UCMERCED

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News from the Center for Research on Teaching Excellence

Accreditation timeline through the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC)

Letter of Intent for Initial Accreditation (completed)

Ongoing Deadlines

Capacity and Preparatory Report (July 7, 2009)

Capacity and Preparatory Review Site Visit (Sept. 29 - Oct. 1, 2009)

Educational Effectiveness Report (Dec 14, 2010)

Educational Effectiveness Review Site Visit (Mar. 8-10, 2011)

Initial Accreditation Decision (June 2011)

For more information see:

WASC's main site at http://www.wascweb.org/
UCM accreditation at http://accreditation.ucmerced.edu

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Our Student-Centered Research University [1]

UC Merced is the research university of the future, partnering undergraduate learning with faculty research. Our mission statement promises that students' experiences here will be rooted in unique opportunities to explore and participate in the world of research. This column is the first of many, highlighting student-centered research university experiences at UC Merced.

The experiences and goals of Matt Meyer, Assistant Professor of Chemistry, are probably shared by many faculty committed to introducing undergraduates to the disciplines of a research environment. He hopes to provide significant educational and career opportunities for students in his lab. To achieve that aim, he initiates the students into the scholarly practices of researchers.

These practices include discussing results and planning strategies for experiments. Students also have been able to collaborate across labs with other faculty on interdisciplinary projects. Like the scholars they will become, students begin to explore the literature of their field, being accountable for presenting a topic and discussing it broadly and deeply, answering challenges from peers and faculty.

These experiences on campus have helped usher the students into the research community outside UCM; for some, that opportunity means having the first taste of co-authoring a manuscript for a peer-reviewed journal. Currently, Dr. Meyer has seven such manuscripts in preparation. Undoubtedly, like most authors, his students anxiously await seeing their names in print.

For other students, learning in the research setting translates to the privilege of presenting at national conferences; two of his former undergraduates actually presented at the Gordon Research Conference on Isotopes, a conference "rarely attended by undergraduates."[2]

No doubt, these practices are being duplicated across the campus, with the outcome of melding "teaching, research, and service"[1] to create the 21st Century scholar.

Unveiling the Year of the Syllabus

Why dedicate a year to the syllabus?

The syllabus is a foundational document that communicates to students what they must accomplish in a course; the syllabus also guides faculty in their evaluation of student learning that then informs their revision of a course curriculum.

It is for these reasons that the incorporation of learning goals and outcomes in all syllabi is a requirement of our accreditation process through the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC).

Over the coming year, the Center will supplement its usual services with consultation hours, workshops and grant support focused on assisting faculty in this vital syllabus development process.

[1] *UC Merced Mission Statement* http://www.ucmerced.edu/about_ucmerced/mission.asp

[2] Matt Meyer's full comments on his role in enhancing student learning through research can be accessed here.

Did you know?

- This fall, UC Mercd will have 32 students pursuing their Master's and 160 students working on their PhD
- Our graduate students come from 18 different countries
- Those from the U.S. represent 11 states (5 east of the Mississippi River)
- U.S. graduate students obtained their undergraduate education in 53 different universities:
  - 28 private
  - 25 public
  - 22 in California

Corey Kuruma '09 comments on the benefits of working in the lab of Kara McCloskey, Assistant Professor, School of Engineering.

"Not only has it helped me understand some of the curriculum, it has also prepared me for future work in the bioengineering field… Being in lab has definitely had its benefits in the classroom. It has increased my confidence with scientific problems and has allowed me to express what I know and have learned from previous experiences."

Why WASC Accreditation?

The appointment of Christopher Viney (Professor, School of Engineering) as the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education positions him to advocate as faculty **and** as an administrator for the principles of a student-centered research university. Based on their considerable experience, his counterparts at the sister UCs (most of whom also inhabit both the faculty and administrative worlds) have encouraged him to focus on this partnership between faculty and administrators to assure accreditation. Indeed, WASC clearly indicates that the faculty **must** take the lead, since they are most intimately involved with student learning.

