

The Classroom

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Learning

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Contents

Teaching First Year Students by Dr. Donna Llewellyn	1
Mentoring One Freshman at a Time by Dr. Rigoberto Hernandez	2
The Classroom Interview John Stein	4
My First Semester at Tech Four Freshmen Share Their Journals	8
In the CETL Library Jennie Brown reviews the book <i>Teaching College Freshmen</i>	14
The Classroom Interview Dr. Gordon Kingsley & Dr. Michael Loss	17
The Fellowship Communication Program and the First-Year Student by Dr. Amanda C. Gable	21
How Self-Regulated Are First-Year GT Students When It Comes To Learning by Dr. Debra Fowler	23
Spring 2005 Events	24

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Teaching First-Year Students

by Donna C. Llewellyn, Ph.D.

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If you teach a course that is primarily taken by upper-level students then you can have some confidence about what prerequisite courses the students have taken and hence about what prior knowledge the student has had. In addition, the typical upper-level student has adjusted to dorm or apartment living, remembers to eat on a fairly regular basis, knows what a college exam looks like, etc. Usually, though, the first-year student has none of this grounding. As a group, these students have had a plethora of different courses that have been taught using different methods with different grading and workload standards. They have had their meals prepared for them, probably their clothes bought and laundered for them, their curfews set, and basic rules for conduct governed. Suddenly, all of this must be self-determined in a new setting surrounded by new peers and instructors. Of course, on the flip side, these students are not yet jaded, they are still ready to learn, and they are not yet ensconced in their "major silos." This is the time to catch them and to light their enthusiasm. I know, none of this is new to college instructors, but it does bear repeating every now and then.

This issue of *The Classroom* is dedicated to the issues surrounding teaching first-year students. We include several interviews with people who are experienced and experts at teaching and understanding our first-year students. We also include the student point of view. Four first-year students kept journals for us during their initial term at GT – read about their experiences and cycles of emotions as they adjust to our institution. It is important for us all to better understand the issues of first-year students. If you are lucky enough to teach these freshmen, you have a unique opportunity to set the tone for the next few years that they will spend here. But, just as importantly, if you teach any undergraduate courses, how the students do in their first year determines if they make it to your class at all, and if so, in what academic and emotional state they arrive. It is the responsibility of the entire GT community to lay the groundwork as firmly and positively as possible during the first year.

So what can you do as part of this community? Spend some time talking with other instructors who interact with first-year students. Volunteer to teach GT 1000: Freshman Seminar. More faculty involvement is needed for this important course and teaching it will help you better understand the students you teach in your major classes. Volunteer to mentor and interact with first-year students – there are many initiatives that need faculty participation – in this issue you can read about one professor's experience with Freshman Partners, and get inspired to volunteer yourself. And please, let me know if there is anything that you think CETL can do to help GT faculty in their academic interactions with first year students. ■

Mentoring One Freshman at a Time

by Rigoberto Hernandez, Ph.D.
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In 2002, Dr. Hernandez won the BPP Freshman Partner of the Year Award.

On “day one,” a freshman encounters many unknowns and generally feels disconnected from the safety net of the family and home that supported her successful admission to Georgia Tech. Without any additional aid, she might make good choices and have a successful undergraduate career. Alternatively, she might make simple mistakes, such as overburden her schedule with extracurricular activities or avoid a professor after a poor exam, that will ultimately lead to some level of failure. At the extreme, this leads to student drop-outs. But many such students could just as easily succeed if only they receive the “right” guidance. The question is, what is the “right” guidance? The specific answer is not obvious, and likely depends on the student. The general answer is simply to provide the student with as many points of support as possible. Georgia Tech’s Freshman Experience Program seems to be doing precisely this, and it has led to dramatic increases in student retention over the last few years.

However, no matter how much programming one develops, the recurring theme to success is mentoring students face-to-face. Here lies the problem — there are approximately 1,950 freshmen in the FE program. How can any one person (mentor) spend significant amounts of interactive quality time with all of them? The simple answer lies in a divide-and-conquer approach. These 1,950 students are divided into sections of approximately 15 students. Each section is associated with a Peer Leader (PL) who serves as an advisor and a consistent point of contact to that section for all of their coordinated activities. As good as a given PL may be, and as much time as he may interact with his students, he can’t possibly provide all the guidance needed by his freshmen. For example, a PL can’t simulate the authority of a faculty member, staff person, or alumnus, and thereby cannot be in a position to challenge students from that vantage point.

Thus enters the so-called Freshman Partner. She is a faculty member, a staff member, an alumnus, or perhaps a mature volunteer. She doesn’t have to mentor all 1,950 students, but rather only one section. The multiplier enters easily because there exist several

hundred Freshmen Partners; this number is considerably less than either the total number of GT faculty and/or staff, let alone alumni. AND she doesn't need to act as a daily source of contact because that's the PL's role. Instead, she can be like a distant and much-loved relative who comes in a few times during the semester to establish contact, and keep the candles of inspiration glowing.

In my own experiences as a Freshman Partner, I have done a large number of activities with my students, for example, dinners at Cuban restaurants, baseball games, steak dinners in their residence hall, cookouts,

some of their cultural prejudices. Their direct interaction with me also provides them an opportunity to see how a faculty member thinks, and to learn that our role is not just simply that of evaluators disseminating grades.

So what is the cost-benefit analysis of being a Freshman Partner? In the past few years, I've mentored a total of 5 sections. It probably takes less than 20 hours (total) per semester for each section, though most of these are hours I would have spent with my family. So every year that I've been asked to serve as an FP, I've deferred the question to my wife. She

reminds me of the student who went on to graduate school because he caught my love of research, or the student who saw that doing science is only part of the equation, or the student who rarely said a word but didn't miss a single event. And finally, she reminds me to e-mail an acceptance to my future PL. ■

“No matter how much programming one develops, the recurring theme to success is mentoring students face-to-face. Here lies the problem -- there are approximately 1,950 freshman . . . How can any one person spend significant amounts of interactive quality time with all of them? The simple answer lies in a divide-and-conquer approach.”

hockey games, ice cream and coffee outings, pizza and pool outings, a Penn-and-Teller performance at the Ferst Center, etc. The key to all these events is the realization that the events aren't the primary objective, but rather they are the vehicle that draws the students in. For example, I always have my first meeting with the section during the first week of the year at their residence hall. This lowers the activation barrier for them to meet me, and it serves to kick-start our future encounters. A subsequent dinner at a Cuban restaurant introduces them to my cultural background and helps to unseat (or at least challenge)

Q & A:

An Interview With John Stein

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John Stein is in his third year at Georgia Tech. He received his Bachelor's degree in Psychology from the State University of New York at Oneonta College. He's earned two Master's degrees: an MS in Counseling Education with a concentration in College Student Development from Long Island University and an MS in Educational Psychology from the University at Albany, SUNY. John's career in Higher Education spans over 23 years. He has held a number of administrative positions at colleges located in New York State. Prior to coming to Tech, John served as the Dean of Students at Manhattanville College and Associate Dean of Students at Sarah Lawrence College. He also spent 15 years at Skidmore College working in a variety of positions on the Student Affairs Staff. John's professional interests include working with college students at risk and first-year student development.

Q: How do you see your role at Georgia Tech? What does your position aim to accomplish?

