

# THE SCHOLARSHIP OF TEACHING AT WESTERN WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY THE CARNEGIE TEACHING ACADEMY PROGRAM - 1999

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## PART I OF THE CAMPUS CONVERSATION

In September of 1998, Western Washington University agreed to participate in the Carnegie Teaching Academy Program that explores the topic of the Scholarship of Teaching. The primary goal of this program is to foster a national dialogue about teaching and learning that will improve the quality of student learning and the status of teaching.

College deans at Western were asked to make recommendations for faculty to serve on a focused discussion group on this topic, and an announcement in FAST about the program also solicited faculty participation. A group of about 20 faculty and program directors resulted from these recruitment efforts at Western.

In early January 1999 a series of six questions, as suggested by the Carnegie Foundation, were posed to focus group members. Responses were obtained through the Internet using a group support system called *MeetingWorks for Windows* as the first step in the process. From these electronically posted answers, a listing was made and the faculty met in two face-to-face sessions to review, consolidate, append, and modify their initial answers to the questions. Thus, Part One of our work is complete.

### THE CARNEGIE TEACHING ACADEMY DRAFT DEFINITION

*The scholarship of teaching is problem posing about an issue of teaching or learning, study of the problem through methods appropriate to disciplinary epistemologies, application of results to practice, communication of results, self-reflection, and peer review.*

This was the definition that served as the starting point for our conversation of the ways teaching is enacted on our campus, the conditions that support the scholarship of teaching here at Western, and the conditions that inhibit it.

The following sections of this executive summary will feature the key points and consensual ideas that emerged in response to the specific questions posed by the Carnegie definition and the questions that were framed by Part One of the Teaching Academy Program.

### HOW DO YOU THINK THE "SCHOLARSHIP OF TEACHING" IS DEFINED ON OUR CAMPUS?

In general, participants in the focus group discussions agreed that we do not currently have a clearly defined statement on the scholarship of teaching. Secondly, the groups agreed that wide variability exists across academic units in terms of definition and recognition of teaching. For the most part, the emphasis we place on teaching is summative rather than formative. That is, we tend to place great emphasis and rewards on the student evaluation component of evaluation, but relatively little emphasis on peer-review of teaching and collective understandings of good pedagogical practices and shared goals in terms of student learning outcomes.

While we have captured some components of the Carnegie definition, those aspects involving the process of teaching and the collective development of a campus definition are lacking at Western. It may be unlikely that the campus could come to some standardized definition of the scholarship of teaching, but a need for a campus-wide dialogue about teaching and student learning outcomes seems to be very much needed at this time.

Some discussion centered on the ways in which tenure and promotion policy favors research versus teaching, but most concurred that this was an arbitrary dichotomy and that there are many ways in which teaching is research and research is teaching. Again, variations seem to exist across the campus with regard to those units that recognize and reward teaching.

In summary, three key points came out of the focus group discussions. These were:

1. The scholarship of teaching is very poorly defined here at Western, with emphasis primarily placed on the ends rather than the means (i.e., summative student evaluation and occasionally peer review as criteria for tenure and promotion rather than dialogue about the process of teaching and learning that fosters a holistic understanding).
2. More emphasis should be placed on student learning outcomes rather than teaching as a means of understanding best classroom practices.
3. Wide variation exists across the campus in terms of the definition and application of the scholarship of teaching.

#### WHAT ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF HOW OUR CAMPUS CULTURE DISCOURAGES THE SCHOLARSHIP OF TEACHING?

This question generated a lively debate about the ways in which teaching was not always recognized and rewarded. While many ideas were forthcoming, they fell within three general areas.

First, and most prominently, considerable discussion centered on the many ways in which research was more highly valued and rewarded in relationship to tenure and promotion than was teaching. Perhaps it was best said by this colleague, “The surest road to tenure continues to be publication record, with very vague standards regarding the evaluation and understanding of the best classroom practices.” While many acknowledged that publications about teaching were acceptable indicators of scholarship and often counted toward tenure and promotion, the academic, disciplinary publications seemed to count more heavily in the review process.

Second, our continued reliance on the standard student evaluation as the primary evidence of teaching hinders our comprehensive understanding of the scholarship of teaching. One faculty member said, “We use student evaluations to assess teaching effectiveness as opposed to careful analysis of methodologies .... While student evaluations can provide valuable evidence, the lack of any formal system of peer review and the lack of any

significant rewards for excellence in teaching are major problems.”

Third, a list of structural problems were also cited as obstacles to teaching here at Western. These included:

- a heavy teaching load for most faculty;
- the 50 minute classroom schedule;
- lack of time—no time to reflect and discuss teaching;
- very few training or faculty development opportunities for teaching;
- too much emphasis on departments and disciplines—lack of interdisciplinary teaching opportunities; and
- institutional cultural that fosters rigid individualism and resistance to change—our rewards structures favor individualism rather than collective efforts.

#### WHAT STEPS COULD WE TAKE TO STOP DISCOURAGING THE SCHOLARSHIP OF TEACHING?

Many ideas were offered in response to this question. In fact, so many ideas were solicited that participants were asked to assign Likert ratings to the items in order that consensus might be more clearly featured.

