role of the teacher in the learning process in this unique circumstance?

### WHAT ARE THE ORIGINS OF AFRICA'S NEGATIVE IMAGES?

A survey of the literature shows that mass media and early European scholars are blamed for Africa's enduring negative images. For example:

A. P. Newton, a British scholar, once stated, “Africa had no history before the coming of the Europeans. History only begins when men take to writing. And Since Africa had no knowledge of writing, information about African history could be found only in material remains, in language and in primitive culture. These are the concerns of linguists, archaeologists and anthropologists and not the concern of historians” (Retrieved June 26, 2006, from [http://www.umass.edu/afroam/aa254\\_t12.html](http://www.umass.edu/afroam/aa254_t12.html)).

Hugh Trevor-Roper, a distinguished historian, retorted that while, “...men existed even in dark countries and dark centuries...but history, is essentially a form of movement...of society, the process, conscious or unconscious, by which certain societies, at certain times, had risen out of barbarism once common to all and, by their efforts and example, by inter-change and diffusion of arts and sciences, gradually drawn or driven other societies along with them to the full light and freedom of the 18th century” (cited in O'Toole & Schafer, 1974).

According to Kevin Dunn, “Tarzan” captures all the features of Africa's negative images. Dunn, in “Lights...Camera... Africa: Images of Africa and Africans in Western Popular Films of the 1930s,” shows five ways in which western film makers use “Tarzan” to paint various negative images:

1. Africa as inhospitable to the white man;
2. Africa as the keeper of great treasure;

3. Africa as hunter's paradise;
4. Africa as a dream/nightmare; and
5. Africa as a land which time forgot (Dunn, 1996).

Based on the strength and depth of these early caricatures, the images and predicaments of modern Africa are still seen through these prisms by Westerners as a continent in need of a rescue, a land of calamity and hopelessness (Dunn, 1996).

### **Do the Media Have to be Obsessed with Negative Imagery?**

Jerry Domatob's "Coverage of Africa in American Popular Magazines," a two-year study of how frequently African crisis and disaster stories appeared in *Time* and *Newsweek*, found that these magazines did a poor job reporting on issues of high importance to Africa. However, they concluded that the magazines were drawn to Africa for the crisis. Unless it is crisis, he surmised that Africa never gets any attention (Domatob, 1994).

Minabere Ibeleme's and Ebere Onwudiwe's study of the *Today Show's* six day coverage of Africa in 1993 was excellent and balanced. The *Today Show*, they explained, interviewed people from all walks of life, affluent industrialists, and impoverished villagers, and acceptance of women in careers previously dominated by men, among other issues. According to Ibeleme and Onwudiwe's analysis, "the picture that emerged was not a continent emerging from Stone age, but one grappling with realities and challenges of contemporary life" (Ibeleme & Onwudiwe, 1994).

### **Negative Images: What Consequence for Learning?**

The Rockefeller Foundation has invested extensively in the development of African Studies through the support of academic conferences and programs of study. But Walker & Rasamimanana (1993) in "Tarzan in the Classroom: How Educational Films Mythologize Africa and Miseducated Americans," reveal that more work needs to be done to educate American students.

Thomas O'Toole has argued that the solution to the problem is a "...two fold task: the task of clarifying the myth and the separate task of examining whatever reality has been hidden behind it. Only if it is stated and told can the myth be stripped away. Only if myth is stripped away can the reality of Africa emerge" (O'Toole & Schafer, 1974).

### **WHAT CAN AND SHOULD TEACHERS DO?**

Professor Joel Samoff, in "Tarzan, Terrs, and Liberation: A Challenge to Teachers Using Films on Africa," explains that many films available to teachers of African Studies are flawed. He suggests that they should be used for the opportunities they provide rather than criticized for their flaws (Samoff, 1980).

#### **The Need to Create Students' Discovery: The Teacher as Architect and Manager**

Africa as a continent of primitive peoples, the equation of Africa with music and dance, the challenge of biases and datedness, the question of specialization and context, and length and analysis are major issues of concern according to Samoff. But

the solution rests with the teacher acting both as an "architect, and manager, by assisting the student to learn new things." He calls on the teacher to transform films about Africa that are mediocre, distorted, and confusing into positive teaching tools. Samoff counsels the teacher to use films that present Africans as primitive in order to show Africa the beautiful. He demands, if the films are too long, to plan to show the films outside the classroom. The idea is to seek change no matter how attractive the excuses may be (Samoff, 1980).

