Welcome to the Spring 2015 newsletter! It may still be cold outside, but things have really been heating up at the FDC and across campus. I want to welcome our new Associate Director of Online Faculty Development, Dr. Beth René Roepna. Beth René comes to UWG with years of experience in faculty development and online teaching and learning. She has already hit the ground running and become a vital member of the UWG Online team. Look for her to have a real impact in helping shape UWG's future online faculty development and in delivering high quality online/hybrid courses and programs.

Speaking of high quality online teaching and learning, it has been just over a year since we first piloted Quality Matters training on campus, and I am proud to announce that more than 130 faculty members have taken advantage of the training! Partnering with the new Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) and departments across campus, we have been able to offer this service at no cost to faculty. Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive with many faculty stating that the training has not only positively impacted their online teaching but also their face-to-face instruction as well. If you are interested in the training, please contact our office.

Across campus, UWG is ramping up initiatives that target adult non-traditional students, veterans and active military personnel, and high school students interested in joint/dual enrollment. A significant amount of our future projected enrollment growth will come from these groups, and online delivery will play a major role in catering to these new and under-served audiences. UWG Online is partnering with departments all across campus, the CTL, and the new Center for Adult Learners and Veterans to ensure we are ready to meet the needs of these learners. No question: these are exciting times for UWG, students across Georgia and beyond, and faculty and staff working in distance education.

On to the newsletter…

In this edition of the FDC spotlight, we get to know wonderful Wendy Grisham—one of our instructional designers—a little better. She is a runner, a fellow English major, a former UWG student, and an all-around awesome person. We also profile Matt Townsley, a current doc student in the School Improvement Program who just happens to live in Iowa. Matt tells us how a busy introvert with a family and a fulltime job needs the flexibility that an online program provides. We also look back at some great campus speakers, celebrate faculty accomplishments, and tackle those dreaded online discussions.

Thanks for reading and here is to a great spring semester! Remember, we are here to help you so don't be shy about asking.

Cheers,
Jason
FDC Spotlight

Do you know who on the UWG/Online Faculty Development Center staff, attended UWG as a student, has served as an associate dean, and has participated in the Peachtree Road Race?

I joined the UWG/Online Faculty Development Center as an instructional designer in October of 2013; however, I was already very familiar with the University of West Georgia. After graduating from Carrollton High School in 1998, I came to UWG and obtained a Bachelor and Master of Arts degree in English. My degree in English took me to Georgia Northwestern Technical College, where I worked for eight years as an English and Reading Instructor and for two years as an Assistant Dean of General and Learning Support Education.

My time at GNTC provided me with the experience and the desire to help others teach online courses. At first, I taught English and reading courses face to face, but the Online Coordinator (and personal friend), Sharon Wilson, persuaded me to start developing my courses for the online environment. Over the next few years, I moved my courses through the entire online spectrum of course development: from face to face to Web-enhanced to hybrid to fully online. I was highly enthusiastic about each new mode of delivery, and I enjoyed learning about the various tools and techniques available.

I felt like I had more control in the online environment. I could engage my students in ways that I didn’t have time for in the face-to-face classroom. I could also reach those who would not otherwise participate or ask for assistance in front of their peers. Another, more humbling, benefit of teaching online was hearing from the many students who now had the opportunity to earn a degree due to the flexibility of online courses. These students would not have been able to take college courses due to various reasons like military deployment, work schedules, health issues, childcare, etc. Making small, incremental changes to my classes allowed for me to reach a population that was desperate for attention, and still is.

My design approach primarily comes from the faculty perspective, but I also have experience as an online student, which is certainly a driving force as well. I love to troubleshoot and solve problems, so being an instructional designer and working for UWG/Online has been a great fit for me. I do miss teaching sometimes, but I don’t miss grading essays!

