



The Joy Shechtman Mankoff
Center for Teaching & Learning presents ...

Talking Teaching

Fall 2013

PLEASE SAVE THE DATES & JOIN US FOR GREAT CONVERSATIONS . . .

Talking Teaching is a series of informal discussions of teaching-related topics –suggested by faculty members – over food. Talking Teaching provides an opportunity to build community, to pause and reflect on our teaching and to find out about teaching-related resources.

This semester's topics have a special focus on the idea of the liberal arts classroom. We hope that, with your participation, these conversations will be an important part of our continuing project of re-visioning general education.

Topics are listed below, with times and preliminary descriptions. *We are looking for discussants for this semester.* For each conversation, eight to ten discussants will bring a question or an idea to spark the collective exchange of ideas. Imagination, not extended preparation, is the only requirement.

Contact Simon Feldman (sfeld@conncoll.edu) if you are interested in attending or serving as a discussant. We hope to see you at these events!

CRITICAL THINKING & THE LIBERAL ARTS

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 11:50AM to 2:00PM

Ernst Common Room

Many of us take it as a platitude that one of our central goals, as teachers, is to help our students learn to “think critically.” But what do we think critical thinking is? What makes critical thinking valuable? How might “critical thinking” be construed differently (or the same) in the humanities, the arts, the social sciences and the hard sciences? Especially in the context of GE, how and when might it be useful for us explicitly to frame our teaching practices in terms of the value of critical thinking? How do we and can we convey the value of critical thinking to our students?

WHAT MAKES A LIBERAL ARTS COURSE?

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 8:30AM TO 10:15AM

Ernst Common Room

General education arose in the late 19th century as a way to preserve broad liberal arts learning. A key question that came up in the spring semester GE working group was: What makes us a liberal arts college rather than a research university? Are the differences just due to smaller class size and pedagogical innovation, or should there be important intellectual differences between courses at the two types of institutions? Louis Menand has argued that any course can be made “liberal arts” by adding history and theory (philosophy). This is consistent with the liberal arts ideal. In this Talking Teaching we will discuss the topic of what makes a liberal arts course. Should courses taught at Connecticut College be intellectually different than those at a research university? If so, how so? How can faculty incorporate ideas from the original liberal arts ideal into individual courses?

please turn over

THE HONOR CODE IN THE CLASSROOM AND BEYOND

MONDAY, OCTOBER 7, 11:50AM to 2:00PM

Hood Dining Room

Many of our students come to Connecticut College because of our honor code. But many of us also experience cheating as a somewhat common occurrence. Beyond invoking the honor code on our syllabi, what are the ways we, as faculty, can enliven our students' sense of the importance of academic integrity? Are there ways that this can be done without creating an environment of distrust? How do faculty use the Honor Council and how do we understand its role in creating a campus culture of academic integrity?

FIRST-YEAR SEMINARS AS A CORNERSTONE OF GENERAL EDUCATION

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 15, 11:50AM TO 2:00PM

1941 Room, Crozier-Williams

Currently our first-year seminars (FYSs) are an important way to introduce students to the college and build community in their first semester. Should the role of first year seminars in general education be expanded? We will discuss the role of FYS seminars as proposed in the report of the GE summer working group and talk about the ongoing FYS pilot study. We will discuss how FYS can be used to teach intellectual skills and to connect students to the mission of the college, both of which are important proposed outcomes of a new general education program. Are there other ways that first-year seminars can be modified to improve their effectiveness? We welcome participation from all faculty, regardless of whether they have taught a FYS.

USING EXAMS TO IMPROVE LEARNING ACROSS THE DISCIPLINES

MONDAY, OCTOBER 21, 11:50AM TO 2:00PM

Ernst Common Room

Exams are used in many different ways across the disciplines. They are commonly used to test students' understanding and to assign grades; but thoughtfully constructed exams can also contribute to student learning. We will discuss using exams as a deliberate teaching tool, including concepts such as scaffolding both within and across exams, tying exams to learning goals, and using exams to encourage students to think beyond what they have learned in class. We will explore how colleagues in different fields use exams and discuss ways that exams can be used more creatively and effectively.

THE FIRST YEAR:

WHAT ARE WE DOING IN OUR 100-LEVEL COURSES?

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 1, 8:30AM TO 10:15AM

Ernst Common Room

First-year students entering Connecticut College embark on a year filled primarily with 100-level courses. The first year is essential because it shapes students' perspectives on the college and is a critical time for student retention. These 100-level courses currently serve both as introductions to majors and as general education courses for non-majors. In this event we discuss how we can more carefully consider the nature and goals of these 100-level courses. Can the same course address the needs of majors as well as the much larger group of non-major liberal arts students? Can we rethink the way introductory courses work? How can we ensure that 100-level courses are of the highest possible quality and are placed in a liberal arts framework that addresses the needs of non-majors? The Teagle Data Into Action Summer Working Group, which has been considering these issues while working with data on the first year experience at Connecticut College, will join us in this discussion.