

# Synergia

1. The interaction of two or more forces so that their combined effect is greater than the sum of their individual effects.

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## STUDENT AND FACULTY SURVEYS ON TEACHING AT UST



By Michael Cogan and Julie Seykora  
(Institutional Research and Development)

In order to better understand the perceptions and learning outcomes of UST students, UST has dedicated significant time and resources to local and nationally recognized projects related to identifying student engagement, faculty advising satisfaction, pre-college experiences, learning outcomes, and faculty perceptions of students. Nationally, the trend has been to collect information from students and faculty; however, much of the dissemination activities pertaining to these projects clearly provide a student-centered view.

Despite the lack of faculty-specific projects, a significant number of “faculty” data points are currently available. In 2007, Institutional Research and Analysis (IR&A) began

disseminating faculty-related information in the form of fact sheets and presentations. Further dissemination may prove useful in developing a sound understanding of issues important to the UST Faculty. It is our hope this dissemination plan will prove useful to faculty members when working with students in the classroom environment and beyond. For purposes of this article, we have chosen to focus on three assessments administered during the 2007-08 academic year: the Faculty Advisor Survey, the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE, pronounced “fessie”), and the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA).

The Office of Undergraduate Academic Counseling sponsors the Faculty Advisor Survey. John Krebsbach serves as the project manager. In 2007, nearly 2,000 freshman and senior students responded to a series of questions concerning the faculty advising process. A specific question included in the survey provided students with the opportunity to indicate their satisfaction with their advisor’s “timely response” to questions, concerns, and needs. Approximately 85 percent of senior respondents and 90 percent of freshman respondents

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indicated they were satisfied or very satisfied. This is great news. Of course, a question that comes to mind is the meaning of “timely.” In order to answer this question, IR&A added the following question to quantify this rather abstract term:

UST administrators are interested in developing context when using the term ‘timely’. As you reflect on the previous question, please respond to the following scenario. If you contacted your faculty advisor on a Tuesday morning at 9 a.m. during the fall semester, how soon would your advisor need to contact you in order to consider their reply timely?

Nearly 38 percent of seniors indicated they would expect a

(Cont. on next page)

response the same day. Eighty-five percent of seniors responding to this question expected a reply no later than the next day. Freshmen were a bit more demanding with 47 percent indicating they expected a response within the first day; however, they responded similarly to seniors when considering the combination of same day and next day (87 percent). This practical information is one example of IR&A developing measures to improve the communication process between faculty and students.

In 2008, approximately one-half of all full-time faculty members responded to the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE). The Division of Academic Affairs under the direction of Angie Barretta-Herman sponsors the FSSE. Overall, 187 full-time faculty members completed the survey. A useful feature of the FSSE is the ability to compare faculty and student perceptions concerning similar issues. In order to accomplish this, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE, pronounced "nessie") was administered to students during the same period. As a point of reference, the FSSE asks faculty respondents to consider the typical UST student while the NSSE asks students to address similar questions using their own behaviors as a reference. The following example illustrates the usefulness of linking the two datasets in order to make comparisons. Approximately 84 percent of faculty and 87 percent of students agree that students use email to communicate with the instructor often or very often. Further, approximately two-thirds of

faculty and seniors agree that students worked with classmates outside of class to prepare for class assignments often or very often. Yet, the analysis indicates there are differences between faculty and student perceptions as well. For example, approximately three-fourths of students reported asking questions in class or contributing to class discussions often or very often. This percentage conflicts with the perception of the faculty, as just over one-half listed often or very often when responding to this question. Another example includes the statement "have serious conversations with students who are very different from you in terms of their religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values." Approximately 11 percent of faculty respondents indicated this interaction occurred often or very often as opposed to 44 percent of the student respondents. The obvious question to ask is why faculty and students agree on some issues but vary significantly on others.

The Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) is a student-learning instrument designed to assess and improve teaching and learning. Academic Affairs is the sponsor and Michael C. Jordan is the project manager. The CLA assigns a series of values expressing the quality of teaching and learning at UST. The cross sectional administration of the CLA included 300 freshmen in the fall of 2007 and 100 graduating seniors in the spring of 2008. Overall, UST was one of 176 four-year institutions to participate in the study during this period. The CLA assesses three

primary tasks: performance (analyzing complex, realistic scenarios), make-an-argument (writing a persuasive, analytic essay), and critique-an-argument (critique written arguments). The CLA provides several measures related to these tasks. For example, one measure involves the aggregation of the *make-an-argument* and *critique-an-argument* tasks. Incoming (freshman) students at UST scored in the 22<sup>nd</sup> percentile. In other words, freshman students at 137 other participating institutions scored higher; however, UST seniors taking the same assessment placed in the 91<sup>st</sup> percentile. This result indicates UST seniors scored higher than approximately 160 of the 176 participating institutions. More importantly, UST scored in the 97<sup>th</sup> percentile when considering the academic growth of students attending UST for four years. Overall, only a handful of participating institutions in the study added more "value" to their students while at the institution. The CLA research staff concluded UST performed "well above expected." Although UST should never rely on a single measure to define success, the CLA does provide evidence of high quality teaching and learning at UST.

