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Winter 2013

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▼ **POD 2014 Conference**

Presentations 2014  
Information for  
Presenters 2014

▼ **POD 2013 Conference**

Create@POD 2013  
Excursions 2013  
Pre-Conference  
Workshops 2013  
Plenary Sessions  
Presentations 2013  
Information for  
Presenters

▼ **POD Network News**

POD Network News  
Archives

▼ **Ground Rules and  
Guidelines**

Page Format  
Guidelines  
Step by Step  
Directions for  
Adding New Pages  
to WikiPODia  
Wiki Explanation  
Video

**Thoughts about  
WikiPODia?****WikiPODia Working  
Group Members (a  
partial list)**▼ **Resources & Useful  
Links**

Educational &  
Faculty  
Development  
Websites & Program  
Information  
Periodicals Related  
to College Teaching  
for General  
Readership  
Topical Resources  
Useful Links

**Sitemap****Recent site activity**

[Contact the Editor \(Fall  
2014\)](#)

edited by Emily Gravett

[Contact the Editor \(Spring  
2015\)](#)

edited by Emily Gravett

[POD Network News](#) > [POD Network News Archives](#) >

## Winter 2013

**POD Network News****Winter 2013****INSIDE THIS ISSUE:****President's Message**

[Notes from the POD  
Office](#)

[Conference Wrap-up](#)

[2012 Award Winners](#)

[Election Results](#)

[Guest Columns](#)

[Journal on Excellence in  
College Teaching](#)

[Committee Updates](#)

[Member News](#)

[Reminders and Save-the-  
Dates](#)

[POD Essays on  
Teaching Excellence](#)

[Contact the Editor](#)

**Teaching in Times of Tragedy**

Following the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, I wrote two companion articles (one with Therese Huston) based on two studies of helpful interventions for educators teaching in times of tragedies. Following the devastation brought on by hurricane Katrina, then-president Matt Ouellett decided to make them publicly available on the POD website<sup>[1]</sup>.

Therese and I never guessed the papers would have an enduring shelf life. We simply couldn't conjure other tragedies beyond rare occurrences of international terrorist attacks and natural disasters. Instead, we regularly receive updates on how they have been used to help educators deal with the modern all-American tragedy of school shootings. From Columbine to Virginia Tech to the recent massacre in Newtown, CT, there have been 31 school shootings in the US, more than double the rest of the world combined. The frequency of such occurrences was underscored by the absurd and surreal news that Vice President Joe Biden's press conference on gun control on Thursday January 10 collided with the report of yet another school shooting.

When I spent my presidential year insisting that POD take on more of its advocacy mantle and speak out on issues in education, I had in mind maybe the plight of adjunct faculty, not the minefield of the gun control debate. And yet here we are. As we grieve the senseless loss of the students and of the heroic educators who died trying to protect them from harm, I encourage all of you to educate yourselves, listen to your conscience, and take individual actions that weave justice in the world. But what can we do as an organization? Will we always play catch up with pedagogies for dealing with tragedies? How does faculty development speak to these issues?

The highlight of the Seattle conference for me was Mike Wesch's keynote, with his exhortation to (help faculty and students) cultivate wonder. The sense of curiosity, significance, and connectedness that cascades down from this breaks the "Vicious Cycle of Whatever" with its fragmentation and loss of meaning and power. The wonder, he promised us, can transfigure it into the "Virtuous Cycle of Whatever," where we realize we make the world, embrace vulnerability, invite connections, join the symphony, celebrate the actual while pursuing the possible, and "whatever" is possible. The Executive Committee and the

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edited by Emily Gravett

[Member News](#)  
edited by Emily Gravett

[Committee Updates](#)  
edited by Emily Gravett

[View All](#)

## Navigation

Conference Committee were so energized by these possibilities that we decided to dedicate the next conference to them, with the theme “Freedom to Risk, Freedom to Connect, Freedom to Learn.”

While much of the debate on guns also centers on notions of freedom, it is the learning part that is crucially missing. In a cursory exercise applying the seven principles of learning to some of the extreme positions I have seen in the media in the last days, I noticed the following. Misconceptions about guns and shootings abound. Many people don't seem to know much, and they don't connect the dots among the things they do know. They simply don't believe that any of the thoughtful proposals out there will reduce the death toll, which kills any motivation to engage in problem solving. Many are stuck at dualistic stages of intellectual development, with only one right way to look at the issue, an “us vs. them” mentality, and deep animosity toward anybody who disagrees. And, finally, some are very unsophisticated metacognitive thinkers, unaware of and uninterested in the logical flaws in their arguments, as in the case of the Sandy Hook “truthers.”