A: The Office of Success Programs provides students with a variety of services and programs that assist students in their success both academically and personally at Tech. Students are initially introduced to our office through their participation in FASET Orientation. The office is also responsible for coordinating GT1000: Freshman Seminar, a one-term/one credit graded course. Each fall approximately 50 sections (discipline-based or general) of the course are available for freshmen. In addition to the course, we offer a variety of academic support services including one-to-one tutoring, academic counseling, and on-line resources or workshops on time manage-

ment, study skills, note taking, stress management, and test taking strategies.

Q: From your point of view, what is the most important issue/activity to consider in teaching, educating, developing and transitioning first-year students?

A: I believe one of the most important issues to consider is the misconception that students have prior to arriving and early in their first semester, in believing that high school has truly prepared them for Tech. Many students do not understand the changes they will need to make in order to be successful here. The two biggest changes I see students struggling with are making realistic assessments on how much time they devote to their coursework and studying, and managing their time—making the shift from being in very structured environments—high school and home—to a more unstructured environment—college.

Q: Students often view getting top grades as success. What other things should be looked at in determining the success of a first-year student?

A: Academic achievement is a very important measure of success for first-year students. In addition to this I believe students need to spend time reflecting on other aspects of their collegiate lives, namely the connection or relationship they establish with their college and fellow students. It's important for students to feel a part of the college. This connection is initially established through their interactions with their faculty and peers and their involvement with campus activities and clubs and organizations.

Q: Tell us about the programs designed for first year students at Georgia Tech? What are the objectives of these programs?

A: There are many programs for first-year students at Tech. The specific objectives of these programs may

“I am amazed by how involved students are in the daily life of the Institute. Tech students have a rich history of making things happen. They take great pride in their accomplishments and so should we.”

vary but essentially they all seek to address two goals, the first being to assist students through their initial transition from high school and home to college. Freshman Experience, FASET, Freshman Seminar, mentoring programs, OMED's Challenge Program are wonderful examples of programs that acknowledge both specific and general needs of first-year students. The second goal is to engage first-year students in the community through their involvement both in and out of the classroom. There are many wonderful leadership

opportunities available for first-year students—we as a community need to do our best to make sure they know those opportunities exist and to educate them about the value of becoming fully involved in the community.

Q: What would be the single most important piece of advice you would offer to first-year students and their instructors at Tech?

A: The single most important piece of advice I would offer first-year students and their instructors is to communicate with each other. Faculty needs to spend time at the very beginning of a semester talking to students about their course requirements and the expectations they have for all their students. Students need to know that it is perfectly acceptable for them to approach a faculty member with a question.

Q: What is the biggest challenge to new undergraduates when they arrive at Tech?

A: The biggest challenge that many new undergraduates face upon arriving at Tech is truly understanding and accepting the changes they will need to make to be successful academically. Based on data that we receive each year from a national study (Cooperative Institutional Research Program) that new freshmen complete while at orienta-

tion, 89% of our freshmen arrive at Tech admitting that they spent 10 hours or less a week studying or doing homework during the last year of high school. [Taken from the 2003 Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) Study].

Q & A, continued

an interview with John Stein

Q: Would you describe Georgia Tech's first-year college students as well prepared and motivated?

A: This is a difficult question to answer. Of course students admitted to Tech are high achievers who have excelled in high school. They are very bright and capable students. My answer to this question is very much connected to my answer for the previous question. The truly successful students are the ones able to assess for themselves how realistically their high school prepared them for Tech (regardless of the number of AP courses they took or their final GPA/rank in high school) and then make the necessary modifications in their behavior to adapt to the rigor of Tech. This change in behavior may come in a variety of ways; increasing the number of hours they spend a week reviewing course material and studying for quizzes and exams or seeking additional help by scheduling a tutoring session or meeting with their TA.

Q: We often hear: "Our Tech students are different." If this is true, how do our first-year students differ from those at other institutions?

A: Having worked at three different colleges prior to coming to Tech, I would say that Tech students are both similar and different from other freshmen. They are similar because they arrive at Tech with many of the same concerns about college that their peers have elsewhere (that may be more of a product of their age). They also may come with many of the same misconceptions about college-life as well as the same dreams and hopes for their futures as their peers. They differ in their involvement and dedication—I am amazed by how involved students are in the daily life of the Institute. Tech students have a rich history of making things happen. They take great pride in their accomplishments and so should we.

Q: In what ways are first-year students mentored at Tech (either formally or informally)?

A: Tech students are mentored in a variety of formal and informal ways. There are formal programs that freshmen are invited to join. Two examples (and I'm sure there are others) are the Freshmen Experience Freshman Partner Program and the Women in Engineering M & M Mentoring Program. Both of these programs offer freshmen (and other students) an opportunity to be in a relationship with a student or faculty/staff member who is more experienced and knowledgeable about Tech. The mentor potentially serves many roles—teacher, coach, advisor, friend and role model. Informally, students themselves find individuals on campus (a faculty member, staff, coach, advisor, student) who serve as their mentor.

Q: In what ways is teaching first-year students different or unique from teaching sophomores and upperclassman? What special considerations might faculty make when designing curricula for freshman courses?

I don't have experience teaching sophomores and upperclass students.

Q: What do you enjoy most about working with first-year students?

A: I enjoy the enthusiasm and energy of first-year students. For many students, coming to college is the result of much sacrifice and hard work, both for them and their families. For students who live on campus it is a step toward becoming more self-reliant. The first year of college is filled with so much change and transition unlike any other year in college. After 24 years of working with freshmen, I still find them to be an exciting and challenging group of students. It's

exciting for me to observe the changes that occur for freshmen during their first year of college and beyond.

Q: Are there any particular situations/experiences that you have had with first-year students that stand out in your mind?

A: I would say teaching Freshman Seminar for the past ten years offered me many memories of experiences and conversations with both individual students and groups of students that stand out in my mind. Most have to do with the student or students coming to a realization of what the “college experience” means to them and more importantly what they want to accomplish long after they leave college. One particular student comes to mind—a young female student who I met in her freshman year while working at a college in New York. Back then she was a very committed student but somewhat confused about what she wanted to major in and do with her life. I remember reassuring her that she had some time to explore her options. Eventually she found her passion. After graduating from college, she entered the Peace Corp and lived in Africa for a number of years. Today she is a tenured faculty member at Barnard College. It’s been over twenty years since I first met her as a freshman—observing her journey has been a very rewarding experience.

Q: What advice would you give faculty about enhancing the productivity of first-year students?

A: I offer two pieces of advice: the first is to restate what I said earlier—communicate with your students. I know this can be very difficult for faculty who teach 100+ students, however I still think it’s important for students to know that you are available to them if they need you. The other piece of advice is to challenge your students to do their very best but make sure to

encourage them to keep trying if they don’t succeed the first time.

Q: What changes have you seen over the past five to ten years in characteristics of first-year students?

A: Today’s first-year students are different in a number of ways. Many are much more technically sophisticated than students ten years ago. It’s a generation that has grown up with structured “play dates” and days that are filled with activities—little down time. Hence, some struggle when they come to college and their days are not filled with activities. This generation of students also has a very different relationship with their parents. They are much more connected to their families and are more agreeable to making important decisions in concert with their parents. Colleges and universities across the country have struggled to find the right balance in keeping families engaged and informed without crossing the line legally. Deans, faculty and staff have also reported that they have seen a change in the number of parents that call wanting to speak about their child, advocate for their child or express concern about something that is not ok regarding their son’s or daughter’s experience at college. I’m not saying this is necessarily bad—it is however, a change from an earlier time. ■

My First Semester at Georgia Tech

Four Freshmen Share Their Journals

What a privilege—four of our freshmen allow us to glimpse into that pivotal transition time—entering the world that is “Tech,” the first semester. Even just glancing at the pages of the entries into their journal and/or blog reveals a mammoth feeling of sheer intensity—the crush, the pressure, the fast pace, the enormity of the balancing act, the vastness of discovery...and more. Read, remember, reflect, realize.