In closing, this article describes a very small sample of information available to UST faculty. IR&A currently maintains more than a dozen data sources containing information directly or indirectly related to faculty issues. Additional analyses are underway to identify time allocation patterns of UST faculty members when considering

the three levels of traditional scholarship. In addition, IR&A is developing a report linking the perceptions of coursework activities (e.g., classroom assignments, length of papers, and group work) as viewed by faculty and students. We look forward to sharing our results and assure you that IR&A will continue to make faculty issues a critical component of the institutional research agenda. For more information regarding the FSSE and Faculty Advisor Surveys, please visit the IR&A web site at [www.stthomas.edu/ira](http://www.stthomas.edu/ira).



## PROFILES IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

*A column devoted to celebrating innovations in teaching and learning at St. Thomas*



*Kevin Theissen  
(Geology)*

### **Collaborative Role Play**

Role-playing activities can work well when teaching about controversial topics such as climate change. These activities offer:

- A nice way to explore various problems and their solutions.
- A way to reduce “black-and-white” thinking, as students learn both the complexity of issues as well as the more subtle aspects.
- A way to develop student skills in taking initiative, communication, problem-solving, and collaboration.

In an introductory course, I run a role-playing exercise in which students debate and vote on a bill to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by a significant level in the coming years. Prior to the exercise, I cast

students into roles of the members of several interest groups with a stake in the outcome of the bill. I give students a brief written description of the specific concerns for their group to help them prepare. They are assigned reading on the science of climate change and advised to research additional materials specific to their position. During the exercise (a mock convention held over two lecture sessions) each interest group has time to make brief position statements, take questions from other groups, and attempt to influence others’ votes. At the end of the exercise they vote to accept, amend, or reject the bill.

Students are highly engaged in this exercise and it makes for an active classroom. They are often creative in playing their roles, even when they are representing views that differ greatly from their own. Assessment is based on a rubric for the collective effort of their group in the exercise as well as individual effort in their written response to a reading assignment used in preparation for the exercise. Performance has been very good on these items. I have also found that students frequently give special praise for this exercise in their reports on teaching.



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The lobby area and resource room of the Center will be open from 8 a.m. - 3:30 p.m. M-F. Please stop by!

*The opinions expressed in articles in Synergia are not necessarily those of the Center for Faculty Development.*

## FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK ...



*Sue Chaplin (Faculty  
Development Director,  
Biology)*

### ***Making reading count...***

I like teaching freshmen. I love their enthusiasm, their energy, their excitement about new experiences in college. But as the age gap between us widens, I have to admit that I know less and less about their “culture” and the problems they face. That is what made me pick up a book this summer called “*My Freshman Year: What a Professor Learned by Becoming a Student*” by

Rebekah Nathan (2005). The author is an anthropologist at a large university who decided to spend her sabbatical leave studying her university’s undergraduate culture by taking courses and living in the dorm as a freshman student. Her reflections on that experience provided some insights one might expect: course registration is an imperfect and frustrating process; students don’t use the library; most professors and administrators overestimate the importance that academics plays in student life; social life and partying play a much bigger role than academics in the overall college experience.

One of her reflections – “most students don’t read most of the assigned reading” made me stop and think about what I require students to do in my courses and why I think it’s important for them to do it. I know that students practice crisis

management; the work that gets done is the work that is next due—anything else is subject to triage in descending order of importance. So, how do you make the reading or any other assignment relevant to your students without simply adding to their burden of crisis management?

I don’t have an answer to that question, but I did think a lot about it before constructing the syllabus for my freshman biology course this fall. I have assigned study questions to focus the reading on specific aspects of the chapter, and to ensure that students prepare those answers before class, I use “clicker” quizzes to check for understanding. It works! And I have had only a few complaints about the textbook or the reading assignments so far this semester.