Alas, the refusal to learn is not just a trait of some extremists, but a disposition embedded into our society as policy. For instance, the Center for Disease Control has been barred from doing research on the causes and prevention of gun violence since 1996. Fortunately, following some excellent advocacy by a group of over 100 crime scientists led by the Crime Lab of the University of Chicago<sup>[2]</sup>, President Obama just reversed this predicament in one of his executive orders.

If lack of learning is part of the problem, then teaching is part of the solution. Therefore, we—the teaching and learning people—on a cosmic level, are part of the solution. Every workshop on teaching controversial topics we facilitate; every article on promoting civility in the classroom we share with our faculty; every consultation on fostering critical thinking we conduct; every learning community on contemplative pedagogy we run; every small way in which we help faculty teach students how they can use the tools of their discipline to embrace complexity and nuance instead of absolutism; every such intervention ripples through wave after wave of students. As one of my graduate students wrote to me: “Your workshops make us not just better teachers, but better people.”

As we wrestle with this tragedy, we realize society desperately needs what we offer. We renew our commitment to education, and to a vision of a mature, courageous, and compassionate society.

—Michele DiPietro, POD President

<sup>[1]</sup> <http://podnetwork.org/resources/crises.htm>.

<sup>[2]</sup> <https://crimelab.uchicago.edu/sites/crimelab.uchicago.edu/files/uploads/Biden%20Commissi>

Subpages (10): [2012 Award Winners](#) [Committee Updates](#) [Conference Wrap-up](#) [Election Results](#) [Guest Columns](#) [Journal on Excellence in College Teaching](#) [Member News](#) [Notes from the POD Office](#) [POD Essays on Teaching Excellence](#) [Reminders and Save-the-Dates](#)



Add files

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Add a comment

## Notes from the POD Office

Updated Apr 15, 2013, 8:23 AM


 Search this site
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Welcome to WikiPODia

Topics

POD Conferences

POD Committees

POD TIGs

POD Awards

## ▼ POD 2014 Conference

Presentations 2014  
Information for  
Presenters 2014

## ▼ POD 2013 Conference

Create@POD 2013  
Excursions 2013  
Pre-Conference  
Workshops 2013  
Plenary Sessions  
Presentations 2013  
Information for  
Presenters

## ▼ POD Network News

POD Network News  
Archives

## ▼ Ground Rules and Guidelines

Page Format  
Guidelines  
Step by Step  
Directions for  
Adding New Pages  
to WikiPODia  
Wiki Explanation  
Video

## Thoughts about WikiPODia?

## WikiPODia Working Group Members (a partial list)

## ▼ Resources &amp; Useful Links

Educational &  
Faculty  
Development  
Websites & Program  
Information  
Periodicals Related  
to College Teaching  
for General  
Readership  
Topical Resources  
Useful Links

## Sitemap

## Recent site activity

[Contact the Editor \(Fall 2014\)](#)

edited by Emily Gravett

[Contact the Editor \(Spring 2015\)](#)

edited by Emily Gravett

[POD Network News](#) > [POD Network News Archives](#) > [Winter 2013](#) >

## Notes from the POD Office



## POD Network News

## Winter 2013

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

[Notes from the POD Office](#)

[Conference Wrap-up](#)

[2012 Award Winners](#)

[Election Results](#)

[Guest Columns](#)

[Journal on Excellence in](#)

[College Teaching](#)

[Committee Updates](#)

[Member News](#)

[Reminders and Save-the-Dates](#)

[POD Essays on Teaching Excellence](#)

[Contact the Editor](#)



The ECRC website group, led by Eli Collins-Brown, has been working closely on the development of the new POD website with Blue Riot Labs, a web design firm in Denver, CO. A few of the exciting features include a completely redesigned look and interface, a feature-rich, searchable members-only section, and real-time payment processing. Look for the launch sometime this spring!

We set yet another attendance record at our fall 2012 conference in Seattle with 809 people registering! Thanks to everyone who made it powerful in content and not just numbers.

Planning for the 2013 conference in Pittsburgh, PA is well underway. The theme this year is **Freedom to Connect -- Freedom to Risk -- Freedom to Learn**. Stay tuned for announcements about plenaries and other developments. The conference will be held at the historic Omni William Penn Hotel, the same location of the 2007 conference.