As faculty and administrators balance full calendars, it is often difficult to see the value of adding the responsibilities of WASC accreditation to those schedules. There are, of course, key benefits to our being accredited:

- ✓ Attracting high quality students
- ✓ Allowing equal access to graduate schools for our graduating seniors
- ✓ Opening doors for Federal grants that stipulate successful accreditation
- ✓ Permitting our students to receive Federal loan monies
- ✓ Maintaining excellence in teaching and learning

Failure is not an option.

First Center Mini-grant Awards

The Center awarded its first three faculty mini-grants in Spring 2008; the recipients of the $5,000 awards were **Mike Dawson** (Asst. Professor, NS), **Vicki Wedel** (Asst. Professor, SSHA), and **Katie Winder** (Asst. Professor, SSHA).

Other faculty are encouraged to consider ways that this opportunity might allow them to explore their classrooms as a microcosm for research. For example, the grant opportunity enabled Dr. Winder to consider means that would allow her to "scale up" her microeconomics theory class, thinking through how economics is delivered to students. A class that has grown from seven students in 2005 to having a current cap of 100 needed curriculum revision that would "formally incorporate games and teamwork into a large-class curriculum as a way to ensure that students don't fall between the cracks." She hopes these changes will enhance students' comprehension and retention of content while they enjoy the mode of instruction – especially early in the semester when frustration can have long-lasting effects.

Congratulations to these recipients! The results of their classroom research into ways of facilitating effective student learning will be detailed at the conclusions of their grants' cycles.

Apply for mini-grant teaching support!

All faculty are encouraged to apply for Center grants and fellowships. The best proposals will explain anticipated improvement in teaching, its efficacy in terms of current scholarship on learning, and provide detailed and appropriate plans for assessment.

Mini-grant awards will not exceed $5,000. Review of submissions will begin on October 1 for Spring semester awards. Early submission will improve chances of funding.

For more information or an application, please visit the "Grants and Fellowships" link on the Center website at <crte.ucmerced.edu> or contact Juana Dumagan (jdumagan@ucmerced.edu) at 228-7950

Important messages from WASC!

In April, a UC Merced contingent attended the annual Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) Academic Resources Conference in San Diego. The meeting provided helpful insights into the accreditation process. Among the attendees were Gary Lowe and Mike Roona of UC Merced's Institutional Planning and Analysis office. Mike and Gary share their observations below.

- ✓ *Accreditation is more than WASC compliance*. As Mike emphasized, "WASC is more interested in whether we are learning from the process of establishing goals for student success and working towards them." WASC values a culture of continuous improvement.

- ✓ *Make accreditation our own*. The process is meant to engage the entire university community in reflection of what it means to be a UC MERCED graduate. Gary Lowe observed that the conference underscored "there is no right or wrong way to prepare for the WASC review. It's up to our university to determine what works best for us." Roona also observed that UC Merced's accreditation effort could complement the Strategic Academic Plan that faculty and administrators developed last year.

- ✓ *Use the process to discover and highlight our unique status as the newest research university*. Mike Roona noted that WASC review "gives us an opportunity to really show how we are unique. For example, what does it really mean to be the first student-centered, research university of the 21st century? The accreditation process gives us a chance to show what it is that makes us a distinctive, preeminent institution."

- ✓ *Accreditation is about student learning and, thus, must be a faculty-driven process that engages the entire academic community*. Participants also recommended that UC Merced faculty, administrators, and staff take advantage of future WASC seminars and conferences. April 15-18, 2009 is the date of the next Academic Resources Conference to take place in Hollywood! Contact Robert Ochsner if interested.

For more information about the support WASC provides for accreditation and to view the April 2008 workshop and concurrent session materials visit http://www.wascarc.org.

For the *Capacity and Preparatory Review* in fall of 2009, we must demonstrate that our university "functions with clear purposes, high levels of institutional integrity, and organizational structures and processes to fulfill its purposes." In key respects, this review lays the foundation for the subsequent Educational Effectiveness review in spring of 2010.

The Year of the Syllabus

Center Faculty Workshops - Fall 2008

For the fall semester, workshops are tentatively scheduled for Tuesday at 1 p.m. With the exception of panel discussions, workshops will be repeated on Wednesdays at varying times. We hope you will mark your calendars and plan to attend!