### ***UPCOMING APPLICATION DEADLINES FOR FACULTY DEVELOPMENT GRANTS***

Note that deadlines are 4 p.m. on dates below. Late applications are not accepted. All proposals must be emailed by 4 p.m. of the designated day to [pmalexander@stthomas.edu](mailto:pmalexander@stthomas.edu). Please see the FDC website for instructions and application forms, at [www.stthomas.edu/fdc](http://www.stthomas.edu/fdc).

#### **Teaching Enhancement Grant:**

March 1 (March 2 in 2009)

#### **Faculty Partnership:**

February 15 for Spring Semester

#### **Partnership-in-Learning:**

February 15 for Spring Semester

#### **Distinguished Visitor Grant:**

One month prior to visit.

## FD UPCOMING WORKSHOPS

### ***Transforming an Assignment***

*Co-Sponsored with Service Learning*

Wednesday, November 12, 2008  
3:30 - 5 p.m.

Have you been interested in trying service-learning in one of your courses but are apprehensive about changing your entire syllabus? Experiment with changing just one assignment. See how you can activate students' engagement with learning by transforming one of your existing assignments into one that uses service-learning to meet its goals.

This practical, hands-on workshop provides examples from faculty in several disciplines. Participants are encouraged (but not required) to bring one of their own assignments for discussion.

### ***Reflections on Racism and Privilege with Tim Wise***

By Denise Dieffenbach

Join us for Multicultural Student Services Spring Community Dialogue series entitled: *White Like Me: Reflections on Race from a Privileged Son* featuring author, Tim Wise. This event is co-sponsored with ULC and Faculty Development.

This three part series will include: a J-term book club, public lecture, and faculty, staff and student conversations with Tim Wise. The book club will meet Fridays in January from noon - 1 p.m. in the Leather Room (Lib 108). A faculty development session is scheduled for Tuesday, April 7 from 3:30 - 4:30 p.m. followed by Tim

Wise's community lecture and book signing at 7 p.m. in the OEC Auditorium.

Wise is among the most prominent anti-racist writers and activists in the U.S. He has spoken to over 300,000 people in 48 states, and on over 350 college campuses, including Harvard, Stanford, and the Law Schools at Yale and Columbia. Wise has provided anti-racism training to teachers nationwide.

This series will provide the UST community with an opportunity to learn about the impact of race and racism on white people in the U.S. and to challenge students to think about ways they can use their privilege to work toward racial reconciliation and to advance the common good.

For more information about the 2009 MSS Community Dialogue series featuring Tim Wise, please contact Multicultural Student Services at 651.962.6460 or [www.stthomas.edu/multiculturalstudentservices](http://www.stthomas.edu/multiculturalstudentservices).

#### ***January Book Club***

Co-sponsored with Multicultural Student Services and ULC

*White Like Me: Reflections on Race from a Privileged Son*, by Tim Wise

Fridays, January 9, 16, 23, 30  
Noon - 1 p.m.  
Library 108

Faculty may receive complimentary copies of the book if they commit to attending at least 3 of the book discussion sessions. Copies will be available from Faculty Development after Dec. 1. Contact Pat Alexander at [pmalexander@stthomas.edu](mailto:pmalexander@stthomas.edu) if you are interested.

### ***Coming in January: Faculty Center for eLearning Technology Seminar***

It feels too early to cope with falling leaves, let alone falling snow... but plans are underway for our January 2009 seminar. As with our prior seminars, we hope to include a variety of instructional technology topics presented by both faculty and IRT staff. Topics and dates are still being finalized, and will be communicated via the Bulletin and the FCL Newsletter. Keep watching!

### ***Disability Awareness: A Documentary and Panel Discussion***

*Co-sponsored with the Enhancement Program - Disability Services and the Office of Institutional Diversity*

Wednesday, December 3, 2008  
3 - 4:30 p.m.

Murray-Herrick Campus Center,  
room 155

How do students with a disability experience our campus? What are their successes and challenges in the classroom? How do faculty work with students who have disabilities? What kind of academic accommodations are available? What is our campus doing to welcome our students with disabilities? A panel of current students, alumni, and faculty will share their experiences and expertise in the area of disability. We will discuss ways to challenge the assumptions and myths about people with disabilities.



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## TRAVEL CLINIC FOR FACULTY & STAFF



*Madonna McDermott  
(Student Health  
Services and Wellness  
Center)*

The University of St. Thomas Student Health Travel Clinic is now available to all faculty and staff. The UST Travel Clinic, located on the St. Paul campus, is certified by the Center for Disease Control and offers convenient, low cost, high quality care for pre- and post-travel health care needs.