*Billiee Pendleton-Parker
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by Adam Tart

First-Year Student in Discrete Mathematics

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August 1, 2004

High school is behind me and college at Georgia Tech lies just ahead. I'm pretty excited to get moved in and start living on my own, but of course I'm nervous, too. I'll be living with Mark, one of my closest friends from high school. Many people tried to dissuade me from rooming with somebody I know, but I think that our friendship will prove resilient. I've got my schedule pretty well set up: 18 hours with 7 classes seems kind of intimidating, but I'm going at it with full confidence. Will the classes be as hard as everyone says they are? There are two things I've always heard about Tech: it's really hard; and there are next-to-no girls. I wonder if these are actually true, and if so how hard it will be to deal with. Even harder to deal with will be missing my family. I'm really ready to be mostly independent, but I'll miss their constant presence in my life. They live fairly close to Tech, though, so because I can visit them whenever I'd like, it'll be all right. I'm not too worried about missing most of my friends, though; this sounds harsh, but I only say that because most of them will actually be at Tech with me, kind of like all of us continuing our adventures of high school but now in just a different setting. There's so much to be excited about! My friends will be there, I'll be taking interesting courses, I'll be on my own (mostly), I'll get to meet new people and do new and exciting things. I hope I like it. I'm sure I will. Will it be life-changing? I won't find out until I go to sleep.

August 28, 2004

I've gotten pretty settled into my life at college so far and have been thinking about the things I want to get involved in. Some of my new friends and I will be forming an Ultimate Frisbee team for intramurals, and because that is my favorite sport, it should be exciting. I'm also really interested in participating in one of the freshman leadership organizations; Freshman Council seems most appealing. Also appealing is the way my schedule has worked out. I decided to drop Health and take it another semester, so now with 16 hours I'm a little more stress-free. Probably my most interesting course has been Linguistics (a study of language) partly because it's different from the math and science classes I'm taking and partly because it's something I've never thought of before. The fact that I'm enjoying this “out-of-the-ordinary” course makes me wonder if perhaps I'd enjoy a major different from my current major, Discrete Mathematics. Thankfully I've exempted most of my core classes, so I have some extra time to decide. It's time to go eat now. (I'll write more on the food later.)

October 10, 2004

In my last entry I mentioned I'd write about the food, so I'll do that now. I have the unlimited meal plan, and it's the best thing since sliced bread (which, incidentally, is available in the dining hall). Towards the beginning of the semester, I thought the food available in the dining halls was fantastic. I had never seen such variety in my home's pantry or fridge! As time went by and meals were repeated, my infatuation with the dining hall dwindled, but I am still very grateful that I can eat a meal whenever I want. My schedule rarely permits this, unfortunately; I am often so busy with schoolwork, homework, extracurriculars, and sleep that I forget to eat or just don't have the time. Also, the food is tasty, but I really do miss my mom's cooking. It is hard being a vegetarian here. Ironically, it's time to eat again.

October 27, 2004

I've only been home once so far this semester, and it was to attend my high school's homecoming football game. Revisiting the school of my youth (or at least the part of my youth that was before this part) evoked eerie feelings of sentiment, gratitude, and nostalgia. College life has proven to be so different from high school life that if I had only experienced one, I do not believe I could have imagined what the other would have been like. I witnessed old friends still attending high school, and I observed how they interacted with each other, how they acted individually, and what their topics of conversation were. I was reminded of how I, too, once thought that being a high school senior meant I was on top of the world, that I was really the only thing that mattered (alongside my friends and family, of course), that really insignificant things mattered a great deal, too, and that everything would go my way. In college I'm among a sea of people striving to succeed, each as important and significant as the other, and I no longer feel that the clothes I wear to class will affect my social standing or that others' opinions of me will greatly affect my outlook on life. Both the high school and the college life are great experiences in their own ways (there is so much more to say on this topic than I have the time for now), and I'm glad I've experienced both. I'm glad I got to come home to see my family. I missed them very much.

“I've only been home once this semester . . . to attend my high school's homecoming football game . . . I observed old friends still attending high school . . . I, too, once thought that being a high school senior meant I was on top of the world . . . In college I'm among a sea of people striving to succeed, each as important and significant as the other . . .”

Adam Tart (October 27, 2004)

November 26, 2004

I am home again, this time for Thanksgiving, and it is a perfect time to reflect some more on my Georgia Tech experience. I don't think I mentioned this previously, but the Bee-Gees (our Ultimate team) lost in the first round of the playoffs. We'll play again next year, though, so we have high hopes that we've not been beaten out of commission entirely yet. I've been thinking a lot about Freshman Council. It has been a wonderful experience for the most part, but it can be incredibly frustrating. Getting thirty leaders to also follow each other has proven

challenging. The council produces great ideas at every meeting, but rarely is much accomplished due to everyone wanting to do their own thing. Members of past councils assure us that this is typical and that much more gets accomplished the second semester. I really hope this is true.

Contrary to popular belief, I've decided Georgia Tech's campus is beautiful. Maybe it's just because I've been feeling more at home each and every day, but I think mostly it's the way so many architecturally beautiful buildings coexist with surprisingly many grassy fields in the middle of a giant city. Many times at night I've gone to the Campanile and just watched the fountains run and the lights slowly reflecting different colors off the spire. I recommend the activity for anybody who wants to clear his head; it's great for reflection, in both the literal and the metaphorical ways.

December 10, 2004

I just took my last final, thus ending semester #1 for me. The finals went smoothly except for my CS final: I thought it was the wrong day, and I didn't realize this until only 40 minutes of the test remained. Thankfully my professors allowed me to take the other version the following day and will average the two scores. I'm truly grateful that my professors are just and understanding. I had gone to almost every class, had an A

average going into the final, and sincerely grasped all the material we covered throughout the semester; I really appreciate my professors recognizing that my mistake was not a reflection of my character or academic performance. I've learned my lesson about making sure I know when my scheduled events are. And of course, college has been full of many other lessons. Going into college I thought I might come out a totally different person. In retrospect, it seems instead that I'm just a more mature version of my old self. I still laugh at sophomoric jokes, so I can't claim complete maturity, but I don't think there will ever be a time that I could. I feel more able

to manage my time wisely, more confident in tackling new courses, materials, and challenges, and more secure in my opinion that life is never so bad that you can't find some way to fix what's wrong. I'm really looking forward to returning to Tech next semester and taking more challenging and exciting courses. Of course, I'm also looking forward to winter break, as any break from the rigors of Tech is well-deserved. It must be said, however, that Tech is not nearly as hard as it was made out to be. And, in fact, there are plenty of girls on campus. ■

My first semester at Tech, continued

by Becky Tucker, First-Year Student in Aerospace Engineering
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2 Sept. 2004: "I'd like to know who came up with the college learning process: 'So, we're going to put them in much larger classes, with less class time, and then the lab and class components of the same class should be COMPLETELY unrelated. Yep, sounds good!'" This idle musing, written the first month of my freshman year at Georgia Tech, was one of my earliest observations about college life. As an Illinois girl, Atlanta seemed a long way from home and I needed a way to keep in touch. I e-mailed my friends and family every week about the seemingly foreign ways of college and city life, creating an unusual record of my first semester at Tech.

