

## Center for Instructional Development and Research

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Information for People who Teach  
at the University of Washington

## Talking with Colleagues about Teaching

*"Teaching is perhaps the most privatized of all the public professions. Though we teach in front of students, we almost always teach solo, out of collegial sight – behind closed doors."*

*(Parker Palmer, The Courage to Teach)*

Across the UW campus, many groups have responded to the isolation of teaching by meeting to reflect together on their teaching and their students' learning. This issue of the Bulletin provides examples of different types of conversations about teaching and learning that are already going on, and offers a resource for those who are interested in starting conversations of their own.

### BROWN BAG TEACHING AND LEARNING SEMINARS

Since 1994, Ginger Warfield, Senior Lecturer in Mathematics, has organized bi-weekly brown bag teaching and learning seminars for Mathematics faculty and TAs. She generally follows up with an online newsletter summary and commentary distributed to the department. Advice from Ginger on starting and sustaining this series:

- *Creating Interest*: "When I started these, I assumed I would need to create interest in teaching. I was wrong. The interest is there. All I need to do is provide the forum."
- *Finding Topics*: "Operate on the hypothesis that if you find something you're interested in, other people will be interested too."
- *Finding Speakers*: "Keep your antennae out. For example, 'coat-tail' on speakers the department brings in and pays. Often speakers on a research topic have interesting things to say about teaching and learning and are pleased to be asked."
- *The Newsletter*: "The newsletter cuts both ways; some people don't come because they figure they can get the gist of the session from the newsletter. But, the newsletter keeps awareness of brown bags out there."

Links to the Brown Bag series and the Newsletter:

[www.math.washington.edu/~warfield/BrownBags/index.html](http://www.math.washington.edu/~warfield/BrownBags/index.html)

[www.math.washington.edu/~warfield/news/news.html](http://www.math.washington.edu/~warfield/news/news.html)

### TOTAL: TALKING OVER TEACHING AND LEARNING

Like ongoing TA training in many UW schools and departments, the School of Oceanography's TOTAL program ensures that TAs aren't, in the words of current Lead TA Jeff Abell, "hung out to dry" once orientation is over. Scheduled three times per quarter, these meetings provide a "supportive place to talk about teaching." Advice from Jeff on developing an ongoing teaching series:

- *Selecting Topics*: Focus on immediate, practical advice about teaching and careers

Continued on back >>



- *Sharing the Load*: “Realize that ... you are a facilitator. You don’t have to do everything. Don’t be afraid to ask people to help out. You have to get people involved this way.”

## “CONNECTED TEACHING” MEETINGS

Since the early 1990’s, School of Nursing faculty teaching in each of the three levels of the BSN curriculum have met weekly in “connected teaching” meetings to share information about work load, content, and testing in their respective courses and clinical settings.

Susan L. Woods, Associate Dean of Academic Services and Professor, Biobehavioral Nursing and Health Systems, calls these meetings “One of the big successes of the BSN curriculum.” Some of the benefits she identifies are:

- *Mentoring and reciprocal learning* between new and experienced faculty
- *Problem solving*: “Instead of stewing about something yourself, you have people to talk to.”
- *Ongoing group reflection* leading to change and improvement

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## HOW CAN CIDR HELP?

At CIDR we can help you plan and organize a conversation group, and we can also help you find colleagues who are interested in meeting to discuss their teaching. Visit our Teaching Conversations web page for more information:

<http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/resources/conversations.html>

CIDR consultants are also available to consult with your group and provide resources on specific teaching topics.



## Center for Instructional Development and Research

CIDR promotes excellence in teaching and learning at the University of Washington through its work with individual faculty and TAs, departments, campus-wide initiatives, and University leaders. CIDR staff are available year-round to collaborate on the design, implementation, and assessment of ways to advance teaching and learning for all students in the diverse UW community. Consultations are confidential and offered at no charge to UW faculty, TAs, and departments.

If you have questions about teaching and learning, or you would like to find out more about working with CIDR, you can call us at 543-6588, send a message to [cidr@u.washington.edu](mailto:cidr@u.washington.edu), or visit our web site:

<http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/>



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