

## Friday @ the Center: January 6, 2006

### Connecting with Course Evaluations

A few updates concerning autumn quarter course evaluations: the overall SPU completion rate was 47%, the same as last spring, despite the extension of the evaluation period through the end of finals week. Freshmen were the most compliant, with 55% completing evaluations. Other completion rates were graduate students at 50%; doctoral students at 53%; post-BAs at 49%; juniors at 46%; seniors at 44%, sophomores at 41%; and non-matriculated at 33%. The average time spent filling out an evaluation was 9.45 minutes.

You can access your course evaluations by logging into Banner, going to the Faculty & Advisor menu, and entering the Course Evaluation menu. Note that if you looked at the evaluation responses earlier, you might not have seen information regarding how much time students spent on the course; that information is now available.

The time to start working to improve response rates is now! I hope many of you put a statement about the importance of course evaluations into your syllabi, but another key move is to talk with your students at the outset of the quarter about how you are using last quarter's evaluations. A good strategy might be to explain to students what kinds of comments are useful and what kinds of comments are not. "He wore ugly ties," is not useful; neither is "She was really mean." "I needed better explanations of the vocabulary terms," is much more helpful.

There's a great essay in this week's *Chronicle of Higher Education* about the ego-bruising task of reading course evaluations and sorting the brutal chaff from the helpful wheat. Here's the last two paragraphs, but I recommend that you read the entire piece, especially if one or two students "flamed" you last quarter:

From "Evaluation Anticipation," by John Lemuel: "I've started introducing the topic of student evaluations early in the semester, mainly to point out the folly of saving up grievances to unload anonymously after grades are in. I can't deal with problems I don't know about, and finding out about them sometime next semester won't help the students currently afflicted. So I tell students, try talking to me, and see if we can't resolve the problem. If I help some learn how to be a self-advocate in the process, that's a plus.

But I know I won't appeal to every student, so I ask them to write only comments they could sign their names to, and some actually do. I point out that anonymous denunciations have all of the courage and none of the effectiveness of a drive-by shooting. Some of the denunciations I keep for my own amusement in a folder labeled "Student Hall of Shame." The rest get pitched. I am as free to ignore them as they are to write them."

### Book Discussion Opportunity

Once again the Center is offering two Teaching and Learning Circles, consisting of five to eight faculty who meet three or four times a quarter to discuss a book provided by the Center. The TL Circles are informal, with no pre-assigned leader, although I will ask one member to serve as an informal coordinator.

Circle One will provide an opportunity for theological education and reflection in its focus on *The Art of Reading Scripture*, a collection of essays edited by Ellen F. Davis & Richard B. Hays, both from Duke. In our teaching we often struggle with the ways our students read the Bible and

wonder about appropriate ways that we can bring the Bible to bear on our classroom activities. This book's "Nine Theses" about biblical interpretation and subsequent essays provides some thought-provoking approaches to understanding scripture. Circle Two will read and discuss *Why are all the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria*, by Beverley Tatum, a developmental psychologist in racial-identity development. The book discusses some of the distinctive social dynamics faced by black students educated in predominantly white environments and so helps us continue to work on diversity and reconciliation.

If you are interested in participating in either of these Circles, please send me an email to that effect by noon, January 13, along with a list of the usual times during a week in winter quarter that you would be available to meet. Depending on the level of interest, there may be more than one Circle formed for each text.

## Keep Thinking about Grants

Applications for all internal SPU grants the support work during the 2006-007 academic year are due **Feb. 1, 2006**. This includes Faculty Research Grants, Senior Faculty Grants, Lilly SERVE Faculty Grants, and Women's Studies Grants. See <http://www.spu.edu/depts/csf/scholarshipops.asp> and <http://www.spu.edu/depts/csf/programs/womensstudies.asp> for more information and to download application forms.

The January edition of *The Grant Advisor* can be accessed through on-campus computers at <http://www.grantadvisor.com/tgaplus/>. This monthly newsletter contains 20-25 full program reviews and over 300 listings of grant and fellowship programs, organized into eight academic divisions (fine arts, humanities, sciences, social sciences, education, international, health, and other).

And remember, if you apply for a grant from a source external to the university, you must follow the process outlined at <http://advance.spu.edu/corporations/externalgrants.asp>.

Blessed Epiphany!



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