Three weeks into the semester, I wrote home about one of the most extraordinarily unpredictable situations I have ever encountered. It was certainly an... interesting introduction to city life:

16 Sept. 2004: "My question is, when there is a man living in the dumpster (I'm not kidding), what do you say to him when you throw away your trash?" Have no fears, the Georgia Tech staff quickly rectified the situation, though I still have the urge to ask if his name was Oscar.

As I settled into college, I joined some campus organizations. My opinion about the worth of some organizations was slightly less than complementary:

30 Sept. 2004: "By the way, if anyone ever approaches you about being on a committee, board, or council, say no. They are the equivalent of giant black holes that will suck away an hour of your time into the dark abyss of nothingness from whence there is no return." Certainly some of the organizations I joined are wonderful and valuable. This was simply a life lesson in productivity and time management.

Dorm life is not as bad as so many people had warned me. Not to say that sharing a twelve foot box with another person was an easy adjustment, but there are advantages. For example, someone else cleans your bathroom, cooks your food, and washes your dishes. Still, after two months I was ready for Break:

7 Oct. 2004: "Parents' Weekend was last weekend. I stayed in the hotel with my mom and step-dad so I could have a real shower and sleep in a real bed. (You know, one slightly larger than a pool float and not 7 feet in the air.)" Parents' Weekend was a welcome respite from campus and did a lot to ease my homesickness.

My classes seemed to get harder and harder as the semester continued. There is not a student at Tech who cannot relate to the stress of having too much to do and not enough time to finish or understand it all. A few weeks before finals, it all seemed to collide in the same week:

21 Nov. 2004: "I have been obscenely busy the past few weeks. How busy is that? Well, I had three group projects, a paper, a website, three tests, a presentation, and three campus organizations to deal with. For a couple of days I was pretty much living off chips and salsa (dinner), Poptarts (lunch), and Diet Vanilla Coke (all the time)." My eating habits have since returned to normal.

I was just shy of euphoric the moment I was finished with finals for the semester. On 9 Dec. 2004, I immediately gushed to my family, "Guess who's done with finals!!!! That'd be me! I just took the calculus final of death less than an hour ago. It wasn't as bad as it could have been. I'm so excited!" The dreaded calculus final was over and I now had exactly one month to recover from this semester and prepare for the new one. Here we go again. ■

"My question is, when there is a man living in the dumpster (I'm not kidding), what do you say to him when you throw away your trash? . . . Have no fears, the GT staff rectified the situation, though I still have the urge to ask if his name was Oscar."

Becky Tucker (September 16, 2004)

by Diane Dutcher
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aug. 26, 2004

I am glad we are spending time on various types of sketches, but it's just so frustrating to fail. It's so difficult to grasp my impatience...I want to be independent, yet I desperately need guidance! What's going on? I love sketching, I love architecture, I am so passionate about studio...so then why do I feel so unfulfilled and alone after each class?

sept. 2, 2004

It took me SUCH a long time to do my work and it didn't turn out well at all! I don't understand how I can work on it for so long and get such an unsatisfying result. This is frustrating...I am SO impressed by my studio mates—they do amazing drawings! I'm soooo tired....extreme lack of sleep and no good food...ahhh! Today was cool, but my pure exhaustion hindered my progress. These 4.5 hours are going by so slowly...

oct. 9, 2004

Who am I? And what am I doing here?
I have been asking myself these questions lately. I mean, Tech has done incredible things for me, all of which I won't list because I am not in that mood right now. But I am just so confused and lonely. And I'm not lonely in that I don't have people that are here for me...or lonely in that I am depressed and reclusive. I am lonely along my journey in life...I feel like no one truly understands me or where I want to be. I know that I can't expect people to understand me...I am so complex and emotional. And gosh, I am sorry that I'm not perfect. I am sorry that I don't have enough time. I am sorry that I don't live up to your expectations. I am sorry that I'm not risky and energetic. I wish that I could go to calculus or CS and not fall asleep. I wish that I could lie down and just watch a movie without drifting off.

I don't know who I am anymore. Everyone says college helps you discover who you are...who you want to be. But before I came to Tech, I felt like I had a much better grasp of who I was. Before meeting all these new people. Before my chronic lack of sleep. Before I got involved in relationships that bring me down. Before I took my close friendships for granted. Before I cried every week or got upset about something dumb. Before I became "overcommitted." God, I hate that word. And I am so sick of everyone assuming that I am overcommitted...that I can't handle it. Maybe I can't, but can't I be left alone to discover that for myself? Without being told by someone every day that I need to cut back. That I am "too stressed" or "too [insert negative word]."

Gosh, I am really frustrated with myself for letting these things bother me, but I can't help but notice how I am changing.

Architecture is tough. So, so tough. I love the work I do and I would never change my major because I genuinely enjoy what I'm doing. But it takes so many sacrifices. I know that every major here (and basically everywhere else) is hard and has its difficulties, but architecture has proven to be a different type of demanding. All of me goes into my work. I sit here crying right now, because I realize just how much I have given to my studio work. I don't think I've ever faced such a time consuming thing in my life. It requires so much energy, time, lack of sleep, and creativity just to do a mediocre job. And apparently that is all I am doing right now.

Nothing seems to be going right. And I know what you're thinking: How can she say that? She's at Georgia Tech with a scholarship. She has goals for herself. She has so much motivation. I mean, come on, Diane knows what she wants. But really, I don't anymore. I don't know. I am so scared and I am so confused. And it's not just because I am unsure or because I am not "succeeding." It's because I feel so alone.

nov. 23, 2004

i am slowly trying to finish my studio work.
i've just realized that when people move on and never turn back, it hurts...it really does.
i know i'm not a part of your life anymore...and i can't help but wonder what happened.
actually, college happened, that's what.
things have changed and i'm not saying i don't like the change.
but i'm basking in the past right now and i realize how much i miss it.
i miss it, badly.
i thought i knew what i wanted, but i have been so unsure lately.
i hate this.
i love this.
what do i want?

nov. 28, 2004, thanksgiving break

I have had one of the best weekends in a long time. Seriously, the family, friends, food, football (although we lost...),

My first semester at Tech, continued

and sleep were completely AH-mazing :)

Thank you to everyone who has made me laugh and realize just how great friendship and love can be.

I love my girls...wow, I didn't realize how much I had missed y'all until yesterday when I was up at UGA. Honestly, thank you SO much for all the laughs, hugs, advice, love, and unconditional friendship. I can't tell you how much it means to know that you are here for me, always :p

This break has been full of "ups"...and it has been wonderful! The few "downs" that have happened have been overshadowed by all the good things that have happened.

Talking to my mom has helped me figure out a thing or two. I am still unsure on exactly where my future is taking me, but I am ok with that. I know that I cannot predict what will happen and so I just need to go with the flow and continue what I'm doing right now, because I am happy.

dec. 5, 2004

WHY CAN'T I CONCENTRATE? I NEED TO STUDY BUT I CAN'T GET ANY MOTIVATION. THIS IS HORRIBLE!

I NEED TO WRITE MY PAPER.