When I’m not working, I enjoy reading, shopping (online of course), and spending time with my friends and family and my Labrador, Murphy. I have also taken up running. I began running in April of 2013 and now run half marathons. Running is hard, really hard, but the benefits are worth the effort. Entering large races (like the Publix Half Marathon and the Peachtree Road Race) keeps me motivated because there are people of all ages, sizes, and abilities running next to me. Even being passed by a 10 year old on one side and a 70 year old on the other is inspiring to me (after I’ve cried a little).

~Wendy Grisham, Instructional Designer

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Online Teaching Tools: National Speakers on Education

UWG hosted two great speakers on education and online education in Fall 2014. If you missed either Alan November’s talk or the workshops by Thomas Tobin, read on to find out more about what they shared with us and find links to their videos.

The College of Education invited Alan November to be the speaker for their inaugural Dag Folger Speaker Series: Critical Topics in Education, on November 5, at the Townsend Center for the Performing Arts. Alan November, celebrated author and leader in educational technology, shared with the audience ideas from his book, Who Owns the Learning? Preparing Students for Success in the Digital Age.

What was fascinating to me, as I listened to him speak, was how November showed us how we can use technology, in relatively simple ways, to make learning more meaningful for students of any age. Instead of the concerns faculty have expressed about technology being used to make cheating easier, he showed how we can use technology to create meaningful assignments in which cheating is nigh on impossible. To read more about November’s accomplishments and to find out why he is considered one of the nation’s fifteen most important thinkers in education, read more here. If you missed his talk or want to watch it again, follow this link.

A week after November’s evening talk, Thomas Tobin, Ph.D. came to UWG to present a number of workshops as part of the Super-Skills Series. Tobin presented an hour long talk on 104 Best Practices in D2L with sections on increasing student engagement, integrating easy and cool new tools in to your course, increasing the sense of instructor presence into your online course, and more. This initial presentation was followed by three two-and-a-half hour presentations over the next two days on...
Online Faculty Development Center staff is dedicated to helping students succeed in technology-enhanced and online courses and enabling faculty to focus on teaching rather than technology. It is our job - and our pleasure - to help the faculty of UWG design, develop, and implement any online component of their courses. From large-scale projects to just fixing a glitch in your course, we can help. We can help you design your course from the ground up, revise one you’ve been teaching, or untangle one you’ve inherited. Even if you’re not completely online, we can help you implement any of the university’s online tools/software in your course.

We are current on the best practices of online education and can help you translate your knowledge of teaching face-to-face to how to best engage with students in an online environment to promote meaningful learning.

We provide one-on-one or online training on CourseDen (Brightspace by D2L) and all its components. We’ve put together step-by-step instructions on how to do most of what you need to do on a daily basis. We can troubleshoot your grade book.

We are spearheading the implementation of the Quality Matters rubrics as a means of evaluating and promoting UWG’s online instruction on a national scale.

We are here to help you help your students get the most out of their technology-enhanced education.

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Faculty Kudos

The Faculty Development Center (FDC) works directly with instructors to help develop better online course content. Along with Center for Teaching and Learning, we have developed a 3-course recommended sequence through Quality Matters, to help instructors develop engaging, well-structured, and better accessible online content.

Quality Matters is a nationally recognized, faculty-centered, peer reviewed processes created to promote the quality of online course design and online components. QM has developed a sequence of workshops that prepare instructors for becoming better reviewers of online courses.

How UWG is benefiting from implementing Quality Matters

As the University of West Georgia moves forward with a revised vision statement and implements the approved Complete College Georgia—University of West Georgia Campus Plan (2012), UWG|Online will implement QM to assist in achieving the goals outlined in Strategy 5:
Access/Completion: Strategically increase the number and diversity of distinctive, high quality, online offerings, to include participation in eCore and possibly eMajor, to meet student demand and leverage strengths.