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[POD Essays on Teaching Excellence](#)  
edited by Emily Gravett

[Member News](#)  
edited by Emily Gravett

[Committee Updates](#)  
edited by Emily Gravett

[View All](#)

**Navigation**

 Add a comment

## Conference Wrap-up Updated Apr 15, 2013, 8:21 AM


 Search this site
by Members of the Professional and Organizational Development Network in Higher Education | [www.podnetwork.org](http://www.podnetwork.org)

Welcome to WikiPODia

Topics

POD Conferences

POD Committees

POD TIGs

POD Awards

▼ **POD 2014 Conference**

Presentations 2014  
Information for  
Presenters 2014

▼ **POD 2013 Conference**

Create@POD 2013  
Excursions 2013  
Pre-Conference  
Workshops 2013  
Plenary Sessions  
Presentations 2013  
Information for  
Presenters

▼ **POD Network News**

POD Network News  
Archives

▼ **Ground Rules and  
Guidelines**

Page Format  
Guidelines  
Step by Step  
Directions for  
Adding New Pages  
to WikiPODia  
Wiki Explanation  
Video

**Thoughts about  
WikiPODia?****WikiPODia Working  
Group Members (a  
partial list)**▼ **Resources & Useful  
Links**

Educational &  
Faculty  
Development  
Websites & Program  
Information  
Periodicals Related  
to College Teaching  
for General  
Readership  
Topical Resources  
Useful Links

**Sitemap****Recent site activity**

[Contact the Editor \(Fall  
2014\)](#)

edited by Emily Gravett

[Contact the Editor \(Spring  
2015\)](#)

edited by Emily Gravett

[POD Network News](#) > [POD Network News Archives](#) > [Winter 2013](#) >

## Conference Wrap-up

**POD Network News****Winter 2013****INSIDE THIS ISSUE:**

[Notes from the POD  
Office](#)

[Conference Wrap-up](#)

[2012 Award Winners](#)

[Election Results](#)

[Guest Columns](#)

[Journal on Excellence in  
College Teaching](#)

[Committee Updates](#)

[Member News](#)

[Reminders and Save-the-  
Dates](#)

[POD Essays on  
Teaching Excellence](#)

[Contact the Editor](#)

**POD 2012 Conference Highlights**

The POD 2012 Conference in Seattle, WA, Pencils & Pixels—21st Century Practices in Higher Education, enjoyed attendance by over 800 participants. With more than 230 sessions, including pre-conference workshops, interactive and roundtable sessions, research sessions, and posters, attendees were busy and engaged. Between sessions, new collaborations emerged at post-it and visual thinking stations throughout the display area.



[Images from the 2012 conference are available on Flickr.](#)

**Highlights of the conference included:**

- An overwhelmingly positive response to Michael Wesch's plenary, "The End of Wonder in an Age of Whatever."
- Experiments with new program formats such as Guidebook and ePubs that kept attendees in the know, no matter what e-device(s) they brought.
- A rollicking "Create@POD" night of digital stories and public service announcements for popular educational theories.



[POD Essays on Teaching Excellence](#)

edited by Emily Gravett

[Member News](#)

edited by Emily Gravett

[Committee Updates](#)

edited by Emily Gravett

[View All](#)
[Navigation](#)


- Backchannels, in both pencil and pixel formats, where attendees shared and processed many POD experiences.



This year's conference Freedom to Connect -- Freedom to Risk -- Freedom to Learn will take place November 6-10, 2013 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. We'll explore the diverse landscape of higher education and the learning journey that includes questioning, experimentation, discovery and wisdom. We're building on Michael Wesch's 2012 POD Conference plenary, which urged us to venture out beyond our personal and professional comfort zones and marvel at new learning opportunities.



vibrant city has to offer!

More information and the call for proposals can be viewed [here](#).

