

# CTE Today

## A Newsletter for Teachers at USMA

Center for Teaching Excellence

March 2007

*“The hardest conviction to get into the mind of a beginner is that the education upon which he is engaged is not a college course, ..., but a life course, for which the work of a few years under teachers is but a preparation.” - Sir William Osler*

### Growing Wisteria, *By Dr. Mark D. Evans, CTE Director*

“Wisteria are vigorous, twining vines and gardeners are committed to keeping them in bounds.”

Reading the Ohio State University Fact Sheet on Wisteria, I could not help but think of our cadets — vigorously growing, learning, occasionally spiraling around for direction, developing, needing outlets for their energy, and needing limits or guidance to grow properly. It seems that the “teacher as a gardener” analogy is fitting when considering how we educate, develop, and guide our cadets. Let’s consider additional characteristics of wisteria:

*“Among their attributes are hardiness, vigor, longevity and the ability to climb high.”*

We are blessed with hard-charging, energetic young men and women. They truly have the wherewithal to achieve great things. They are capable of growing and thriving in less than ideal conditions (occasional sleep deprivation, psychological and physical challenges, etc.), getting up and getting back into the fight.

*“In order to bloom well, wisteria require full sun and a deep, moderately fertile, moist*

*soil that does not dry out excessively.”*

The academic, moral, ethical, military environment that we

*“The biggest frustration [we] face [is] when [cadets] have a longer than average juvenile period and sometimes fail to bloom as expected.”*

establish is key to the success of our cadets. We provide boundless opportunities for our cadets to learn and grow. We run top-notch, world class programs in academic, physical, and military education with a plethora of visiting lecturers, AIAD’s, MIAD’s, summer training, clubs, honors programs, rich mentorship, and on and on. One could hardly imagine a richer environment for cadet growth and development. The one caveat might be that we occasionally over-water or fertilize our cadets or expose them to too much sun. We can, on occasion, provide too much of a good thing (do you disagree?).

*“Wisteria will adapt to most soils.”*

Our cadets are adaptable. They show us that they are adaptable every day in a variety

of settings; indeed, that’s part of the goal of their 47-month experience. They will thrive even if we don’t always establish a perfect environment (and thank goodness!).

*“Some type of support will be necessary as plants mature.”*

This is one area where the analogy differs. Cadets require less support as they develop and mature. Our cadets grow from high school students to LT’s in 47 months and less and less scaffolding is required as they progress along that timeline.

*“Young plants should be fertilized annually until they fill the allotted space. Do not expect young vines to bloom since vegetative growth is being encouraged.”*

*Continued on p.2*



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#### Announcements

**Annual Luncheon Celebrating Teaching at USMA**  
Friday 14 May @1200  
at the Officer’s Club  
*more information will follow soon.*

**Apgar Award Packages are due in the CTE office:**  
Monday 9 April  
*See the CTE website for more information*

#### Conferences

Teaching Professor Conference, May 18-20, 2007, Atlanta, GA

<http://www.teachingprofessor.com/>

The First Year Experience, July 24-27, Toronto, Canada  
<http://www.sc.edu/fye/events/international/index.html>

Creativity Workshop, July 13 - 22, 2007, Florence, Italy  
<http://www.creatingandexploring.net/educatoraward.html>

# Making Research Easier: Metasearch Engines,

By Missy Hess, Librarian, USMA



Whether you teach Engineering or English, you know how important it is for cadets to do some outside research and writing on a topic related to your course material. Cadets might choose a topic or you might assign a specific one. How will you respond when a cadet raises his hand and says he can't find much on his topic in the library or on Google?

Your likely responses might be to:

1) Tell him to look again, 2) Change his search topic or broaden the scope, or 3) Check with the reference librarians. Consider another possibility: Tell him to use another search engine.