If you are teaching, leading a service learning opportunity, taking a sabbatical, volunteering, or simply planning a vacation abroad, international travel can be a wonderful and exciting experience. It can provide you with an experience of a lifetime while at the same time expose you to potentially dangerous health risks.

The goal of the UST Travel Clinic is to assist St. Thomas community members in minimizing health risks while providing information, medication, and immunizations to stay healthy during travels abroad.

Services include:

- Personalized pre-travel counseling based on your medical history and travel itinerary
- Immunizations appropriate for the country(s) you will be traveling to

- Appropriate physical exams and/or lab tests based on your medical history and your travel destination
- Recommendations for preventing travel-related illnesses
- Educational materials about your destination including information on food, water, insects, weather, politics and general safety
- World Health Organization (WHO) booklets verifying Yellow Fever immunizations

Dr. Jan Hansen from the UST School of Education has these comments to share regarding her experience at the UST Travel Clinic:

As I prepared for a J-term trip to Tanzania last fall, my main concern was my ability to “get my shots” in the short time frame available. I contacted my local medical community who could not fit me in, then contacted the UST Health Services. I was met by kind, competent and thorough staff who expressed nothing but genuine care for me and for the students they serve. Superlatives are not a normal part of my speech. However, I travel and have been to numerous travel clinics: In my experience, UST Travel Clinic was unmatched in its professional care which was delivered in such a personal way. I left for Tanzania knowing that health care professionals more knowledgeable than I had

prepared me for the best travel experience possible.

If you are planning to travel in the near future, call the UST Travel Clinic at Student Health Service for an appointment at 651-962-6750 six to eight weeks prior to your departure. Visit our web site for additional information and resources at: [www.stthomas.edu/studenthealth](http://www.stthomas.edu/studenthealth).



## NEW IN THE RESOURCE ROOM

### *Intercultural Resources*

***Intercultural Sourcebook: Cross-Cultural Training Methods***, edited by Sandra M. Fowler and Monica Mumford. Intercultural Press, 1999.

Includes self-identity inventories and exercises for developing intercultural understanding.

***Survival Kit for Overseas Living: For Americans Planning to Live and Work Abroad***, by L. Robert, *Kobls*. Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 2001.

A practical guide to negotiating culture shock, images of Americans abroad, and other aspects of adjustment for Americans traveling to other countries.

***Communication between Cultures***, edited by Larry A. Samovar, Richard E. Porter, and Edwin R. McDaniel. Wadsworth Publishing, 2008.

Chapters on cultural identity, cultural values, language, nonverbal communication and intercultural communication, with exercises and discussion ideas at the end of each chapter. Very helpful for classroom activities.

***Intercultural Communication***, by Larry A. Samovar, Richard E. Porter, and Edwin R. McDaniel. Wadsworth Publishing, 2009.

A more theoretical treatment of intercultural communication, with essays on ethical dimensions and cultural competency, among other topics.

***American Cultural Patterns***, by Edward C. Stewart and Milton J. Bennett. Intercultural Press, 1991.

A helpful guide to cultural self-awareness of Americans as they encounter other cultures.

## INTERNATIONAL INFO

### ***International Faculty Seminar Grant***

Deadline: January 15, 2009 for June, 2009

The International Education Center makes three grants yearly of up to \$3500 available to attend an International Faculty Development Seminars sponsored by the Council of International Educational Exchange (CIEE). Preference will be given to applications for:

- China: to continue the development of our relationships and exchanges.
- Chile and Argentina: to continue the development of connections in Latin America.
- Turkey: to build on work being done by the Muslim-Christian Dialogue Center.

The purpose of this grant is to assist faculty in gaining international experience in order to internationalize their teaching and to explore opportunities for international programming. THESE SEMINARS ARE SCHEDULED FOR JUNE 2009. Visit [www.ciee.org/ifds](http://www.ciee.org/ifds) for specific dates and details.

For more information on these opportunities contact Dr. Sarah Stevenson, Director, International Programs, 2-6451 or [sastevenson@stthomas.edu](mailto:sastevenson@stthomas.edu). For applications contact Mary Hernandez, Office Coordinator, International Education Center, 2-6450 or [mehernandez@stthomas.edu](mailto:mehernandez@stthomas.edu).

## UPCOMING FACULTY DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

(See p. 5 for workshop descriptions)

### *Transforming an Assignment*

Workshop Co-Sponsored with Service Learning

Wednesday, November 12, 2008, 3:30 - 5 p.m.

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By Tim Wise

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