BUT FIRST, I'M GONNA WATCH THE TECH GUYS BASKETBALL TEAM BEAT GEORGIA...HAHA, OH GOSH. ■

by Rachel Harkness

First-Year Student in Biomedical Engineering

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I had always heard people say Tech was the hardest thing they ever went through, but they made it through so I figured it had to be do-able, but I began to doubt myself early. I know plenty of people who have gone to college and now are successful in life. If they can do it I can too—right? I dove in head first and took on cheerleading, school, a sorority, and freshman college life in general. Well, needless to say I learned a lot this semester. Grades may not show the same; however, I'm very positive and up beat about this coming semester. It brought me back to kindergarten, I was in a new place with plenty of scary things and once again I was relearning my ABC's in figuring out what I learned and my advice to others.

Aim is important, you have to continue to set goals high and try to get all A's; attempt lots of new things and many great achievements will come. Balancing everything at this school is quite difficult, between

studying and cheering even the small necessities become a burden. Cheering was a passion throughout my high school career and a student athlete definitely takes competition to a new level. Dreams are the most important thing that kept me going, it helped to have something to direct your energy to even in the most difficult times. Experiencing living on my own was a whole new adjustment but eventually it was exciting and the extravagance of college life took over and formed a whole new independent way of life for me. Frustration became a way of life and it came with plenty more F's. Failing was my biggest fear; however, unfortunately, it happens and you have to accept it. Family is no longer close by but I formed the same closeness with the new friends I made and the 'fone' is always right next to me when I have to find out what's new with my sister at home. Finally, football is amazing, the frenzied fans fill the stadium; it's hard not to get fired up for the big game.

Guys are in abundance around tech, but unfortunately it's true, "the odds are good, but the goods are odd;" even when you think you got a great guy he may only be a greater distraction. Holidays are the best at Tech they came few and far between, but that's what we looked forward to and held out hope for. Insignificant details are important even when I'd like to think not, that's how all the tests work, and in such large classes I sometimes felt like an insignificant number. Juggling workouts, practice, school, friends, and more put me in a constant jam; there just, isn't enough time for everything in one day. Keeping true to me was what I found most important even when I felt like I was killing myself with everything that kept piling up. Laundry piles were the greatest, and I quickly learned it was the little things that would take their greatest toll; that's where I needed luck, for schedules, teachers and work load; unfortunately, I had no such luck. Money as in paper seems to disappear the fastest from my wallet but the shiny stuff I find on the ground makes my day, there's plenty to be found in the city and it reminds me to look for miracles and take things one minute at a time. No time is the common ground for everyone;

"Who am I? And what am I doing here? I have been asking myself these questions lately. I mean, Tech has done incredible things for me But I am just so confused and lonely. And I'm not lonely in that I don't have people that are here for me...or lonely in that I am depressed and reclusive. I am lonely along my journey in life...I feel like no one truly understands me or where I want to be."

Diane Dutcher (October 9, 2004)

therefore, no sleep, no fun, it was mostly nothing but cheerleading and school most days. Options are in abundance, with so many things to choose from, one must be careful not to over commit, because that only leads to feeling overwhelmed. Prioritizing had to be learned quickly, where I may have been able to do it all in the past I definitely had to make difficult deci-

sions. I had to give things up and divide my time accordingly, I gave most of my time to athletics, but unfortunately sleep and school suffered and ultimately I had to grow up and give up my passion. Quiet times exist for studying; however, with everything I have to focus on peace and quiet don't exist in my mind. Room mates can make or break the first year and with four, I had a diverse group of girls and each relationship is unique. Stress is the best definition for Tech. I had always heard there are three S's and a student only has time for two in one day, well, I seemed to add two more S's; therefore, including Studying, Socializing, Sleeping, Sorority life, and Sports. Tests are the biggest stressor while at Tech, and definitely take up an immeasurable amount of time to prepare for. Understanding is the one thing I prayed for and most of the time had none of but never quit trying. Very, very, very, hard is an understatement; however, very rewarding balances it out. Withdraw was never something I saw as an option but I once again learned that it's better to do that then to fail the class, in addition to dropping classes sleep withdraws are common and that only leads to caffeine withdraw. X-ing off the days as I counted down the days was the best feeling ever, because as great as my time here was knowing I could go home was even better. Yelling at the top of my lungs on finals week definitely helped the emotions;

however, I don't think it kept me from going insane. Z end of my alphabet is for zoo, and that is definitely how it feels with the zillions of things going on here at Tech. ■

In the CETL Library:

by Jennie N. Brown
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Teaching College Freshmen

Bette LaSere Erickson
Diane Weltner Strommer
San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1991
ISBN: 1-55542-310-8

As a first-time Freshman Seminar (GT-1000) instructor eager to learn more about the art of teaching first-year college students, I volunteered to write a book review for this issue of the CETL newsletter. My director recommended “Teaching College Freshmen,” a 250-page book with a white cover and black block lettering. Despite its prosaic cover, the book gave me many interesting ideas for improving my teaching strategies and is a good starting point for those new to teaching freshmen or for those who would like to enliven their freshmen course with new instructional activities.

Erickson, Assistant Director of the University of Rhode Island’s Instructional Development Program, and Strommer, former Dean of University College and Special Academic Programs at the University of Rhode Island, divide their book into three main sections: Understanding Freshmen, Teaching Freshmen, and Special Challenges in Teaching Freshmen, and they provide specific examples from a variety of disciplines to illustrate their points.

The first section challenges readers (presumably, faculty or instructors who teach college freshmen) to learn about and understand the generation of students seated before them, including their high school backgrounds, motivations and expectations, skills

they bring to college and skills they lack, demographics, and issues with which they cope during their first year. While the main idea of the section – many college freshmen are passive learners who have far more social and developmental than academic goals for college – may still hold true, the description of “today’s freshmen” is based on research from the late ‘80’s; the book, published in 1991, could use a revision. For a more up-to-date perspective on today’s freshmen, I suggest reading Maureen Wilson’s “Teaching, Learning, and Millennial Students” in *New Directions for Student Services* (no. 106, Summer 2004) in lieu of or in addition to the first two chapters of the book.

In addition to learning more about the students’ generation, as the book suggests, taking the time to get to know something about *individual* students fosters rapport between students and instructor. In my section of GT-1000, I spent part of the first class session playing “icebreaker” activities with the students; by the end of the second session, I knew students’ names, and throughout the semester, students completed journal writing assignments, which gave me insight into their personalities and the issues with which they struggle. These activities may not be feasible for all classes, especially large ones, but even when I was a graduate student at Tech, one of my professors took class time to learn students’ names in a class of around 40 students. This simple gesture made the class feel more comfortable – students worked together in labs and felt at ease asking the professor questions throughout the semester.

The first section of the book also covers intellectual development and learning styles. The discussion on intellectual development summarizes four broad

A Review of *Teaching College Freshmen* ... and how it relates to the Freshman Seminar

stages of William Perry's theory of intellectual development and substantiates each with examples, quotes from students, or findings from subsequent research. According to Erickson and Strommer, most freshmen are in a "dualism/received knowledge" stage; they have faith in authority and right answers. As one freshman in a team-taught course puts it,

'Both of these [professors] seemed really smart, but they disagreed all the time... You couldn't figure out what you were supposed to assume... Lots of times I never did figure out who was right. And they wouldn't tell you... That bothered me' (49).

This description prompted me to think about how I can incorporate text from several sources into my curriculum and challenge students to assess the credibility of each author and comment on possible reasons for differences in opinion among experts.

