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Section IV: New Practices

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Two of the current trends in higher education concern the use of technology in teaching and teaching critical thinking. Faculty developers must stay abreast of the applications of new technology in teaching and learning, as well as creative uses for existing technology, in order to help faculty members select and use technology effectively. The first two articles in this section address these issues and provide working examples of applications. The third article describes a method for teaching critical thinking using an eight-step process based on Stephen Brookfield's work.

Electronic mail offers a method of communication between teachers and students that can be personal and direct or completely anonymous. Student-teacher (or teacher-student) contact can occur at any time, and various teaching and learning functions can therefore take place anytime and anywhere. The article by James Hassett, Charles Spuches, and Sarah Webster, is based on their experience in using e-mail in their courses. They suggest three basic uses for e-mail—course management and support, teaching and learning, and course evaluation and feedback—and provide rationales and practical examples for each of the applications.

In 1985, Robert Lewis began to explore ways to elicit more useful information from his student course evaluations by creating a data base of student responses and using simple statistical techniques to analyze the results. His article describes the methods he used and examples of the kinds of questions he tried to answer using the data base. Although his ratings, like those of many teachers, were generally positive, he

was curious about the responses of sub-groups within each class and how they reacted to specific elements of the course. In one case, he tested whether "challenge" or "enjoyment" was more important for learning particular elements of the course, and concluded that "enjoyment has a higher relationship with learning than challenge." This use of computers illustrates the power that technology can place in the hands of individual teachers.

Classroom examples of the application of critical thinking theory are still uncommon in the literature. The article by S. Kay Thornhill and Melissa Wafer provides a clear picture of the strategy they used for incorporating critical thinking into a clinical course in nursing. Their example offers a model for other teachers, especially those in professional education, to teach critical thinking as an integral part of the curriculum.