



# Teaching at USMA

Vol. 10 No. 2

Center for Teaching Excellence  
<http://www-internal.dean.usma.edu/centers/cte>

September 2004

## Interim Feedback An Opportunity for Faculty Members

*The most important knowledge teachers need to do good work is a knowledge of how students are experiencing learning and perceiving their teacher's actions.*

- Steven Brookfield  
[a nationally known educator]

Traditionally, professors wait until the end of the semester to elicit feedback from their students, but it has become increasingly apparent that interim feedback throughout the semester is far more valuable because it positively affects the learning environment. That is, students are encouraged to see the learning process as something in which they should be actively engaged when the instructor actively seeks their perspective on the process.

What works best are three or four focused questions that the cadets are invited to respond to anonymously. The CTE website offers a way for instructors to do this electronically. You can go to the CTE web page, and under "Cadet Feedback," click on "Interim" or go there directly at

<<http://www-internal.dean.usma.edu/centers/cte/interim.htm>>

Complete instructions are on the website, but because this is a very simple system, instructors cannot write their own questions. Instead, we offer a variety of choices (20) which we collected from faculty members over the years. And you don't have to use our system, to use our questions.

Whether you do this via e-mail or on paper in class, the principles remain the same:

- Students should be invited to respond anonymously.
- The instructor should provide a response to the class after their feedback has been digested. That is, there should be some acknowledgment that the cadets'

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## TALENT Conference in April

Every other year, the CTE has been sponsoring a conference on teaching and learning. Our last two conferences have been one-day events designed for the regional academic community, and they have been very well received.

The topic of teaching and learning with the use of technology has been of special interest to participants, so this year's conference will continue that theme with a focus on three specific issues.



Mark your calendars now for **Saturday, 9 April** for this very valuable opportunity, not only to share ideas with your faculty colleagues from USMA, but also with faculty members from various colleges and universities in the New York metropolitan area and the Hudson Valley region.

The conference call for proposals can be found on page 3 of this newsletter. Note that the call does not specify a length for these sessions. That's because the conference planning committee intends to shape the day according to the submitted proposals. Right now, we're primarily interested in the topics and will negotiate time with accepted presenters.

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# Interim Feedback

## An Opportunity for Faculty Members

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comments have been received and are valued. This does not mean that the instructor will follow any and all suggestions made by the class. In fact, interim feedback is often an opportunity to explain why certain procedures are being followed, and certain requirements are necessary. However, sometimes the cadets' suggestions are especially valuable for an instructor.

For example, question #12 (opposite column) was submitted several years ago by a first-year instructor who was teaching a core course. She heard her colleagues talk about some techniques they used, but she was interested in knowing whether the cadets were as impressed with the techniques, so she decided to take advantage of "cadet lore" to see if any specific techniques had been talked about among the cadets. As she explained, if the cadets were enthusiastic about some instructional technique or strategy, she would want to try it.

Personally, when I teach EN101 (composition), I almost always ask question #1 because I want to see if the cadets' perception of what they're learning correlates with my idea of what I'm teaching. When I ask this question at about week six of the semester, I will typically get three or four items from a class of sixteen to eighteen, and it is a confirmation to me that the students understand that they are not simply "writing" but are learning principles of composition.

There's nothing special about these questions. They were solicited from the USMA faculty members several years ago because when the CTE began promoting interim feedback, the most common question we received was "What kind of question(s) should I ask"? So we wanted to publish a list that instructors could either adopt or adapt to their own purposes.

I have also almost always used question #3 because it serves as an assessment of the techniques I use to promote cadet writing development. There are things I do in class that are not especially congenial to my teaching style, but they have been consistently identified over the years by students as most valuable for their learning. So that's why I continue to use them.

One disadvantage to the CTE electronic system is that each cadet's response to your question arrives in Outlook as a separate message, and I find it more helpful to see all the responses to each question in one place. My solution is to cut and past the responses into a Word document by question, and this makes it easier for me to analyze the responses by question.

The final caveat is "Don't ask if you don't want to know." That is, in choosing questions for interim feedback, select those for which you really want cadet response. A "good" question is one that helps you develop as a teacher.

If you've never solicited interim feedback, why not try it now and see how it helps you as a teacher? If you send me [Anita Gandolfo] your experiences with this process, we'll feature a follow up to this article in our next newsletter.