### **Teaching as an Emerging Liberation**

Accordingly, "teachers should, from the images of Tarzan and terrs (terror and violence), endeavor to create or show emerging liberation." As many students carry negative images of the African to classes, the teacher should strive to give a surprising positive experience that the students never knew existed or expected (Sarmoff, 1980).

### **Mind Your Language**

Words like tribe, barbarian, and civilization do not have value free meanings, instead they leave an aftertaste of ethnocentrism and a feeling of superiority. The *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* defines civilization as a state of human society that is very developed and organized. If the writer's intention is to explain that a society without modern amenities like water and electricity isn't civilized, civilized doesn't do it. Evelyn Jones Rich has called for better word choices in academic discourse because, "as teachers and scholars of African Studies we perpetuate the myths of the inferiority of the Continent by the terms we use. What is more, we resist efforts to change" (Jones-Rich, 1974, p. 47).

### **Separate Myths from Realities**

As Sheila Walker and Jennifer Rasamimanana state succinctly, teachers should:

1. Separate myths from reality.
2. Explain the meaning of unfamiliar issues raised in films.
3. Explain the kinds of relationships (e.g., historical, economic, political, cultural) that Africa and the African Diaspora have with each other and with other parts of the world.
4. Situate the films in their proper historical context.

They argue that information alone is not knowledge. Only when information is put in historical context, to answer questions or solve problems, do they serve useful purposes. Therefore, teachers must use fact-based and balanced information, as unsubstantiated fact and figures lead to misinterpretations. (Walker & Rasamimanana, 1993). These negative images if unaddressed fester like wounds.

### **Strategies for Detection, Evaluation and Selection of Quality Research Materials**

Collaboration between students, teachers, and librarians is ideal for quality research. Thomas Spear suggests that researchers should always seek and obtain "congruence of evidence." According to him, when data from all sources are in agreement, quality scholarship is guaranteed. Hence, it is important that selected data be rigorously evaluated. These

materials succeed or fail on the logic and the authenticity of their claims, so proper demonstration and balance of sources and effective analysis are extremely important (Spear, 1987).

Thus, a good researcher is urged to resist generalizations, like Africans have no history. He/she should not only be skeptical, but also tread carefully on scientific evidence, waiting for “truth tests” which are beyond reasonable doubt. There is a dearth of excellent materials in African Studies; only with care, caution, and collaboration can quality sources be found.

## ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

Negative images create obstacles for scholars of African studies and “other far away places.” However, this challenge presents unlimited opportunities for academic brilliance. If the teacher cannot take the students to Africa, can he/she bring Africa to the classroom? Yes, through imaginative illustrations, supplemented by excellent use of maps, films, and media images. A good example is comparing the centrality of cattle in the Zulu economy to Idaho’s potatoes. Scholars should demonstrate in class what they expect students to learn. The imaginative role of the teacher is central to the teaching and learning process. That is, the teacher is a perpetual learner, delivering what is known, but also watching to discover weaknesses that exist to design suitable learning models. I recommend for further reading, *Great Ideas for Teaching about Africa* (1999), edited by Misty Bastian and Jane Parpart. It is a compendium of imaginative pedagogies.

African studies classrooms provide global laboratories, hence, Africa’s problems may provide scholars the next academic frontier for testing and solving major global political, economic, social, and medical problems. South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation program success has already done so for multiracial democracy.

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# Responding to African American Vernacular English (AAVE) in Written Assignments

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*I had did report cards for my student teaching...*

*The majority of school that has this same curriculum has increased in yearly test scores with their students...*

*The class use to be departmentalized...*

*Most of the adults have live in the West Lawndale Community all of their lives...*

*I use to let the children back to get things...*

*This has really help the children put forth some effort...*

*The students began to leave their seats and this happen throughout the entire day...*

*Asking Jan to be Mrs. Kennedy helper for today was a good way to comfort her...*

*I observe Mrs. Kennedy pre-K class...*

## DESCRIPTION OF AAVE PATTERNS IN WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

The above quotes are from papers and journals I received during the past year from five graduate students taking their last course prior to getting a degree in teacher education. Most students in these classes are certified teachers, as this course is required for degree completion, but not for certification. It is a writing-intensive course that requires a thesis-like paper in which students develop a research project in their own classroom. In these sentences, students have used grammatical structures common to a language form linguists now usually refer to as African American Vernacular English, or AAVE.

