

## Results from Last Semester's Faculty Survey

At the end of the spring semester, the CTL conducted its first bi-annual faculty survey. We thank all 116 faculty members who responded (for an overall response rate of 23%). Book prizes and one grand prize (Dr. Lidia Filus) went out to 12 faculty drawn at random from the participants. The good participation rate allowed us meaningful insight into current preferences and classroom practices. This CTL Bulletin summarizes the most pertinent results; more detail can be found on our website at [www.neiu.edu/~ctl/](http://www.neiu.edu/~ctl/).

The faculty who responded to the survey were predominantly tenured or tenure-track (76%) for a within-group response rate of 33%. Most respondents have been teaching for more than six years (60%). Almost two thirds (65%) had taken workshops at the CTL over the last two years, and 95% of them were aware of receiving the CTL Bulletin regularly. They were distributed across the three colleges with 7 faculty responding from Business, 24 from Education, and 75 from Arts and Sciences. A few were instructors in Academic Development, and seven did not respond to this item.

### WRITING

Most faculty reported they required a "fair amount: 7-10pp" (27%) or a "considerable amount: 10pp+" (51%) of writing in their courses. The preferred types of writing were: Short papers (26%), single term papers (14%), papers that required drafts (13%), and reflective journals (12%). By far the favorite type of assignment was individual or group projects (53%) that might involve drafts of a paper and/or individual or group presentations. Several open-ended statements indicated a gradual increase in writing starting lowest in Gen Ed, more in 300-level classes, and most in graduate courses.

### DIVERSITY

Faculty try to address the diversity of their students (term not further defined in the survey) with a variety of means: 34% do it by creating group activities in their classes; 21% with special readings they assign; 19% with special assignments. Only 9% felt that their classes or their discipline didn't lend themselves to addressing diversity issues. This topic also yielded a wealth of open-ended comments such as:

- "I address learning style diversity by requiring different kinds of assignments – group work, oral presentation, written reflections, written observation papers."
- "I use it [diversity] as a resource for other points of view, other ways of doing things. They often can flesh out with details concepts I'm presenting in class."
- "I always make sure that my readings include multiple perspectives—I don't consider them "special," they are part of my core curriculum. I think it is vitally important to include the writing of and about women, lesbians and gays, African Americans, Latinas, Asians, and others of all genders. In addition, my assignments address issues of diversity."
- A number of faculty also emphasized the importance of choice (especially of assignment topics) for their courses.

### BLACKBOARD

A majority of respondents use Blackboard as their main instructional technology (33%) or as one of several technologies (also 33%). About 25% are using mainly other tools (such as videos, web sites, Powerpoint, Excel, and other software); and about 5% explicitly state that they do not use Blackboard. The most important purposes for which Blackboard was used were the posting of syllabi and other instructions (33%) and providing students with

lesson materials (28%). Only 14% of the respondents had students interact with each other in discussion forums and even fewer (4%) used Blackboard to have students collaborate on projects in small groups. Those functions will become more relevant as hybrid courses come online.

### **FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT**

Formative assessment provides constructive feedback to students without “judging” their performance as is done with a graded exercise. Formative feedback happens while students are still struggling to learn the material. Summative assessment (through a grade) happens as the class is considered ready to move on to the next material. Common tools for formative assessment are “minute papers,” having students find real-life examples/illustrations for concepts, providing instructor or peer feedback on assignment drafts, or student self-reflection on their own progress. Less than 25% of the respondents said they were either unaware of such techniques or typically did not use them. Everybody else used them either occasionally (58%) or frequently (18%). Of those who used them, 34% did it to give feedback of project drafts, 25% to have students provide peer-feedback, 17% to have students reflect on the quality of their own work, and 16% for minute papers.

### **RUBRICS**

Grading rubrics tell students in detail what the instructor’s criteria are for evaluating their work. They usually consist of a short list of criteria (3-6) in the left-hand column and, in subsequent columns, several levels of proficiency for each criterion that the instructor has defined for the assignment. A list of sample rubrics for many purposes and disciplines is available at: [www.winona.edu/air/rubrics.htm](http://www.winona.edu/air/rubrics.htm)  
Most of the respondents (75%) are using grading rubrics in their courses. Of those, 45% use rubrics in all of their courses; the others in some classes typically for the main assignment.

### **STUDENT PROFICIENCY**

After years of experience teaching on our campus, faculty have formed a sense of their students’ proficiency or lack thereof in basic skills areas. We asked about six areas and report them in decreasing ranks of perceived mastery. More than half of the students in lower-level classes are seen as proficient by the following percentages of faculty:

- 57% in Teamwork
- 47% in Oral communication
- 47% in Reading
- 33% in Understanding tables and graphs
- 27% in Writing
- 18% in Quantitative reasoning

Other items were mentioned in which students seemed lacking. Those included:

- Critical thinking (mentioned 5 times)
- Interpreting data (5 times)
- Media/technology literacy (4 times)
- Creative thinking/problem solving (3 times)

### **TOPICS WE MISSED**

A few poignant statements include:

- “You ask nothing of the necessary relation between research and teaching, and thus any support for research at NEIU... You say nothing here of classroom conditions, availability, or scheduling. You say nothing of standards University wide. You don’t ask us about any solutions we may have to the problem of under-prepared students...”
- “The level of basic skills must be improved across the board: reading (vocabulary), writing, map reading, logic, global awareness, etc. Also, historic and other multi-disciplinary frameworks must be stressed in order for students to place new material within a proper context. Above all, students must be taught, and re-taught, what they need to know regardless of their status or the level of the course. For example, many upper level undergraduate and graduate students simply do not have the requisite understanding of Year 1 material in their disciplines...”
- “The questions [of this survey] seem primarily designed for faculty teaching in non science departments. Most questions as formulated above would not resonate with faculty members within the Dept. of Mathematics...”

*We thank you for your insightful comments and will try to incorporate your suggestions into our work over the next semesters!*