Quality Matters processes benefit both individual faculty and their institutions in the following ways:

- Improved online and hybrid student learning outcomes and retention
- Provides a comprehensive process for course development, design, and revisions which are aligned with accreditation standards
- Integration of new technologies and research findings into technology enhanced learning environments
- Faculty professional development and certification

What does this mean for students who are attending UWG? Instructors who have completed this sequence are recognized as UWG|Online Course Instructor Certified. They are given the tools to create successful online courses. Check out this list of instructors who have become certified and offer them your congratulations next time you see them!

- George Bradford
- Tiffany Parsons
- Patricia Riley
- Wendy Grisham
- Timothy Ayers
- Glauco Sremin
- Greg Dixon
- Abbot Packard
- Linda Haynes
- Jessica Loiacono
- Lara Willcox
- Anne Gaquere
- Brad Prince
- Nadeja Popov
- Adriana d’Alba
- Meg Pearson
- Cheryl Brown
- Kim Holder
- Christopher Bounds
- Rong Guo
- Michelle Byrne
- Colleen Vasconcellos
- Elizabeth Stupi
- Laura Miller
- Mary Alice Varga
- Mariana Sanchez
- Rita Mahmoud
- Danilo Baylen
- Mary Beth Slone
- John Hansen
- Phyllis Snipes
- Philip Reaves
- Frances Chumney
- Frank Stonier
- Judy Butler
- Linxiao Liu
- Kelley Christopher
- Hilde Patron
- Julia Whisenhunt
- Emily Hunt
- Dawn McCord
- Susan Welch
- Vanessa Woodward
- Cynthia Brown
- Mary Bishop
- Keith Pacholl
- Caroline Perjessy
- Debra Cobia
- Mark Parrish

For more information on the Quality Matters process, or if you are an instructor and would like participate in this exciting training opportunity, please contact our help desk at 678-839-6248.

~ Wesley Steverson, Academic Instructional Support Specialist & Jessica Loiacono, Online Innovation Coordinator

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Online Pedagogy

Dreaded Discussions?

Do you dread reading and posting in your online threaded discussions in CourseDen? Are you spending too much time doing something you find unpleasant (to say the least)? If so, you might find that changing the questions and discussion format leads to you and your students being excited about the online threaded discussions instead of putting them off like a trip to the dentist!
The simplest step I took to make the discussions more interesting for the whole class was to start the threads myself, instead of having students start the threads. When the instructor starts the threads and guides the discussion in each thread, there are fewer repeated answers and the discussion is more of a conversation instead of a “homework assignment” in which the discussion is used to determine who read the assigned material. In the classroom, we don’t expect or want every student in class to respond to our opening question with the same pat answer: we want a discussion, a conversation. I used to call my online discussions a Salon. I used the introductory discussion to tell my students what a Salon was and gave them some pointers on how to participate in such a discussion. An article in Faculty Focus suggests treating the online discussions as you would a dinner party: welcome everyone in the introductory discussion, provide plenty of delicious food (content), draw out those who need help, and keep the conversation moving. Start a new conversation – thread – when all the points you wanted covered have been discussed. I usually plan at least three or four threads for each discussion.

To start the threads yourself, use the place where you usually post your question (the Description) as a place to state the learning objectives you plan to cover and to explain to students the requirements for the discussion (such as responding to each other in the discussion instead of just replying to you). Then, post at least one thread before the discussion is opened to students. You and your students will enjoy the results if your questions ask students to at least analyze and apply the information they are learning.

If students are being asked to analyze, apply, or evaluate information, then they need to integrate it with what they already know and this means that a deeper level of learning will take place. This is one of the big advantages of online discussions over classroom discussions: students have time to reflect on the material and if they are asked questions that help them talk about the meaning of the material rather than to just find the correct answer, the conversation becomes interesting to everyone because students and faculty reveal their relationship to the material in their responses.

Instead of asking students to identify components (the Remembering level in Bloom’s Revised Taxonomy) or solve a problem, you can ask students to identify which components are most useful (important, meaningful) and why (analyzing, evaluating). Or you can ask them to create a problem which involves specific concepts in the assigned readings (synthesizing). These questions ask students to be more creative and to use the material being studied.