In analyzing how many of my students use AAVE in their written assignments, I determined that about one third of my African American students showed some incidents of AAVE, though not to the extent of the five students whose papers I selected here. I hasten to add that many of my students make mistakes – a particular problem is the possessive case, singular and plural, and the related problem of its and it’s; but this article will concentrate on the issues involved in the use of AAVE.

In my cursory analysis of the deviations from Standard English in these papers, I came to the following conclusions:

1. In all of these students’ papers, both Standard English and AAVE were used interchangeably for the same grammatical structure.
2. The most common lapse into AAVE occurred in the past tense for regular verbs, where the “ed” was commonly dropped.
3. Also common was lack of subject-verb agreement, most often in the third person singular, where the “s” was missing. Other cases of lack of subject-verb agreement as in the second sentence were less common.

4. Constructions as that in the first sentence, although common in AAVE (the use of the past tense rather than past participle in irregular verbs: “I should have went”) are very rare in these papers. Almost all AAVE usages involve dropped endings.
5. I did not find any uses of the habitual tense using the verb to be in an uninflected form (“I be having a good time at the park”—meaning “I always have a good time”).

## MY RESPONSE TO AAVE IN WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

I work with all of my students in the development of their papers. Students regularly do more than one draft, and I correct these drafts and make suggestions for revisions. I do not differentiate AAVE deviations from Standard English from other spelling or grammatical errors when editing papers. I have talked to individual students, however, and have asked them to have their papers edited at the Writing Center. Several of these students have told me that they have a “designated editor” who helps them with their final drafts.

In one of my classes, I decided to present the issue of teaching the transition from AAVE to Standard English at the elementary level. Students read essays by linguists on the history and grammar of the dialect. Emphasis was placed on acceptance of AAVE as a legitimate dialect, with the need to learn to “switch” in formal situations such as school and work; and on teaching Standard English in a systematic way, based on the knowledge of how the AAVE structure diverges from Standard English.

Reactions from African American students differed. First, many speakers of Standard English denied any claim of legitimacy for AAVE. They considered it a street language used by African Americans very much unlike themselves. Second, most of the students whose papers reflected the use of AAVE did not contribute much to the conversation, but showed an interest in the historical roots of AAVE. Their past struggle with mastering Standard English made this a difficult topic. Third, one of my students, an excellent science teacher with a significant pattern of AAVE in his writing, was hostile to the imposition of Standard English on AAVE speakers. He said, “This is just another way of Whitey hitting us over the head.”

I asked one of my students who had not completed her papers by the end of the semester if she wanted to do a paper on the use of AAVE among her students. Her papers and her speech reflected consistent use of AAVE. I gave her a reading list and told her to watch her students’ use of AAVE—particularly subject-verb agreement and missed past tense endings. I recently received this student’s literature review. It was well organized and well written. She said she now understood why she had always hated writing. She has discussed the topic with her friends and sometimes switches just to see people’s reaction. She is formulating plans for teaching Standard English, humanely and systematically, in her own classroom. She told me that she can never thank me enough for having selected this topic for her paper. She has become much more conscious of AAVE constructions in her own language and is learning to switch more easily.

In future classes, I will introduce the topic of AAVE where it is appropriate. It is an important topic both for white and African American teachers. AAVE is now most commonly dealt with simply as “mistaken English.” I talked to one African American teacher who has a “country corner” for students “caught” speaking incorrectly in her classroom. She proudly told me that parents come to her and complain about their children correcting their speech at home. This is not how I would want my students to handle AAVE in their classrooms.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR ROOSEVELT UNIVERSITY

At Roosevelt University, we are currently engaging in discussions about meaningful assessment of our general education curriculum. Part of that discussion involves the question, “What skills and characteristics define a Roosevelt University graduate?” The question is, should the ability to speak and write Standard English be one of those skills? Although AAVE is a legitimate dialect with its own grammatical structure, the fact is that AAVE speakers/writers are handicapped in the professional world. We do owe it to our students to offer classes that help them make the transition from AAVE to Standard English, based on the best linguistic knowledge available, and on the recognition that language is an integral part of our identity.