The area on learning styles is less well developed, covering only Witkin's field independence, Kolb's learning cycle, and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, though the authors give a reference to a more extensive survey published in 1987. An up-to-date index of learning styles is online at Clemson's Office of Teaching Effectiveness & Innovation.¹ Another resource engineering professors may find useful is an article by Richard Felder and Linda Silverman, "Learning and Teaching Styles in Engineering Education" in *Engineering Education* (78(7), 1988).²

In order for my students to assess their own learning styles, I required them to complete the VARK questionnaire.³ However, in the future, I'd like to spend more time discussing with students the implica-

tions of their learning styles with regard to study habits and to redesign my curriculum to tap into different learning styles.

The first part of Section Two includes information on goals of freshmen instruction, preparing syllabi, presenting and explaining course material, and encouraging student involvement and active learning. As most who teach probably understand, good teaching involves orchestrating course objectives, instructional activities, and assessment; conceptually, the chapters are unsurprising. However, they contain several examples and descriptions of instructional activities that instructors can use to help students achieve course objectives, such as methods for small group discussions, case study analyses, "writing to learn" exercises, and role-playing activities.

For example, Chapter Seven, "Encouraging Student Involvement in the Classroom," describes a case study method used in a biology class. Students write their own case studies related to the course content, and then work on others' case studies in small groups during class. This may be appropriate to GT-1000, in that it would provide an opportunity for students to apply the text to "real life" and then to read and think about others' applications, as well. Another example I thought useful appears in Chapter Eight, "Fostering Active Learning Outside the Classroom." The authors describe an activity in which students answer an instructor's question related to a reading assignment in one complete sentence. They then must support their response with three quotes from the text.

continued on next page

The end of the second section covers problems related to evaluation, along with recommendations for developing more valid and reliable testing and grading measures. Throughout my first semester teaching, I was struck by the difficulty I had assigning grades to assignments. For example, the objective of a resume writing assignment was to develop quality resumes that could be used for internships or co-ops. However, I found it difficult to assign poor grades even to students who seemed to have missed the most basic concepts; rather than penalizing students, I wanted to motivate them to improve their resumes! I ended up adopting a policy that students may improve any assignment and resubmit it for additional points. However, this policy also struck me as unfair, because it neglected to reinforce students who grasped and applied concepts the first time around. I explained to a colleague my struggle, and she uncovered the root of the problem, “So, you want to provide *formative* feedback, not summative,” she said.

Yet according to Erickson and Strommer, “the primary function of grades is to communicate as accurately as possible the extent to which students have learned what the course was designed to teach” (151). Though I used a rubric for grading the resumes, my grading policy also incorporated a somewhat subjective gauge of how many times students tried or how much they improved. In the future, I will build in more opportunities to give formative feedback (unassociated with a grade) and do away with my “resubmit-regrade” policy.

The third and final section of the book covers special challenges, such as teaching large classes, advising and mentoring, and incorporating learning strategies into curriculum. The chapters offer advice on these topics within the context of teaching first-year students.

The chapter on incorporating learning strategies into curriculum interests me most, especially now, as my colleague, Dr. Debra Fowler, works with John Stein and the Success Program to incorporate “learning how to learn” into the GT-1000 curriculum. According to the book, freshmen need the most help with the basic skills of “reading, writing, arithmetic, speaking, problem solving, and ‘crap detecting’ (. . . identifying the drivel, exaggerations, and untruths that we hear and read each day)” (200).

One example from that chapter that I’d like to incorporate into my class involves helping students read college text. One way is simply to discuss the text and how to read it before it is assigned. The book describes the “SQ3R” method, which involves surveying the text, answering and creating critical questions, reading, reciting, and reviewing. Another example activity involves preparing study questions for students to answer, and later in the semester, asking students to prepare study questions on their own.

Overall, “Teaching College Freshmen” surveys a variety of topics, neatly compartmentalized into chapters, relevant to teaching first-year students and provides usable examples of ways to enhance instruction. Though entire books are available on most of the chapter topics, the book is a good starting place and provides many references to others’ research. I recommend instructors pick and choose chapters that are relatively new and interesting to them. However, the book may not be suitable to instructors who are already well-versed in educational literature on teaching freshmen – especially since the book cites research no more recent than 1990.

■

¹ <http://virtual.clemson.edu/groups/OTEI/links/styles.htm>

² Online at <http://www.ncsu.edu/felder-public/Papers/LS-1988.pdf>

³ <http://www.vark-learn.com/english/index.asp>

An Interview with the inaugural recipients of honoraria from the Eichholz Faculty Teaching Fund

Dr. Michael Loss

Professor, Mathematics

Dr. Gordon Kingsley

Associate Professor, Public Policy

Introduction by Dr. Robert C. Math, Professor of History and Vice Provost

I first met Geoffrey Eichholz, now Regents' Professor Emeritus of Nuclear Engineering, when I was a young assistant professor. He was interested in what was happening with undergraduate teaching in the core disciplines in science, mathematics, humanities, and social sciences, and it was a treat for me to be at the table with Geoff and other faculty members where this was the topic of conversation over coffee.

So it was not surprising to learn last year that Geoff Eichholz was interested in establishing a fund to recognize Georgia Tech faculty members who had demonstrated excellence in teaching the core subjects to first and second year students. In conversation with him, Geoff's passion for this subject was obvious and contagious. I greatly appreciate his generosity and also appreciate the work of our Development Office in helping Geoff structure his gift in a way that is beneficial to him and to Georgia Tech.

Professors Michael Loss (Mathematics) and Gordon Kingsley (Public Policy) are leaders in their respective disciplines and highly effective teachers of undergraduate students. They exemplify the values that Geoff has articulated and the kind of instruction that we wish our students to receive when they first encounter the academic challenge of Georgia Tech. As the initial recipients of the Eichholz Prize they will each receive a significant supplement in the form of salary or funds dedicated for their professional use in each of the next three years. Congratulations to Michael and Gordon!

Q: What is your definition of “good teaching”?

Dr. Loss: If you can get the students really interested so that they are willing and happy to spend a considerable amount of time with the material. In Math and also in Physics there is no way around the time issue. It simply takes time to get acquainted with the material.

Dr. Kingsley: I don't really think of what I do as teaching. Instead I am trying to create an environment that provides as many avenues as possible for a student to learn a body of material. Teaching sounds so professor-focused. But a great classroom is one that is student learning-focused.

Q: What do you enjoy most about teaching first-year students?

Dr. Loss: The students are enthusiastic and they are at a stage where they can get interested in a subject for its own sake.

Dr. Kingsley: My introductory classes usually have a mix of students from the different years with a slight majority being in their first year. What I enjoy the most about the introductory classes is the challenge of revisiting the basic core material of my discipline and searching for ways to keep it fresh. To do so requires finding the issues that are most salient to a class and using them as portals for introducing the basic principles of American government.”

Q: What is your biggest challenge in educating first-year students?

Dr. Loss: The big number of students with a great variability in background. This makes it a challenge to pitch the course at a level that is interesting for good students as well as students that have a weaker background.