Three items were consistently rated as highly desirable as a means to stop discouraging the scholarship of teaching here at Western. In order of priority:

1. Provide more resources to support teaching.  
Resources such as release time, summer stipends for course development and training, and more assistance in course development were all mentioned. The use of the Center for Instructional Innovation to help organize seminars and training opportunities for faculty was encouraged.
2. Work towards appropriate reward structures.  
As one faculty member stated, “Even modest rewards and recognition can provide important morale boosts to faculty and more broadly increase awareness of good teaching.” Reward structures focused on tenure and promotion as well as more directly acknowledgment of good teaching.
3. Institute a peer-review process to help make the information on a candidate’s teaching performance more comprehensive and reliable than the current student-review process.

A careful analysis of teaching philosophy, approaches and outcomes for tenure and promotion would help

encourage innovative teaching practices that currently go unrecognized and unrewarded under current policies of student evaluation.

#### WHAT ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF HOW OUR CAMPUS CULTURE AFFIRMS THE SCHOLARSHIP OF TEACHING?

The single most mentioned example was the Excellence in Teaching Award. In addition to this, participants cited grants through BFR that supported classroom enhancements and the creation of the Center for Instructional Innovation that promotes the scholarship of teaching. In addition to these mechanisms, some faculty members discussed the ways in which their departments emphasized teaching through hiring practices that stressed the value to teaching, departmental discussions about teaching and curricular issues, and internal reviews that feature teaching.

The general consensus of the focus groups was that the affirmation of teaching is primarily symbolic on this campus, and that many more “real” resources are needed to foster the scholarship of teaching.

#### WHAT STEPS COULD BE TAKEN TO SUSTAIN THE AFFIRMATION OF THE SCHOLARSHIP OF TEACHING?

Like the previous questions, so many responses were generated in answer to this question that participants were again asked to rate each item. Four items emerged as consensual tasks that could sustain the affirmation of teaching here at Western. These were, in order of importance,

1. Create ways for faculty to communicate with each other about “best practices” and problems in teaching.

This could be accomplished through additional resources that fostered forums, workshops, retreats, conferences, and informal get-togethers for faculty to talk about teaching. The Center for Instructional Innovation has this as a mission statement, but more resources are required to accomplish this task.

2. Provide additional teaching support such as summer stipends, release time, and other supports as incentives for teaching in new and challenging ways.

One colleague recommended that this type of support would be most effective if proposals focused on broad impacts for the university, rather than solely on individual classroom innovations.

3. Establish quality measures of instructional excellence and then encourage it by clear ties to important rewards. This should be done for *all* faculty.

Again, we clearly need to move toward a better articulated statement about the scholarship of teaching and look for evaluative methods that will capture that definition in reliable and valid ways.

4. Recognize and reward departments, not just individuals, for outstanding teaching.

Many colleagues felt that this was quite an innovative idea. Tying rewards to departmental or program initiatives that fostered good teaching might help facilitate this objective. One faculty member felt that emphasis on interdisciplinary efforts might also be featured in this recommendation, with incentives provided for cross-disciplinary program development and collaborative teaching models.

#### WHAT ARE THE MOST CENTRAL TEACHING ISSUES ON OUR CAMPUS THAT COULD BE ADDRESSED BY THE SCHOLARSHIP OF TEACHING?

This final question in the series posed by the Carnegie Teaching Academy Program is a critical one because it will serve as the basis for Part Two of the Campus Conversations. It is interesting to note that our discussion groups generated sixteen unique responses to this question, thus indicating many issues facing the campus community and little consensus about the most salient issue. The rank ordering of these items was requested of all participants, and the following list prioritizes the items (keep in mind, however, that variability was very high among the group):

- How can we find adequate time and resources to provide the best learning environments for our students?
- How should we best provide the tools and motivation for students to become life-long learners?
- How can we keep instruction focused so that a curriculum is integrated and up to date?
- How can we design and test outcomes-based assessments for courses?
- How can we best teach students values, learning styles, attitudes, critical thinking skills, and applications of learning?
- What are the major instructional priorities from an institutional perspective?
- How can we take advantage of the element of peer review in our teaching?
- How can we best use new technologies in teaching and curriculum delivery?
- How can we accommodate different learning styles?

- How can we better integrate the undergraduate curriculum, especially the GUR's?
- What types of learning can be accommodated by large lectures?
- How can we include students more in the process of improving teaching beyond just student evaluations?
- How can we better integrate and infuse topics of culture, ethnicity, gender, class, and sexuality into the curriculum?
- How does improved instruction affect student job placement and success beyond college?
- How can we address the great variation in the teaching load across academic units on this campus?
- How can we better address the issue of academic integrity?

## PART II OF THE CAMPUS CONVERSATION

In late March, a representative from Western was asked to present at the annual meeting of AAHE in Washington, D.C. on our work in Part I. We were selected to present at a two-day special session at this conference dedicated to reviewing nationwide progress in the Campus Conversations Program. Western was particularly noteworthy because of the method employed in Part I of the project that relied on a blending of more traditional face-to-face group decision-making and electronic Web-based discussion formats. We were paired with George Mason University and presented at the first session of the AAHE annual meeting. At this special two-day session, 126 institutions were represented. Staff from the Carnegie Foundation and the Pew Charitable Trust (the underwriting sponsor of the program) were in attendance at our session as well.