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small student groups, and between the instructor(s) and students. Highlighting this interactivity was the built-in academic advising component of the course, in which the instructor served as the students' advisor for that semester.

One of us had previous experience teaching BGS 201 online; the other had taught it only in on-campus and hybrid formats. Team-teaching this seminar gave us a multi-level perspective on the role of collaboration within the online learning environment. Specifically, we collaborated on the planning and administration of the course (using Amanda's syllabus as the backbone) and interacted in the whole-class dialogues about the required texts. This method modeled the process of critical thinking and added a unique dimension to online discussions. Meanwhile, students engaged in small-group discussions that focused on analyzing a text (W. E. B. DuBois' *The Souls of Black Folk*) and preparing to "teach" one chapter to the rest of the class. The same small groups planned and designed a group-authored presentation on the material; a concrete realization of their collaborative efforts.

Our RU online showcase at the Roosevelt University Mini-Conference on Teaching in April 2006 highlighted these collaborative components of the course and focused on the technological advantages and challenges associated with team-teaching in the online environment. Here we briefly reflect on not just technology, but several broader aspects of our experience. Rather than write a traditional essay, however, we use a conversational model that weaves our responses to three key questions; a format similar to the kind of dialogue that occurs in online discussion forums. In doing so, we hope to echo the various levels of collaboration inherent to online team-teaching.

### **What Kind of Challenges Does Technology Pose for Team-Teaching and What are Some of Its Advantages?**

A.A.P.: Team-teaching, in any format, requires building a new rapport with your fellow teacher—a synergy, if you will, so that both are literally on the same page at the same time. For example, there are many aspects of prepping for a new class that experienced teachers complete using elements honed from their previous semester experience, like creating a syllabus and establishing course policies. In our case, we each came with these tools in hand, but then went through a detailed process of thoroughly reexamining them together in order to agree on course requirements, grading standards, procedures, and timing.

M.B.: I found this re-examination process fun, challenging, and extremely valuable from a pedagogical standpoint. While I had taught this course in a variety of ways for nine years at RU, I had never done so online, so I not only felt I had a lot to learn about how one teaches this challenging seminar in the online environment, I also suspected that I needed my assumptions and teaching habits challenged and refreshed. One example of this was in the peer-review writing workshops we used for the students' major writing assignments. Although I have employed these techniques regularly in the past, Amanda had developed a process and rubric for this exercise specific to teaching BGS 201 online that we used together. I was very impressed with the results of the students' critiques of each other's work—their specificity and perceptiveness. I found

## **RU Collaborating?: Reflections on Team-Teaching an Online Course**

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While team-teaching at Roosevelt is a decidedly rare occurrence, in the online arena it's even more uncommon. During the Spring 2006 semester, we conducted a unique pedagogical experiment: team-teaching a general education seminar, BGS 201. It was an introductory undergraduate course that developed critical thinking, reading, writing, discussion, and research skills. BGS 201 placed a premium on *interaction* among students in the class as a whole, within

that they far exceeded the efforts of my past students using my “old” peer-review system. Thus, I gained an important new pedagogical tool as a result of our team-teaching.

A.A.P.: Within a team-taught *online* course, I found that preparatory agreements about course structure and policy were not only necessary, but actually essential to ensuring consistency and fairness with students. Since Mike and I were having many “private” conversations with our students via email (as well as individual conferences), we also needed to make time to communicate with each other on various student situations. On one hand, the online aspect made it easy to update each (copying or forwarding relevant emails), but it was another thing to keep up with during the semester.

Being online also added a couple of “spices” to the traditional team aspect of determining who will be “cooking” what and when. In an on-campus classroom, each teacher has a clear-cut schedule for when s/he is teaching. Not so in the online classroom, as both teachers enter and leave the online environment as their schedule permits. Thus, sometimes students have one teacher in the discussion board, sometimes both, and sometimes neither. Rolling with the flexibility of teachers and students entering and leaving classroom conversation is important to create the discussion *du jour*. For example, sometimes I would want to return to a discussion point at a later time, but would discover that Mike had already responded, so my intended follow-up was no longer needed.