Dr. Kingsley: The biggest challenge in educating this group of students is getting them to understand that the responsibility for learning rests with them rather than the teacher. The first year at Tech is tough. Virtually all of the freshmen are used to high school environments where they excelled in their class work. What they are not used to are the high expectations from faculty and the changes in the way in which academic material is presented and courses organized. In my experience the students that have the toughest time with the transition are those that are overwhelmed by the choices and freedom they have in structuring their days. Many of these students want their classes to provide roadmaps with clear discrete tasks for getting good grades. All the while they ignore the additional need to learn and study and master the material. I understand this. After all I was in their shoes once and made many of the same mistakes. As a teacher I try to counter this by pushing them to take responsibility for learning.

“ . . . students want their classes to provide roadmaps with clear discrete tasks for getting good grades. All the while they ignore the additional need to learn and study and master the material . . . As a teacher I try to counter this by pushing them to take responsibility for learning . . . “

Dr. Gordon Kingsley

Q: Are there specific activities you have students do in your classroom to involve them in the learning process?

Dr. Loss: Not really. I ask questions also in big classes and I expect answers from the students. In this way I check that I am not losing them.

Dr. Kingsley: One of the key ways I use to get students more involved is to use simulations in the American government class. It is a challenge to engage students in the large lecture class. The approach that I (and other colleagues such as Dr. Richard Barke) have taken is to turn the numbers to our advantage by asking the students to engage in a large-scale political exercise. For the last several years students have been asked to form their own

House of Representatives and attempt to pass legislation through this body. They are required to represent a district, form into political parties, create a class newspaper for tracking the events of the House, and create a political profile which will guide their actions throughout the term. Once the students have established a political identity they then get down to the work of forming their House. This requires creating the rules by which the Congress will consider legislation and engage in debate, electing a Speaker of the House, creating committees for considering legislation, as well as creating political caucuses of like-minded representatives. The students then get down to the primary goal of the simulation by trying to pass legislation through the House. Just to make things interesting I have lately

begun to put a budget constraint on the exercise. They can bust the budget during the simulation but they are required to vote to do so.

The other activity that I require is that the students write an editorial in which they must present a political argument and try and persuade classmates to share their position. This turns out to be challenging for students. Most of our freshmen have some idea of how to approach an essay or a report. But the act of expressing a personal political position is new, as is the idea that the essay will be for public consumption rather than simply for a grade.”

Q: Tell us about any particular situations/experiences that you have had with first-year students that stand out in your mind?

Dr. Kingsley: I don’t really have a particular experience with a first year that stands out in my mind. The best experience is when you see the proverbial light bulb go on. Most students have such a terrible attitude about government and politics. It is considered an unseemly activity fraught with questionable morals and ethics. However, as students gain more experience in finding their political voice and see the practical and direct ways in which their voice might be heard they begin to understand that though messy, public debate and discussion is a critical part of their lives.

Q: In what ways is teaching freshmen different or unique from teaching sophomores and upperclass students?

Dr. Loss: In teaching freshmen one creates a transition from high school to the University. Upperclass students should be able to learn more outside the classroom; one cannot expect this of freshmen yet. They need more guidance and have to get used to a much faster pace in the courses.

Dr. Kingsley: When I am designing a course I don’t think of freshmen and sophomores as being particularly unique in their approach to learning. The

only challenge with upperclass students is getting past the veneer of cynicism which they don as a means of appearing sophisticated.

Q: From your point of view, what is the most important issue to consider in educating first-year students?

Dr. Loss: We have to enable them to learn outside the classroom and make them realize that Tech is a different environment than their high school. It is faster paced, the material is harder and often understanding does not come so easy. The teacher has to create a good environment where the students feel comfortable asking questions in the lectures, after class and coming to the office hours.

Dr. Kingsley: For a student to get into Tech they have to be pretty smart and talented. So the bulk of my effort is almost always directed at maintaining motivation. That means that one of my jobs is to search out ways to encourage motivation throughout the semester for the mastering the content of the course.

Q: What would be the single most important piece of advice you would offer to first-year students and/or their teachers at Tech?

Dr. Kingsley: Be courageous in your learning. The desire to fit in and the ‘cult of cool’ are such strong forces when students first arrive on campus. It can be so powerful that students can sometimes be convinced to put their brains on hold until they find a place where they fit in. Don’t succumb to these temptations. Be mindful of where you are and learn all you can.

Dr. Loss: Take the students seriously. Guide them through a substantial intellectual journey, encourage them, but also make them responsible for their learning. Show them at various stages of the course that they can do something which they were not able to do before. ■

The Fellowship Communication Program and the First-Year Student

by Amanda C. Gable, Ph.D.
Academic Professional

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As the coordinator of the Fellowship Communication Program for the Undergraduate Studies Office, I advise students who are interested in pursuing graduate school and plan to apply for national fellowships or prestigious scholarships. Through our web site (www.undergradstudies.gatech.edu/fellowship/) and resources in our office (French 207B), we want to give both undergraduate and graduate students a central location for information about various graduate fellowship and prestigious scholarship competitions as well as selected prestigious undergraduate scholarship competitions.

Primarily I give advice about external fellowships and scholarships—those offered by government agencies, private foundations, or corporate entities—not those offered internally by Georgia Tech. The terminology can be confusing; I generally think of national graduate fellowships as those offered by organizations such as National Science Foundation, the Hertz Foundation, Ford Foundation, Bell Labs, and others. At Georgia Tech, we refer to fellowships that require Institute endorsement and/or interviews as Prestigious Scholarships—currently the list includes the Rhodes, Marshall, Churchill, Fulbright, Gates, Mellon, Mitchell, Truman, and Goldwater Scholarships. All of the prestigious scholarships have designated campus advisors—their names and contact information are at the end of this article.

Although I spend much of my time talking with students who are juniors, and even more of my time working intensely with students who are in the first semester of their senior year or have just started graduate school, the information I have about being competitive for graduate fellowships is also valuable to first-year students. I am not suggesting that we groom students for certain graduate fellowships and scholarships from the moment they arrive at Tech, but I am suggesting that if students are familiar with the requirements for selected fellowships and scholarships they can get more out of their undergraduate studies.

After all, even in their first-year, many students are already thinking about graduate school and making preliminary decisions, often based on sketchy, less than accurate information. If they have more knowledge of what is required to pursue graduate school and fellowships, they will make better decisions about how they want to spend their time.

All students know that making excellent grades is the first part of being competitive, but many don't think further about getting the most out of their academic curriculum, such as the value of taking a professor for more than one class as a way to begin developing a more long-term relationship with him or her. Some may not consider continuing their language study from high school unless they hear about a particular scholarship that requires fluency in the language of the country in which they propose to do research. Others may have a limited definition of leadership and not realize that their work in the research lab, for many fellowships, will constitute leadership. Many do not know the manner in which scholarship committees

consider their community service (both on and off campus) and the value of focus, passion, and initiative as opposed to quantity alone.

By discussing with first and second year students the various requirements for graduate scholarships and sharing information on the experiences of former Georgia Tech winners, I can provide students with more choices of how to enhance their academic careers. Whether or not they ultimately decide to go to graduate school or pursue prestigious scholarships, activities like studying abroad, getting undergraduate research experience, and reading the New York Times and The Economist regularly will broaden their perspectives and help them be successful in other pursuits.

Once students decide to apply for a national fellowship and/or one of the prestigious scholarships that I advise, one of my jobs is to help them think through which competitions are best for them. And best for the students not solely in terms of their credentials, but in relation to their intellectual and career interests. I have consistently found that to be competitive for these elite

“I am not suggesting that we groom students for certain graduate fellowships and scholarships from the moment they arrive at Tech, but . . . if students are familiar with the requirements . . . they can get more out of their undergraduate studies.”

awards, a student must demonstrate the often intangible but powerful quality of genuineness. Even if a student has the credentials for a particular fellowship, if it won't contribute to his or her long-term goals, it won't be a good match.