Pittsburgh is a fitting locale because it is a place of reinvention and resilience. Pittsburgh is a thriving metropolis nicknamed “College City” because of its 33 colleges and universities. Famous folks and risk takers from Pittsburgh include artist Andy Warhol, steel magnate and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie, playwright August Wilson, choreographer and dancer Martha Graham, scientist Jonas Salk, and writer Gertrude Stein. Get excited about Pittsburgh and [learn](#) about what this



Victoria Bhavsar & Patty Payette, Conference co-chairs

[vbhavsar@csupomona.edu](mailto:vbhavsar@csupomona.edu), [patty.payette@louisville.edu](mailto:patty.payette@louisville.edu)

Allison Boye & Lisa Kurz, Program co-chairs

[allison.p.boyce@ttu.edu](mailto:allison.p.boyce@ttu.edu), [kurz@indiana.edu](mailto:kurz@indiana.edu)

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## 2012 Award Winners

Updated Apr 15, 2013, 8:21 AM


 Search this site
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Welcome to WikiPODia

Topics

POD Conferences

POD Committees

POD TIGs

POD Awards

▼ **POD 2014 Conference**

Presentations 2014  
Information for  
Presenters 2014

▼ **POD 2013 Conference**

Create@POD 2013  
Excursions 2013  
Pre-Conference  
Workshops 2013  
Plenary Sessions  
Presentations 2013  
Information for  
Presenters

▼ **POD Network News**

POD Network News  
Archives

▼ **Ground Rules and Guidelines**

Page Format  
Guidelines  
Step by Step  
Directions for  
Adding New Pages  
to WikiPODia  
Wiki Explanation  
Video

**Thoughts about WikiPODia?****WikiPODia Working Group Members (a partial list)**▼ **Resources & Useful Links**

Educational &  
Faculty  
Development  
Websites & Program  
Information  
Periodicals Related  
to College Teaching  
for General  
Readership  
Topical Resources  
Useful Links

**Sitemap****Recent site activity**

[Contact the Editor \(Fall 2014\)](#)  
edited by Emily Gravett

[Contact the Editor \(Spring 2015\)](#)  
edited by Emily Gravett

[POD Network News](#) > [POD Network News Archives](#) > [Winter 2013](#) >

## 2012 Award Winners



**POD Network News**  
**Winter 2013**

**INSIDE THIS ISSUE:**[Notes from the POD](#)[Office](#)[Conference Wrap-up](#)[2012 Award Winners](#)[Election Results](#)[Guest Columns](#)[Journal on Excellence in](#)[College Teaching](#)[Committee Updates](#)[Member News](#)

[Reminders and Save-the-Dates](#)

[POD Essays on Teaching Excellence](#)

[Contact the Editor](#)

### Robert J. Menges Award for Outstanding Research in Educational Development

The 2012 Menges award winners were:

#### Effects of Virtual Labs and Cooperative Learning in Anatomy Instruction

Andrew Saltarelli and Cary Roeth, Michigan State University William Saltarelli, Central Michigan University

#### Empowering Faculty to Improve Students' Learning through Collaborative Assessment

Mary-Ann Winkelmess, University of Illinois

### POD Innovation Award

**Finalists and Recipients**

Congratulations to Bridget Arend and Kathy Keairns (University of Denver), the recipients of the 2012 POD Innovation Award! Their winning submission, "Online New Faculty Workshop," details a workshop that exposes new faculty to a variety of teaching strategies and educational technologies, and models best practice in course design and teaching. Participants work through interactive modules and contribute to discussion forums, blogs, wikis, and quizzes to demonstrate completion, and optional online discussions, live online webinars, and face-to-face sessions follow in the fall. This online version of the workshop saw vastly increased attendance, and is now required for all new faculty at the university.

Finalists for the Innovation Award included: Emily Hixon, Katherine Myseliwicz, and Heather Zamojski (Purdue University Calumet) for "TechHarmony: Matching Faculty with the Right Tools"; Mike Truong (University of California, Merced) for "Mobile App Learning Lounge"; Howard Chiou and Brian Croxall (Emory University) for "Changing Graduate Student Teaching One Fro-Yo and BanhMi at a Time"; and Vanneise Collins and Kun Huang (University of North Texas Health Science Center) for "Assessment Tools for Measuring Faculty Knowledge of and Confidence in Promoting Students' Higher Order Thinking." It was an incredibly competitive pool of worthy candidates!

**The Innovation Lamp**

[POD Essays on Teaching Excellence](#)

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[Committee Updates](#)

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[View All](#)

## Navigation

The beloved stained glass Innovation Award/Bright Idea lamp, which shattered in transit to last year's conference, has been painstakingly repaired with help from Kelly Cara and Chantal Levesque-Bristol. Many thanks to all involved with the restoration! To preserve this fragile piece of POD history, the POD Core Committee approved the transfer of the lamp to the POD Archives, where it can safely endure as an emblem of all of the wonderful innovations that POD membership brings to the field of faculty and organizational development.