M.B.: This flexibility Amanda notes is one of the appealing things about online learning from a student’s perspective. It’s why online classes are becoming so popular at Roosevelt, since the format suits students with busy schedules. And while this seems at first to be a boon to professors for the very same reason, in fact there’s a flip side to teaching online: your class is *always there*, throughout the week (and weekends) and around the clock, waiting for you to check email, contribute to the online discussion, or post a new question or class announcement. In other words, the freedom of being able to teach when and where you want instead of at a fixed time and place comes with the burden of knowing your students are always with you, waiting for you, expecting feedback and direction. It’s a very different situation from working with a group of students at a fixed time once a week (and where interaction during the intervening times is limited).

Here’s where team-teaching is a boon and a wild card. It was liberating knowing that my colleague is thinking about and working with that same group of students. If I had a day when I wasn’t particularly “on,” or simply unavailable due to other commitments, such as an out-of-town conference, I could feel confident that she was providing leadership in the course. From our conversations during the semester, I think Amanda felt similarly.

**One Ostensible Benefit of Team-Teaching is that the Expertise of Two Professors is Combined. How Did Your Collaboration Enrich the Intellectual Atmosphere of the Course?**

M.B.: I felt a special challenge in teaching this course, mainly because the learning community was fundamentally

different. Instead of just me and a group of students, I had a colleague who was asking questions, providing feedback, and challenging assumptions—not only those of my students, but mine as well. For example, in posting a response to a student’s comment or question on the discussion board, I found myself thinking about what Amanda might say in response; or how my comment could be phrased in such a way to not only elicit a reaction from the students, but also to set up a new direction my colleague might want to take. In hindsight, I think this thought process made me consider my postings to the board more carefully and from new angles. Many times Amanda’s questions and comments got me to see the course readings in new and different ways, and led me back to the texts to find other examples and angles to consider. It was challenging, but also refreshing, to cede “control” of the online conversation and go with the intellectual flow.

A.A.P.: Certainly having Mike in the class changed my normal classroom dynamic a bit. Even though many professors suggest they are continually raising the bar for their students, having a colleague actually in the class—reading and responding to all of your posts as well as to the students—modifies the typical student audience base by adding an actual peer to it. Thus, while I would post questions and comments with my students in the front of my mind, there is no doubt that Mike was also in my classroom mental picture as well. Having a peer in class with you changes how you say and write things—and for me, it also made me double-check my posts to ensure my meaning was as clear as possible.

M.B.: Certainly, another key challenge for me was the fact that we used Amanda’s syllabus for the course—her reading list, initial discussion questions, and assignment sequence. This was great for me, beyond the obvious reason that I didn’t have to come up with this stuff myself! Namely, I took on the role of a student in terms of how I approached the texts, two of which were completely new to me. Although I stayed a couple of jumps ahead of the class with the readings, in essence I was experiencing the texts right along with them, feeling out their themes and tensions. The discussion board became an arena where I would work out my initial thoughts and ideas about the texts—much like one does as a student in discussion-oriented courses. Amanda’s familiarity with the books and previous teaching experience with them gave her an overarching vision I didn’t have. I think these two perspectives from the professorial standpoint lent a different and more exploratory, nature to the online discussions.

A.A.P.: Even though I had used these books and assignments many times before, I had never taught them with another professor. So, although I came to the class with ready-made pedagogical tools in hand, I found I was viewing everything with new eyes. As well, Mike’s discussion board commentary often pulled class conversations into fresh and interesting pathways—paths that I hadn’t taken before with these particular texts. That was exciting for me. I loved seeing my old familiar books in new ways—and it made me re-think some of the assumptions with which I had started. Now, on the eve of a new semester, I’m sure some of these new discussion points from our shared class will show up in my new solo-taught class.

M.B.: I remember a team-taught graduate seminar in the philosophy of science I took at SUNY Stony Brook in the early '90s. One of the two professors would take the lead on a given day, either in terms of leading discussion, giving a lecture or both; but soon the class would often shift into a high-level dialogue between the two—a kind of intellectual tennis match that had the students' heads swiveling back and forth—as we followed the give-and-take of the two philosophers. In that context, while the performance was intellectually stimulating, it was quite intimidating to “break into” the conversation and raise a point. Frequently the professorial debate would follow a much too long tangential line. This kind of tennis match dialogue did not occur in our collaboration, probably due in part to our deliberate choice to foster student-centered discussion rather than put on a performance. It may also have been the result of the technology and class format, both of which tend to “de-center” the professor and provide opportunities for students to start their own threads of inquiry.