You have probably heard the overlap of results between the top search engines' main pages is very low when the same term is searched on each. A number of studies since the late 1990s have shown this to be true in varying degrees. One recent study was conducted by Spink, Jansen, Blakely, and Koshman (2006) from the University of Pittsburgh and The Pennsylvania State University, among others. The study included four top search engines, (Google, Yahoo, MSN Search, and Ask), and found results shared by three of the top engines to be a mere 2.6%, while two search engines shared results at only 11.4%. Other studies use different rating systems, of course, but few seem to go above the 30% overlap rate for two search engines.

Why this occurs is due to a closely-guarded secret by the search engine companies; their ranking algorithms. A study by Bar-Ilan at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (2005), showed search engines do use unique algorithms, and recommended conducting studies regularly because "ranking algorithms undergo constant changes".

What to do? Become very proficient on Google, take the time to conduct duplicate searches on other engines, or...try using a metasearch engine that browses multiple search engines for you. A number of metasearch engines have sprung up to meet the need, such as Clusty.com.

A Clusty search will yield results clustered into subject groups and weeds out the junk. For instance, a search for "overlord" for a history class divides the results into subject categories, including "operation overlord" eliminating the need to wade through all the results discussing video games with evil overlords. It also allows users to select only those sites that end in the suffix needed, such as .mil and .gov. Foreign affairs researchers can specify results by country.

Clusty's main search engines seem to be MSN, Ask, and Yahoo! News, as well as newspapers and various other sources.

["try using a metasearch engine that browses multiple search engines"](#)

Dogpile.com is another good metasearch engine, with reservations. It also clusters results and allows them to be manipulated, but it requires setting preferences. It searches MSN, Google, Yahoo!, and Ask, but, as in the case of "overlord," doesn't always separate the games from the history sites.

A final, whimsical site would be BananaSlug.com. Give it a try!

So, give your cadets a tip and alert them to metasearch engines. Also, don't forget Google Scholar for scholarly articles.

## References:

Bar-Ilan, J. (2005). "Comparing rankings of search results on the web." *Information Processing & Management*, 41, 1511-1519.

Spink, A., Jansen, B., Blakely, C. & Koshman, S. (2006). "A study of results overlap and uniqueness among major search engines." *Information Processing & Management*, 42, 1379-1391.

## Web Sites:

<http://ranking.thumbshots.com/>  
[www.clusty.com](http://www.clusty.com), [www.dogpile.com](http://www.dogpile.com)  
[www.bananaslug.com](http://www.bananaslug.com)  
<http://scholar.google.com/>

## Wisteria, *continued from p.1*

Plebes require much more attention and guidance, because their incremental change from month to month is more significant than that of firsties. We should not rush their growth nor expect too much from them too soon. They need to pass through the young, developing stage before they can fully mature. Do not expect them to perform beyond their years.

*"Some annual pruning is required to maintain plant quality; it is not advisable to allow the vine to grow randomly and take over surrounding plants and structures."*

The West Point experience can sometimes have a way of inflating cadet egos before they have proven themselves (do your disagree?). They may be the nation's best LT stock, but they have not yet served a single day in the Army. Our culture can often promote behavior that would benefit from increased vigilance, guidance and continued discipline.

*"The biggest frustration gardeners face when growing wisteria is that plants have a longer than average juvenile period and sometimes fail to bloom as expected."*

This is true of cadets on occasion. I have a cadet in class right now who, in a COR to his TAC, I described as "on a collision course with failure". It happens. Despite our best efforts, some cadets do not succeed, or at the least do not mature and perform as expected. It is frustrating. Like wisteria, these are the cadets that require more of your time and energy to help them to develop and grow to their potential.

Continue to tend to your wisteria to promote the best possible growth. If we devote the time and effort, the resulting yield will produce years of satisfactory service.