—Allison Boye, Innovation Award Committee Chair

## Bob Pierleoni Spirit of POD Award



Each year, the Spirit of POD Service Award Subcommittee has the option of presenting this award to one or more POD members. This award recognizes members who have made selfless contributions through their long-time professional service to the organization and the field through: a) steady participation in POD in more than routine ways, b) sharing knowledge, experience, materials, ideas and support freely to others, c) exercising innovative leadership in the organization, d) exemplifying the philosophy, principles and practices of POD, and e) contribution substantially to the profession of faculty, instructional and organizational development as well as to the larger education community. At the 2012 Annual POD Conference this award was given to **Matt Ouellett, UMASS, Amherst**.

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Welcome to WikiPODia

Topics

POD Conferences

POD Committees

POD TIGs

POD Awards

▼ **POD 2014 Conference**

Presentations 2014  
Information for  
Presenters 2014

▼ **POD 2013 Conference**

Create@POD 2013  
Excursions 2013  
Pre-Conference  
Workshops 2013  
Plenary Sessions  
Presentations 2013  
Information for  
Presenters

▼ **POD Network News**

POD Network News  
Archives

▼ **Ground Rules and  
Guidelines**

Page Format  
Guidelines  
Step by Step  
Directions for  
Adding New Pages  
to WikiPODia  
Wiki Explanation  
Video

**Thoughts about  
WikiPODia?****WikiPODia Working  
Group Members (a  
partial list)**▼ **Resources & Useful  
Links**

Educational &  
Faculty  
Development  
Websites & Program  
Information  
Periodicals Related  
to College Teaching  
for General  
Readership  
Topical Resources  
Useful Links

**Sitemap****Recent site activity**

[Contact the Editor \(Fall  
2014\)](#)

edited by Emily Gravett

[Contact the Editor \(Spring  
2015\)](#)

edited by Emily Gravett

[POD Network News](#) > [POD Network News Archives](#) > [Winter 2013](#) >

## Election Results

**POD Network News****Winter 2013****INSIDE THIS ISSUE:****Core Committee Elected**

[Notes from the POD  
Office](#)

Congratulations to these new Core Committee Members.

[Conference Wrap-up](#)

[2012 Award Winners](#)

[Election Results](#)

[Guest Columns](#)

[Journal on Excellence in  
College Teaching](#)

[Committee Updates](#)

[Member News](#)

[Reminders and Save-the-  
Dates](#)

[POD Essays on  
Teaching Excellence](#)

[Contact the Editor](#)



*Pictured L-R: Laura Cruz, Western Carolina University; Michael Palmer, University of Virginia; Cassandra V. Horii, California Institute of Technology.*

*Not pictured: Natasha Haugnes, Academy of Art University; Michael Reder, Connecticut College.*

**Leslie Ortquist-Ahrens POD's next President Elect**

[POD Essays on Teaching Excellence](#)

edited by Emily Gravett

[Member News](#)

edited by Emily Gravett

[Committee Updates](#)

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[View All](#)



Ortquist-Ahrens was elected by the Core Committee at its meeting in October. She is Associate Professor of Comparative Literature and Scholar of Teaching and Learning at the Center for Transformative Learning, Berea College.

## Navigation

 [Add files](#)

## Comments



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 Search this site
by Members of the Professional and Organizational Development Network in Higher Education | [www.podnetwork.org](http://www.podnetwork.org)
[Welcome to WikiPODia](#)
[Topics](#)
[POD Conferences](#)
[POD Committees](#)
[POD TIGs](#)
[POD Awards](#)
▼ **POD 2014 Conference**

Presentations 2014  
Information for  
Presenters 2014

▼ **POD 2013 Conference**

Create@POD 2013  
Excursions 2013  
Pre-Conference  
Workshops 2013  
Plenary Sessions  
Presentations 2013  
Information for  
Presenters

▼ **POD Network News**

POD Network News  
Archives

▼ **Ground Rules and  
Guidelines**

Page Format  
Guidelines  
Step by Step  
Directions for  
Adding New Pages  
to WikiPODia  
Wiki Explanation  
Video

**Thoughts about  
WikiPODia?****WikiPODia Working  
Group Members (a  
partial list)**▼ **Resources & Useful  
Links**

Educational &  
Faculty  
Development  
Websites & Program  
Information  
Periodicals Related  
to College Teaching  
for General  
Readership  
Topical Resources  
Useful Links

**Sitemap****Recent site activity**

[Contact the Editor \(Fall  
2014\)](#)

edited by Emily Gravett

[Contact the Editor \(Spring  
2015\)](#)

edited by Emily Gravett

[POD Network News](#) > [POD Network News Archives](#) > [Winter 2013](#) >

## Guest Columns

**POD Network News****Winter 2013****INSIDE THIS ISSUE:**

This issue features three guest columns contributed by POD members.