### **Did Students Collaborate as Well? If So, What Were the Results of Those Activities?**

M.B.: One of the fascinating parts of this course was the way students themselves collaborated in various ways. One element of this collaboration was the periodic peer review workshops mentioned above, in which each student would read and comment on at least two other draft essays by his or her peers. Another far more complex collaboration was the multi-stage group project. Students were assigned to small groups and given a chapter of W. E. B. DuBois' *The Souls of Black Folk* to analyze and discuss. The results of this work were a group-authored web-based presentation—combining text, image, and hyperlinks—summarizing the group's critique of the chapter's content, rhetoric, and relation to other parts of the text. It also included a group-led discussion forum dedicated to “teaching” that chapter to the rest of the class using the presentation as a starting point for open-ended discussion.

I was initially daunted by the prospect of managing this part of the course and evaluating the finished product; but Amanda assured me it would work—and it did! The process was extremely challenging for the students, who had to break out of their own habits and expectations, negotiate different working and communication styles, map out a timeline for completing the project, figure out who was in charge of what, and get that project done; all done online. To facilitate that whole process, we created group discussion forums so they had a convenient means of communication and a “space” in which to work. We as teachers could monitor their progress and help out as need be. Amanda and I each took on two of the four groups, so team-teaching here was immensely helpful. With fewer groups to monitor, we could devote more time and attention to those we had in our charge. More importantly, we could observe how the other professor's groups were progressing as a way to benchmark the progress of our own groups. As someone teaching this text and assignment for the first time, this was very helpful. I was able to give encouragement to one group who was doing good work and issue a hard-nosed challenge to another that was “slacking.”

A.A.P.: The DuBois group projects have always been worthwhile in the end, but also extremely challenging for both professor and students during the process. Mike's concerns did not surprise me. I had been there too many times before. One of the keys to making online group projects work is to have students know you are there *with* them—reading the group drafts and discussion, offering advice on analysis and presentation, and being ready to play the “heavy” if and when it is needed due to difficult group dynamics (it happens). Mike and I also decided that one of my groups would present their project first, to let him (and the other groups) have a bit more prep time. This took a little pressure off of him so that he could see a group present (and my responses to them) before his own groups did.

M.B.: While the groups produced detailed, fairly comprehensive, and in one case, brilliantly- designed presentations from a technical standpoint, perhaps the most valuable lesson in this student collaboration rested in the planning and discussion process that preceded the formal presentations. Some groups worked smoothly together, with a natural leader emerging to coordinate the project and group members pitching in on a relatively equal basis. Other groups had a more difficult time working cohesively, meeting deadlines, and/or distributing work evenly. With both of my groups struggling with these challenges, it was immeasurably helpful to observe the way Amanda worked with her groups, as well as to talk with her privately about her strategies for dealing with various things we came to refer to humorously as “group issues.” While these inherent risks to collaboration proved challenging and trying at times, I was encouraged, nevertheless, to take some risks in my own seminars with group-based presentations and/or writing projects. Especially, since I can use Blackboard (the online course management system) as a means of facilitating communication and interaction within the student groups.

A.A.P.: Any professor who has tried knows that classroom group work can be challenging to moderate; some students dig in and get “dirty” right away, while others push aside deadlines, frustrating other group members. One excellent feature of the online group discussion board is that everyone in the group and the professor have access to previous group discussions, drafts, agreements, and assignments. It actually becomes an archive of who did what, when. This is a benefit to the online group that isn't available within traditional classrooms, where a professor is more dependent on oral updates (with all of their biases) from the group. Instead of relying on second-hand information from the students, I could simply read through each day's posts in the group board to find out the status of the group projects. Likewise, if a group member was “slacking,” I could use their absence from the group discussion board as evidence to initiate a conversation. Finally, knowing that the professor was “watching” their group work (or watching their group procrastination, as the case may be) can help the group become more productive.

### **CONCLUSION**

Team-teaching online may have a few unexpected trials, but it comes with just as many hidden advantages for both teachers and students. While the format may not be for everyone (just

as team-teaching in a traditional classroom might not agree with all professorial personalities), we found this experience eye-opening and meaningful. In fact, the experiment begs to be repeated in another semester—this time with up-front knowledge of the course’s successes and problems.