Another approach to creating great online discussion questions is to think about the greatest discussions you’ve had in the classroom: What material if any, prefaced the great discussion? Try to recreate it and place that in the first post/thread to the discussion. What made the discussion especially meaningful to the students? Often, students enjoy discussions that they can apply to their current lives or future careers.

While creating interesting discussions can take more time than asking simple questions, you will find that with interesting discussions, you can spend less time posting (to get or keep the discussion going) and more time reading the interesting responses of your students. When students are inspired by interesting ideas and questions, you will be amazed at what they will do!

For more help on writing and managing online discussions, contact me about joining a self-paced workshop on designing meaningful online discussions.

~BethRené Roepnack, Associate Director of Online Faculty Development

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Online Student Spotlight

Did you know that our online programs have students from all over the United States and around the world? In this newsletter you will have a chance to read how the College of Education’s online Ed.D program made a difference to a student from Iowa. To find out more about this student, click here.

Matt Townsley, based in Iowa, is a current doctoral student in the Ed.D. online program at UWG. He began in the summer of 2014 and is currently in his second semester. Matt’s bachelor’s degree took place in the traditional classroom, but he was able to participate in an 85% online hybrid program for his first master’s degree and a partially online program for his master’s certificate.

Matt likes that the Ed.D. program at UWG is an established program: it has history, substantiating the feeling that this is a reputable university. Matt also appreciates the online format of these graduate degrees. They allow for him to have a family life from a distance and not have to endure the inconvenience of commuting and being away from his job and family. One aspect of his educational experience online that he really emphasizes is the importance of the cohort model. In a cohort, students journey through the
program together. Having a deeper understanding of one another and building relationships allows for easier communication online.

When Matt began the program, there was a face-to-face aspect early in the summer where cohort members were able to meet each other and interact. Matt found this to be very positive, because once you get to know people in person and their personalities, it is easier to communicate online and understand where people are coming from. Another positive aspect regarding the cohort is that it is very diverse. Although half of the students are from Georgia, there are many students from all over the country as well as a student from Germany. Matt also praises the faculty, saying that professors are very proactive with communication. He found that Margaret Parrish, the program assistant, was very good with communication details throughout the registration process.

As far as the strengths of the online format of the program, Matt appreciates that it supports his introversion. He likes to read, digest, and think on his own time table, and an online format accommodates that propensity. With a family and child to raise, he is prone to logging in late at night after his son is asleep. Thus, the asynchronous format of the online coursework is very helpful in that respect as well. Another positive aspect to the online format at UWG is CourseDen allows for everything related to his graduate work to be concentrated in one space. It is very nice to be able to turn off graduate work and turn it on all at once, as opposed to a face-to-face class where the student is forced to be in attendance at a particular time and place.

While Matt really enjoys his online courses, he sees room for growth for UWG: Matt would like more interaction with his professors and he would also like to see more professors take advantage of the flexibility that an online learning environment offers. And, like many other online students, he would like to see more online programs being offered, especially Ph.D.s in the field of education.

Questions & Submissions

For questions, suggestions, or items to include in the next newsletter such as:

*Upcoming Events, Workshops, & Training

*Publications & Other Achievements

*Online Teaching/Learning News & Insights

Please contact Beth Rene’ Roepnack:
broepnac@westga.edu

We look forward to learning about and sharing your experiences and achievements.

Thank you for your contributions!

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UWG | Online Challenge

The first three people to email the correct answers to the following questions will win something cool!

1. Who on the staff of the FDC has run some half marathons?

2. What does Matt like about the UWG Ed.D. Online program?

3. Who wrote, Who owns the Learning?

4. The use of which level of Bloom’s Taxonomy leads to the least interesting discussions?

Please email your responses to broepnac@westga.edu. List your full name, contact information and department. All questions must be answered correctly. Items awarded are for faculty use and will be transferred to department inventory. Thank you!