## The CTE's "20 Questions"

1. The most important thing I've learned so far in this course is. . . .
2. The most interesting new idea I've learned in this course so far is. . . .
3. The aspect of this class that is most helpful for my learning is
4. The most challenging part of this course is. . . .
5. The most difficult aspect of this course for me is. . . .
6. The one thing I can do to improve my learning in this course is
7. I would have an easier time learning in this class if I could. . . .
8. The one thing I expect out of this course that is not being provided is. . . .
9. I would improve this course by. . . .
10. The great weakness of this course that I would correct is. . . .
11. The part of the course that I have liked the most so far is. . . .
12. I know of the following techniques that are used in other classes that I believe can be use effectively in this class. . . .
13. I have the following questions or suggestions for you [class instructor]. . . .
14. I suggest that you [instructor] make the following changes in the course between now and the end of the seemster to help me learn better. . . .
15. My recommendation for improving class participation and discussion is. . . .
16. To help me learn you [class instructor] should start doing the following things. . . .
17. To help me learn you [class instructor] should stop doing the following things. . . .
18. I have the following suggestions for how you [class instructor] can use other media or other technologies in this course. . . .
19. Please comment on how well the required readings tie in with class presentations, discussions, and small-group projects.
20. Please comment on how well each class session helps you synthesize the major ideas for the lesson.

# Call for Presentation Proposals USMA TALENT Conference

Theme: *Student Learning in the Information Age*  
Saturday, 9 April 2005  
Mark your calendar now!

A one-day conference to explore the critical instructional issues related to the “new age” of technology. This conference will focus on three major issues, and we invite presentations that address these issues:

## 1) Curriculum implications

Does the “information age” affect *what* we teach as well as *how* we teach? What should an “information age” curriculum look like? As a core? In specific disciplines?

## 2) Assessment of student learning

Does the “information age” call for new ways to assess student learning? How? Why?

## 3) Faculty development

While there has been a great deal of attention to providing technical support and instruction for faculty members to deal with the tools of the information age (hardware & software), there has been a relative lack of attention to “information age” instructional practices, course design, and learning assessment. How do we develop faculty capacity to handle these challenges and other pedagogical issues?

In addition, we welcome proposals that can document TALENT (i.e., effective use of new technologies for instruction).

## Proposal Format

**Name of Principal Presenter**

**Address**

**Phone**

**e-mail**

**Names of any co-presenters** (*All communication will be with the principal presenter who will assume the responsibility of informing co-presenters.*).

**Proposal Title:**

**Abstract** (100 word max.) This is what will be used in the conference program.

### Statement of Proposal:

The statement should have a maximum of 500 words.

This statement will be used by reviewers to decide whether to accept your proposal

Proposals must include, in this sequential order:

- a rationale for the session you are proposing (how it addresses the issues to be explored in this conference and/or will benefit attendees
- a statement of objectives for the session (what you hope to accomplish)
- an identification of the targeted audience(s) for participation in the proposed session; and
- A description of how the session will be conducted to accomplish the objectives with an engaged target audience(s).

Proposals should be submitted via e-mail to [Anita.Gandolfo@usma.edu](mailto:Anita.Gandolfo@usma.edu) **no later than Monday, 10 January 2005.**

*The following are the five primary evaluation criteria used in the review of proposals:*

1. clarity and coherence of the proposal statement;
2. relevance to the interests conference participants;
3. likelihood that the session will provide useful information, skills, and/or ideas;
4. contributions to new or innovative practices for student and/or faculty learning;
5. likelihood that the session will stimulate active engagement of participants.

## Upcoming at the CTE

### Brown Bag series (noon in Thayer 120)

For a “change of pace,” the next two Brown Bag sessions are designed around brief articles and we hope faculty members will read prior to the session. You can access them from the CTE web page. Click on “Programs and Services,” and then “Brown Bags.” In the description of each of the following sessions, there’s a link to the article that we’ll discuss.

#### 23/24 September *"What Makes Teachers Great"*

Professor Ken Bain recently published a book on this topic based on his research. Read his summary article [available on the CTE web page] and join us for a discussion of how this may inform (improve?) our teaching.

#### 21/22 October *"Teaching, Learning, and Their Counterparts"*

There really is nothing "new" in education—just a need to learn from the best thinkers, as this "aged" but provocative article by Mortimer Adler indicates. Read it, and come prepared with ideas you'd like to challenge or affirm from your own experience.

### TALENT series

(at noon in Thayer 120)

#### 13 October *Effective use of PowerPoint*

Despite the the limitations of PowerPoint and other slide-making software that we discussed in our first TALENT session, such software can contribute to effective classroom instruction and student learning. In this session, led by Jeff Rohrlick, we’ll discuss how to use PowerPoint effectively and explore some of the program’s features that we might not be aware of.

119 Thayer Hall

**Director**

Dr. Anita Gandolfo  
x6155

**Asst. Director**

Dr. David Trubatch  
x4257

**Instructional Technologist**

Mr. Jeffrey Rohrlick  
x4670

**Secretary:**

Ms. Maretta Melvin  
x7947

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### Food for Thought-

*What sculpture is to a block of marble,  
education is to a human soul.*

- Joseph Addison, 1711