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# Blackboard as an Electronic Performance Support System: Helping Students Learn 24/7

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For those of you who teach with Blackboard now—and for those of you who haven’t yet taken advantage of the opportunities Blackboard provides—there’s a major advantage to using this online course management system. With pre-course planning, and with some in-depth thinking about what (and when during a course) you want your students to achieve and learn certain information, faculty can easily add value to Blackboard sites by setting up an Electronic Performance Support System (EPSS).

Utilizing Blackboard this way gives students the information they need. Best of all, they can get it themselves, 24/7, from any location, world-wide with internet access. Don’t let the terminology scare you. When applied to teaching, EPSS is really an online job aid—a simple tool that helps students at the point of need. As the American Society for Training and Development explains, “Job aids generally provide quick reference information rather than in-depth training” (Learning Circuits Glossary). Depending on your course content and your assignments, students can use Blackboard as an EPSS to cut down the complexity of steps they need to do a task. They can identify what they should do for a particular set of conditions (if X, then Y). This support tree helps them make appropriate decisions. In addition, they can get the performance-information they need to do a task—just when they need it.

## GOOD FOR FACULTY TOO

Faculty as well as students benefit from better student performance and understanding. As veteran faculty, much of what we know is familiar to us. We expect most of our students to come into our classes with basic knowledge of our subject and with academic ways of doing things: reading critically, writing papers, making presentations, and taking part in discussions. We’re disappointed or frustrated when they don’t have these skills. However, using Blackboard as an effective EPSS for our own classes gives us an easy way to pass on some of this knowledge without having to repeat it as often.

We need to remember that what we consider as basic may be foreign, literally, to at least some of our students.

Maybe they’ve never had an instructor who taught them these strategies and techniques, or how to find and use certain “essential” information. Maybe they were taught but didn’t listen or take good notes, or were out of class that day. Maybe they’re second-language students or returning adult learners, eager to do well, but too scared to realize they should be asking questions. Regardless, turning Blackboard into an EPSS is another way that can help you, as an instructor, be more effective in getting your message across.

## MAKING AN EPSS THAT WORKS FOR YOUR COURSE AND YOUR STUDENTS

Your first step in making an EPSS is to think critically about what you are teaching in a particular class or even a particular section. Start small, knowing you’ll tweak and fine-tune until you’re successful. Pick one of your courses that you like and know well. Print out your syllabus and start analyzing it from your students’ point of view.

Are there two or three places in this course where your students need to use or understand certain facts or formulas? For example, consider the central limit theorem in statistics; Malcolm Knowles’ theories of adult learning; the Proclamation Line of 1763 in an American history course; or a net present value and internal rate of return calculators for a finance course.

In general, having an EPSS available (and knowing it’s there and how and when to use it) helps most when a student needs to be sure, rather than hazy, about a definition that’s critical for understanding an important point. Another good time to use an EPSS is when students need to access special information that will help them understand certain readings or complete particular assignments. For instance, if you’re discussing immigration will it help your students to have a one-click access at midnight to the Library of Congress site with current, legislative information? Especially if that information can be searched for what’s on the House floor, bills by sponsors, and a daily digest of the Congressional Record?

What information about procedures, concepts, or crucial facts would help your students most if they had it when you felt they most needed it? Once you’ve determined them, go find the information yourself and bookmark the page. Then, with the edit/copy and edit/paste commands, put the URL into your Blackboard site’s external links. Tell the students it’s been posted by sending an email to all users, or by writing an announcement that they’ll see when they open their Blackboard.

## GETTING IT UP AND RUNNING

The mechanics of posting the information are easy, but do plan to go slowly and carefully if you’re doing this for the first time. First, decide the particular piece of information you want students to have in their EPSS. Next, go to your Blackboard site and choose the course from among those you’re teaching in a particular semester. Then find the control panel (left-hand side, navigation buttons).

At that point, look for the Blackboard manual under “Help” on the control panel screen. Read chapter 4 (content) and chapter 15 (organizing and managing content). Follow the instructions for posting (usually in “External Links”). You can do all this ahead of time when you’re planning your course and writing assignment due dates. You can also set the link to the EPSS information so that it turns on and becomes visible to students at the date and time you select.