## References:

Martin, Jane C., Growing Wisteria, Ohio State University Extension Fact Sheet, OSU, Columbus, OH, <http://ohioline.osu.edu/hyg-fact/1000/1246.html>

# Once a Teacher, Always a Teacher, *part 2 in a series*

*In this three-part series, three former junior military faculty members share some insights as self-proclaimed “closet teachers,” still striving to educate subordinates even after departing their teaching tours. In their words, “inspiring students, facilitating learning, and contributing to professional development only start in the classroom.” In these articles are valuable insights for all faculty members, including recommended strategies to maintain mentorship relationships, opportunities to inspire critical thought and develop effective writing skills, as well as suggestions for senior faculty members and programs to leverage former faculty for realistic and relevant cadet projects.*

## Professional Publication —A Mentorship Opportunity

*By Major Bret P. Van Poppel*

Effective writing is a critical skill for Army officers, and publishing papers or articles can be beneficial exercises for developing writing skills. Additionally, a writing project offers a straightforward and challenging opportunity for teaching, learning and mentorship. I recently authored a paper with two junior officers. Not only was it a chance for me to teach and mentor, but it was also both a personally and professionally rewarding experience. In this article, I will share a few insights from my experience.

In the summer of 2005, two second lieutenants, recently commissioned from prestigious ROTC programs, reported the Center for Accessions Research (CAR) of the U.S. Army Accessions Command (USAAC). The two officers were “on loan” from the Armor School, waiting for a training course to begin (“snowbirds” in Army-speak). For six weeks, they worked on two advanced data analysis projects. To perform the required data analysis for both projects, the lieutenants mastered new software tools and learned statistical analysis techniques. Their capstone requirements were a briefing the Director of the CAR and a published article in *ARMOR* magazine, summarizing the experience and highlighting lessons learned.

### Writing and Publishing Are Important

Although over 20 years old, the Army’s “Effective Writing For Army Leaders” publication (DA PAM 600-67) is still in print and remains relevant today. The pamphlet calls for a unit-level writing program, developed and implemented by leaders. Placing the onus for high-quality communications on leaders not only improves compliance, but also establishes opportunities for mentorship. Most of us have a point to make, but only well-written points are accepted for publication. In relation to the leader’s role in developing subordinates’ writing skills, DA PAM 60-67 specifically states, “Be a mentor to your subordinates using specific tools.” Considering this principle in the context of undergraduate education or other early professional experiences, a professional publication may be a reasonable capstone event or development goal. Why forego an opportunity to demonstrate to young professionals—especially young Army officers—what “write (right) looks like?”

*“a writing project offers a straightforward and challenging opportunity for teaching, learning and mentorship”*

For Army officers, publishing is important. With the current environment defined by waning popular support for a protracted war in a strong economy, Army officer publications may be more important than ever before. Ralph Peters, retired Army colonel, asserts that officer-published articles are effective channels to balance popular media and ensure that the Soldier’s story is told. Indeed, Peters defines publication as an officer’s duty. Although web logs (‘blogs) and online discussion boards are growing in popularity and credibility, publishing in a conventional print media enforces high standards of quality. Furthermore, most journals and reputable print publications are available in electronic format via the internet. Today, profes-

sional publications can achieve nearly global reach and distribution through modern internet-based search engines.

### Lessons Learned

Even though I had much more writing experience, I learned at least as much as my fellow authors during this writing project. Many strategies worked, some did not, and other techniques we discovered upon reflection after completing the project. I offer some of the lessons I learned.

*“a professional publication may be a reasonable capstone event or development goal.”*

*Decide Early and Get Organized.* Publishing an article is a significant time investment, and the short-duration internship provided little room for procrastination. Successfully completing the project and publishing an article required efficiency and organization. I specified the publication task at the project’s outset, thereby setting expectations for the Lieutenants and establishing a starting point for our organizational timeline. A few weeks into the project, we conducted a detailed “mind mapping” meeting to brainstorm ideas for the paper’s key topics. Using the “mind map”, the lieutenants drafted a thesis and paper outline. We integrated specific writing tasks within our overall project timeline and completed some preliminary writing tasks early in the project. For example, we completed background research and an extensive literature review before the final project presentation. Completing these tasks early proved to be very beneficial because it provided more time to write, review, and revise.