Titles	Week of
Teaching with Technology: An Introduction to CROPS Tools	Sept. 2
Will this Syllabus Meet WASC Accreditation Standards? You be the Judge!	Sept. 15
Linking Learning within the Syllabus: How to Involve T.A.s and Integrate Discussion Sections and Labs into Your Course Plan	Oct. 6
Shared Values: Ensuring Academic Integrity and Community Through Your Syllabus (Faculty Panel)	Oct. 20
Communicating Course Outcomes to Your Students: Effective Assignment Design and Rubrics	Nov. 16
The Revised Syllabus: Using Evidence of Student Learning and Course Evaluations	Dec. 1

Bryan Waters '09 reflects on how working with Monica Medina (Assistant Professor, Natural Sciences) affected his work and life outside the lab.

"Working in the lab with Dr. Medina has helped me develop a stronger drive to do things on my own. I don't feel like I have to wait around as much for instructions in school; I just go out and do whatever I have to.

Working in a lab makes you independent and confident in your own ability, and this really translates well into your own performance as a student. You aren't afraid to ask questions, or even answer them. It really makes you feel like you're at school to do a job, not just pass a class."

A Look at Future Faculty: Teaching Today

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For more information about resources & upcoming events or to see the bios of the Center staff

please visit:

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Many students apply to graduate school focusing on the research they hope to achieve or field of study they want to master. Some are unaware of what the *Preparing Future Faculty Program*[3] calls the "full scope of faculty roles and responsibilities" – teaching, research, and service. Yet, at a research university, teaching assistants are essential to the successful learning of undergraduates.

They must assume the multi-faceted personality of researcher/teacher/graduate student as some stand at the front of the class in a position of authority for the first time. They discover that, as one TA noted, "Often the type of help we provide is different from that which [students] can get from lectures professors give, or the chapters they read in their textbooks… Being students ourselves and having played that part for a long time has given us a lot of experience regarding good study habits. As graduate students we are something in between undergraduate students and professors; and, therefore, may serve as a vital link to undergraduate students."

In a university with many underrepresented and first-generation students, TAs see "how poorly prepared some students are. However, it's always rewarding to see students who are willing to put in extra time and efforts and succeed in the course that otherwise would've failed them. … All they needed was just a little bit of extra instruction. A nudge in the right direction, so to speak. Given that little bit extra, many of them will succeed."

While undergraduates may be rewarded by putting in a little extra time, that time is multiplied in the life of a TA and often unrecognized by the community they serve. The Center for Research on Teaching Excellence would like to recognize the vital work of our teaching assistants. In the upcoming year, opportunities for them to demonstrate the expertise they have as teachers will be provided through the *Teaching Matters* series. Interested TAs should also apply to become **Instructional Interns**, a means of capitalizing on the good work they are already doing and receive the most useful resource for all TAs – cash.

[3] http://www.preparing-faculty.org

Are there classroom situations that are frustrating you?

Unruly students you can't seem to engage?

Are you seeking ways to improve your teaching and still have time for your own research and study?

In addition to workshops listed below, Center staff are available for private consultations, tailored to TAs' specific needs.

Center Services

Faculty development
Instructional workshops
Grant opportunities
Videotape analysis of lectures
Faculty orientation
Syllabus design consultation
WASC accreditation support
Instructional mentoring
Survey design consultation

Teaching Matters?

This year the Center will host a workshop series, *Teaching Matters*, offering professional development in teaching and learning to all UCM graduate students. The series will kick off in early October with a panel of experienced teaching assistants discussing teaching at UC Merced. To increase awareness of UCM's community of experienced teachers, events will be led by select faculty members and moderated by TAs. Example topics include teaching with technology, leading effective discussions, and engaging students in learning. If you are an experienced TA and are interested in participating, please contact Karen Dunn-Haley at kdunn-haley@ucmerced.edu. Current or future teaching assistants who attend five of these workshops over the course of a year are eligible to become Instructional Interns earning a $250 honorarium. For complete details, follow the grants and fellowships link at crte.ucmerced.edu. Please stay tuned for the exact time and days of our *Teaching Matters* workshops!