## VIRTUALLY ALL DISCIPLINES

What will work best for your students? Can they use a one-click link to federal statistics on education, or a one-click link to PubMed, a searchable service of the US National Library of Medicine that includes over 16 million citations from MEDLINE and other life science journals? How about a one-click link to the WebElements Scholar edition of a periodic table of the elements? Clicking on a single element (e.g., Cobalt, Co, or Element 27) brings up its essential information, plus isolation, history, uses, physical, electronic, and nuclear data, its biological role, its hazards and risks, its physical appearance and a diagram of its crystal structure. Or would your students appreciate a folder that groups related links on arguments together (e.g., a one-click link to several sites that explain a Toulmin argument (English 102))? If you’re teaching U.S. or World Literature, your quick links on the class Blackboard site can help learners fit novels and authors into a time-line, helping them learn the historical context in which the literature was written.

See the end of this article to get the URLs for the above sites. Then think about what and how you teach. Decide which of them (or similar ones you yourself find) will work best for your course and your students.

## THINK USABILITY

Try just introducing one or two EPSS links a semester, until you see how students react. If you’re asking them for feedback, “Explain how you use our EPSS system” is not the query that will give you the best results. Instead, plan some class time for informal feedback or schedule several students for a computer classroom to watch them tackle an assignment that they will benefit from having an EPSS available. Asking, “Do you mind if I watch you use this electronic tool?” will help you and them identify what, if anything, needs improvement. Some websites suggest that 8-10 observations of learners using an EPSS will give you sufficient information to know if the strategy is practical for your course and the way you teach. Remember also to tie in the EPSS information explicitly with a particular assignment or spot in the course, so students see the connection and understand how using the EPSS will help them. You want the EPSS to show up at the point of need.

After you’ve seen how students respond, modify your directions or the EPSS information as needed. The acronym you want to remember as your motto is “KISS: Keep it simple, Stupid.” If it’s too complicated, students won’t bother to find and use the EPSS a second time.

## FACULTY RESOURCES

Maybe you didn’t know it, but if you have a Blackboard site, you already have an EPSS you can use for your own professional development! At the top of the screen, look for a yellow tab on “Faculty Resources.” Scroll down to check out the useful links for faculty, organized by discipline. Also see the links listed at the end of this article for URLs that may be useful for the courses you teach.

## REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

ASTD’s Learning Circuits Glossary, (n.d.) Kaplan-Leiserson, E. compiler. Retrieved July 16, 2006 from <http://www.learningcircuits.org>.

### What pieces of information can you use for your own Electronic Performance Support System (EPSS)?

Look at these examples, for your own discipline—and others. They’re listed in the order in which they appear in the article.

<http://www.stattucino.com/berrie/clt.html>  
Central limit theorem and statistics.

<http://tip.psychology.org/knowles.html>  
Malcolm Knowles theory of andragogy, involving designing learning for adults. A related site is <http://tip.psychology.org/theories.html>, which includes brief summaries of 49 additional psychological theories.

<http://www.ushistory.org/declaration/related/proc63.htm>  
The 1763 line at the end of the French and Indian War that closed off the frontier to colonial expansion. Site is useful in understanding the context of the Declaration of Independence.

<http://www.investopedia.com/calculator/NetPresentValue.aspx>  
Net present value calculator: easy-to-use for a finance or business course.

<http://www.energysmartschools.gov/lawson/irr.asp>  
Internal rate of return calculator: another finance/business formula.

<http://thomas.loc.gov/>  
The Library of Congress site for daily updates on current legislation status. Includes short tutorials on the legislative process, Supreme Court, and U.S. Constitution.

<http://www.fedstats.gov/>  
The link to updated statistics from over 100 Federal agencies. Includes maps, Statistical Abstract of the U.S., databases, contact information, and the ability to search across agency Web sites.

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/gquery/gquery.fcgi>  
Gateway to PubMed and NCBI—searchable across databases—more than 16 million life sciences articles, including books, free full-text articles, human genome sequences, etc. From the National Center for Biotechnology Information.

<http://www.webelements.com/webelements/scholar/>  
The entire periodic table, with links to each element featuring its properties, uses, structure, and bonding.

<http://www.unl.edu/speech/comm109/Toulmin/>  
The Toulmin Project home page.

<http://www.millikin.edu/aci/crow/>  
American literature survey course resources.

<http://www.accd.edu/Sac/english/bailey/worldlit.htm>  
Resources and context for world literature survey courses. Includes Chinese, Japanese, and Indian literature, as well as classical, medieval, and Renaissance.

  
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