*Set hard milestones.* We followed a rigorous timeline throughout the project. While not appropriate or feasible in all situations, we found the use of milestones with specific calendar dates to be very

## Once a Teacher, *continued*

effective in guiding progress and maintaining effort levels. Procrastination and delays would have resulted in long-distance collaboration (in one case, collaboration during Ranger School). For this experience, working together and in-person improved the article's quality as well as the quality of the mentorship experience.

*Reinforce Theory and Writing Mechanics.* Early in the project and before any writing began, we reviewed some writing fundamentals. I outlined the principles of communications theory, which specifies that all communication must consider five factors: *the sender; the recipient (or audience); the message; the medium; and the context.* Additionally, we discussed common mechanics, including *substance, organization, style, and correctness.* I found my fellow authors' writing to be well-grounded in substance and correctness, but their inexperience was evident in their writing's organization and style. In particular, the lieutenants wrote initial drafts in a casual, colloquial, and rambling style. Following another review of mechanics, the lieutenants' revised drafts were clearly and concisely written.

### Reflections

In the end, this publishing endeavor was a valuable one for the lieutenants and for me. Through this experience, the lieutenants recognized that professional writing is an important skill, and they successfully completed the capstone task of publishing an article. I had another opportunity to teach, mentor, and learn from junior officers, albeit in an unconventional classroom. I remain convinced that the experience was just as developmental—and probably more challenging—for me than for my “students.”

### References/Sources:

Ozier, L., Lareau, C., and Van Poppel, B. “Agile Birds: Junior Officer Professional Development During Training Hold Periods.” *ARMOR* magazine, September – October 2006.

Headquarters, Department of the Army, DA PAM 600-67. “Effective Writing for Army Leaders.” June, 1986, p. 1.

Peters, R. “Fighting and Writing.” *Armed Forces Quarterly*, October, 2005, p. 38.

## Once a Teacher, Always a Teacher — Biographies

Major Holly F. West, USMA '91, served as instructor and assistant professor in D/Systems, 2001 – 2005, and as executive officer for BG Daniel J. Kaufman, former Dean of the Academic Board, from 2004-2005. She is currently the Competitive Research Analyst in the Accessions Systems Division of the Center for Accessions Research for U.S. Army Accessions Command at Fort Knox, KY.

Major Brian Tribus, USMA '92, served as instructor and assistant professor in D/BS&L, 2002-2006. He is currently a Strategic Marketing Planner for the Strategic Outreach Directorate of the U.S. Army Accessions Command at Fort Knox, KY.

Major Bret P. Van Poppel, USMA '92, served as instructor and assistant professor in D/C&ME, 2001-2004. He is currently the Digital Communications Analyst in the Market Research and Analysis Division in the Center for Accessions Research of the U.S. Army Accessions Command at Fort Knox, KY.

Each of them remains a Teacher!

# CTE

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Advanced Technology Classroom Laboratory (ATCL), 120 Thayer Hall

## **ATCL, Advanced Technology Classroom Laboratory**

*The ATCL (120 TH) is available for you to teach your sections in. Cadets have access to tablet computers while in the ATCL along with TurningPoint Student Response System, ipods, and other technology. If such technology would improve teaching and learning in your classes, contact the CTE to schedule. Contact Mr. Jeff Rohrluck for additional information.*

## Newsletter Submissions

### **Editor**

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**Submissions** to *CTE Today* are welcome and encouraged. When submitting, please keep these guidelines in mind:

...We are interested in a wide range of teaching and learning topics.

...We are interested in innovative strategies, techniques, and approaches that facilitate learning

...We are interested in reflective analyses of educational issues of concern.

...Write with the understanding that your audience includes faculty in a wide variety of disciplines and in a number of different departments.

...What you describe must be relevant to a significant proportion of USMA faculty.

...Write directly to the audience, remembering that this is a newsletter, not a journal publication.

...Keep the article short; generally between 1 and 3 double-spaced pages.

...If you'd like some initial feedback on a topic you're considering, you're welcome to share it electronically with the editor.