### HOW MANY CAMPUSES HAVE REGISTERED FOR PART I OF THE CAMPUS CONVERSATIONS?

Presently about 105 institutions have registered for Part I. The institutions vary widely with regard to size, mission, and incentive for participating. Some have elected to join in the conversation because it clarifies their own organizational goals, while others have seen this as an opportunity to create a shared campus vision about teaching and learning. Some institutions are investing heavily in this project, with campus-wide groups formed and supported to answer the questions posed by the Carnegie Foundation. Others have adopted methodologies

more in keeping with our approach, to begin with a core of interested faculty and work toward a larger campus initiative in Part II of the program.

### WHERE ARE WE NOW AT WESTERN IN THIS PROJECT?

During Spring term of 1999, Western submitted our plan for Part II of the Campus Conversations. A luncheon was held for faculty who participated in Part I of the project, at which time the Carnegie Foundation video on the Campus Conversations Program was viewed. This video served as a discussion point for the group, and ideas were shared for launching Part II of our project. College Deans and the Provost were apprised of the implementation plan for Part II of the Campus Conversations, and the President committed funds for the first faculty fellowship of the Scholarship of Teaching.

### WHAT WAS THE MOST IMPRESSIVE THING ABOUT THE CAMPUS CONVERSATIONS AT THE AAHE CONFERENCE?

This endeavor is truly gaining national momentum. Much interest and the campus representatives expressed enthusiasm about the ways in which the Campus Conversations Program is capturing the attention and resources of their respective campus communities. There is clearly a paradigm shift at hand. Western is not alone in our recent efforts to elevate the status of undergraduate teaching and learning, and much can be learned from sharing information with other campuses as they seek to find ways of recognizing and rewarding faculty efforts in the classroom.

### WHAT WILL RESULT FROM THE CAMPUS CONVERSATIONS THAT ARE TAKING PLACE ACROSS THE COUNTRY?

As many institutions embark in Part II of the program some very specific outcomes will occur. The Carnegie Foundation will foster linkages across campuses in Part II. These linkages may result from similar methodologies, shared issues, or concomitant institutional structures. As the AAHE conference demonstrated, collaboration across institutions results in rich dialogue about the scholarship of teaching. Another very likely outcome will be the reclassification of institutions of higher education along Teaching I, Teaching II etc. categories. These rankings would be similar to Carnegie's work in the 1970's that classified institutions along Research I, Research II etc. dimensions.

### WHAT IS WESTERN'S PLAN FOR PART II OF THE CAMPUS CONVERSATIONS?

A sub-group of the original Part I focus group members was formed in early March to set the methods

and issues we hope to address in Part II of the program. The specific issue was drawn from the list of 16 most central issues as identified in Part I of our Campus Conversation (see item 6 in previous section of this report).

We intend to answer the following questions: Can a faculty-based case study grounded in a peer review and self-reflective approach improve student learning in non-content domains, such as critical thinking, writing in the disciplines, symbolic reasoning, and affective development? Will this process significantly improve instructional competence, cross-disciplinary dialogues about teaching and learning, and enhance the scholarship of teaching at Western?

For a more complete discussion of the issue at hand and the methodology we intend to employ to address this question, contact Dr. Kris Bulcroft (Center for Instructional Innovation—[kris.bulcroft@wwu.edu](mailto:kris.bulcroft@wwu.edu)); or Dr. Joseph Trimble (Office of Institutional Assessment and Testing—[trimble@cc.wwu.edu](mailto:trimble@cc.wwu.edu)).

#### THE PRESIDENTIAL SCHOLARSHIP OF TEACHING AWARD

Thanks to the generosity of Dr. Karen Morse, funds have been provided for a summer stipend to help in the development and implementation plans for Part II of the Campus Conversations here at Western. Dr. Carmen Werder is the Associate Director of the Writ-

ing Center and she comes with a wide variety of experiences relating to faculty development in interdisciplinary writing courses and curriculum. As the first recipient of the Presidential Scholarship of Teaching Award, she will work closely with the Center for Instructional Innovation as plans for Western's engagement in Part II of the Campus Conversations are developed.

#### IS PARTICIPATION IN THE CAMPUS CONVERSATIONS A GOOD THING FOR OUR CAMPUS?

Without question, the dialogue that has been fostered within and outside our institution is stimulating and enriching. The ways in which Western might better position itself in the next century to maintain the quality of our undergraduate teaching and learning environment warrant consideration. Old ways of teaching and learning are not being replaced but complemented by new ways of understanding how learning takes place, exploring the mechanisms that promote life long learning in our students, and assessing the most efficacious ways of teaching to produce the student learning outcomes we desire. The mere fact that Western has taken a lead in this national dialogue is a very good sign that we are serious about the learning environment we create for today's students and that we want to explore ways of doing an even better job in the classroom.



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