In initially considering fellowships, students do a lot of work, through discussions with an advisor, recommenders, and multiple drafts of personal essays, figuring out who they are and how they want to contribute to their field and their communities. They

also thoroughly investigate the best places to study and discuss this issue with their current faculty. It is not a simple process, nor is the writing or communicating involved quite like other tasks students have typically experienced before.

I tell students who compete for graduate fellowships and prestigious scholarships that, regardless of their credentials, it is difficult to win. They will put an incredible amount of work into writing their essays and proposals, meeting with recommenders and the fellowship advisor, pulling the whole application package together and submitting it, and also, for some awards, practicing and studying for interviews. And after all this hard work, they may not win.

But I also tell students that the process is invaluable. I have observed students who, through the process of applying for prestigious scholarships, have had important revelations about what they want to study and how they want to focus their lives. The personal essays force students to clarify what's most important and push them to seriously reflect on what they've done in the past and what they want to do in the future. Students have told me several years after graduation how much the process has benefited them even though they did not win a particular fellowship. It's a tough process, especially the interviews for prestigious scholarships, but regardless of the outcome, the practice and experience builds a level of confidence that transfers to other situations.

Since 1997, when many of us on campus began working together to educate students more about prestigious scholarships such as the Rhodes, Marshall, Churchill, Fulbright, and Goldwater, Georgia Tech students have proven that they are every bit as competitive as students at schools that have been promoting these scholarships for much longer. Since the 2000-2001 academic year, Georgia

Tech students have won 2 Rhodes, 4 Marshall, 1 Marshall-Sherfield, 2 Churchill, 2 Gates-Cambridge, 4 Fulbright, 1 Mellon, and 6 Goldwater Scholarships. (And all the competitions have not concluded for this academic year)¹ For many years Georgia Tech students have done extremely well in winning the Truman Scholarship (6 since 1993) and competitive national graduate fellowships such as those offered by the National Science Foundation, the Department of Defense (NDSEGF), and NASA. The difference, in my opinion, is that we have increased student awareness of prestigious scholarships and thus increased our number of applicants, campus scholarship advisors have devoted much more time to student applicants, and faculty and staff have volunteered a great deal of time on screening committees and in practice interviews to help students prepare.

At least twice a year, I and other advisors offer a combined information session on many of the prestigious undergraduate and graduate scholarships. We discuss the Truman, which requires application in the junior year, the Goldwater (an undergraduate scholarship), which requires application in the sophomore or junior year, and scholarships that would take a student abroad for graduate study and/or research, such as the Rhodes, Marshall, Gates, Churchill or Fulbright. I also provide many individual workshops on specific graduate fellowships such as the NSF and the process of applying to graduate school. I am glad to work in conjunction with departments; these are often the most successful workshops, as faculty can speak more about discipline-specific aspects of the fellowship or graduate school application process.

There are several resources on campus for students who are pursuing graduate and undergraduate fellowships/scholarships.

- ❖ A listing of many national graduate fellowships and prestigious graduate and undergraduate scholarships can be found on the Fellowship Communication Program web site: www.undergradstudies.gatech.edu/fellowship/
- ❖ For information on undergraduate research opportunities see: www.undergradresearch.gatech.edu
Dr. Leigh Bottomley directs the President's Undergraduate Research Awards—leigh.bottomley@carnegie.gatech.edu
- ❖ For scholarships requiring campus endorsements or nominations—see the following advisor contact information:
 - Dr. Amanda Gable, Marshall, Gates, Churchill, Mellon, Mitchell, Soros, Jack Kent Cooke Advisor, Fellowship Communication Program—amanda.gable@carnegie.gatech.edu
 - Ms. Amy Bass Henry, Fulbright Scholarship Advisor, Associate Director, Office of International Education—amy.henry@oie.gatech.edu
 - Mr. Paul Hurst, Truman and Rhodes Scholarship Advisor, former Director of Marketing and Special Programs/Enrollment Services—phurst62@mindspring.com or an alternate contact, Dr. Carole Moore, HTS Professor and Special Assistant to the Vice Provost of Undergraduate Studies—carole.moore@carnegie.gatech.edu
 - Dr. Jane Weyant, Goldwater Advisor, Assistant Dean, College of Engineering—jane.veyant@coe.gatech.edu
- ❖ Two departmental writing specialists work with students in their department who are applying for graduate fellowships
 - Dr. Jeffrey Donnell, Mechanical Engineering, jeffrey.donnell@me.gatech.edu
 - Dr. Lisa Rosenstein, Civil and Environmental Engineering and Materials Science and Engineering, lisa.rosenstein@ce.gatech.edu ■

¹ Several of these scholarships had Georgia Tech winners prior to 2001—this list does not give the total number of winners historically.

How self-regulated are first-year Georgia Tech students when it comes to learning?

by Debra Fowler, Ph.D.
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First-year students come to Georgia Tech from a multitude of prior educational experiences. Some students have learned strong study habits and are self-regulated or independent learners. Self-regulated learners utilize processes such as goal setting, time management, self-monitoring and various learning strategies to enhance their learning. These students look to instructors more as facilitators or coaches to help direct them in new content areas while utilizing established learning strategies. Other students rely heavily on the direction of a teacher and perform tasks only as outlined in a syllabus or specifically defined by an instructor in daily assignments. One issue that arises from this type of learner is that they understand *what* is being asked, but they do not necessarily have the learning skills to determine *how* to accomplish the task on their own.

Instructors at Georgia Tech anticipate that students conduct themselves as self-regulated learners; they do not expect to need to teach the students learning strategies along with content knowledge. So, how can we determine to what degree entering Georgia Tech students are self-regulated learners? One instrument available for such an assessment is GAMES[®] (Goal-oriented study, Active study, Meaningful and memorable studying, Explaining to learn material and Self-monitoring). This instrument was developed by an educational psychologist, Marilla Svinicki, at the University of Texas in Austin. The instrument explores different study techniques which the learning theory

research have shown lead to a more self-regulated learner. The GAMES[®] instrument is used not only to assess the level of self-regulation in learning, it is also used to illustrate to students where their strengths and weaknesses are as self-regulated learners.

CETL and the Office of Success Programs are conducting a research study involving the GAMES[®] survey with the first-year students enrolled in GT1000: Freshman Seminar. The study will indicate the level of self-regulation of first-year Georgia Tech students as related to learning. Any identified shortcomings in study techniques or study behavior may then be addressed through curriculum enhancements or on an individual basis with the students. If you have an interest in the study or in the use of GAMES[®], please contact Debra Fowler at debra.fowler@cetl.gatech.edu or John Stein at john.stein@vpss.gatech.edu. ■

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Spring 2005 Events

Faculty Development Seminars

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| January 20 | Use CIOS To Improve Your Teaching |
| February 17 | Educational Components of Research Proposals |
| March 17 | Mindmapping in the Classroom |

Other Events

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| March 28 | Celebrating Teaching Day |
| March 29 | Outstanding Teaching Assistant Awards Luncheon |
| April 13 | Faculty Staff Honors Luncheon |
| April 21 | Student Honors Luncheon |

For more information on these and other events, please visit the CETL website at www.cetl.gatech.edu and click on News and Events.

The Classroom

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