[Notes from the POD  
Office](#)

[Conference Wrap-up](#)

[2012 Award Winners](#)

[Election Results](#)

[Guest Columns](#)

[Journal on Excellence in](#)

[College Teaching](#)

[Committee Updates](#)

[Member News](#)

[Reminders and Save-the-  
Dates](#)

[POD Essays on  
Teaching Excellence](#)

[Contact the Editor](#)

### Positioning a New Teaching and Learning Center on Campus: What We Learned from the Communications Initiative at CEDU (Center for Teaching Excellence at Universidad Del Norte)

*Contributed by Edna Manotas, Communications and Educational Material Design Coordinator, and Anabella Martinez, Ed.D., Director, Center for Teaching Excellence, Universidad del Norte, Barranquilla, Colombia*

More than a thousand faculty members from different academic areas and ranks, with diverse backgrounds and teaching experience are not an easy target for a marketing campaign to position the new teaching center at Uninorte. In light of this it is not easy to identify the best means and messages through which to communicate with faculty. We have to start by recognizing that we have a diverse group in all possible manifestations. Early on we came to understand that some professors may be drawn to our programs and services given their interest in conducting SOTL and others may be interested in getting feedback on their teaching. [Read more.](#)

### How Does a Teaching Center Decide What to Do? Parameters and Questions for Strategic Decision-Making

*Contributed by Constance Ewing Cook, Executive Director, Center for Research on Learning and Teaching (CRLT), University of Michigan*

I just received an email from a teaching center colleague at a large public university. She said, "The visibility of our center has increased and we are being approached with more and more requests for support from all over campus. While this is a good thing in many ways, we are already spread pretty thin." She wondered if the University of Michigan's Center for Research on Learning and Teaching (CRLT) has a review process for requests that we could share with her. [Read more.](#)

### International Faculty Development Partnerships: Building "Elastic" Needs Assessments

*Contributed by Andrew State, Makerere University, Uganda, and Mary Wright, University of Michigan, USA*

Faculty development has evolved into a field with global reach (Chism, Gosling, & Sorcinelli, 2010; Dezure et al., 2012). Past POD Conference sessions and *To Improve the Academy* articles have shared perspectives and best practices on collaborations with Asia, the Middle East, and West Africa, among other regions (e.g., Babarinde, 2011; Schram, Cook, Kaplan & Zhu, 2011; Dezure, et al. 2011; Lee, 2011). Here, we build on this prior work by spotlighting a

[POD Essays on Teaching Excellence](#)

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[Member News](#)

edited by Emily Gravett

[Committee Updates](#)

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[View All](#)

single geographical and cultural context for faculty development collaborations (Uganda) and on a specific approach for development of teaching center capacity, a needs assessment survey. [Read more.](#)

## Navigation

Subpages (3): [How Does a Teaching Center Decide What to Do?](#) [International Faculty Development Partnerships](#) [Positioning a New Teaching and Learning Center](#)



 [Add files](#)

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Welcome to WikiPODia

Topics

POD Conferences

POD Committees

POD TIGs

POD Awards

▼ **POD 2014 Conference**

Presentations 2014  
Information for  
Presenters 2014

▼ **POD 2013 Conference**

Create@POD 2013  
Excursions 2013  
Pre-Conference  
Workshops 2013  
Plenary Sessions  
Presentations 2013  
Information for  
Presenters

▼ **POD Network News**

POD Network News  
Archives

▼ **Ground Rules and  
Guidelines**

Page Format  
Guidelines  
Step by Step  
Directions for  
Adding New Pages  
to WikiPODia  
Wiki Explanation  
Video

**Thoughts about  
WikiPODia?****WikiPODia Working  
Group Members (a  
partial list)**▼ **Resources & Useful  
Links**

Educational &  
Faculty  
Development  
Websites & Program  
Information  
Periodicals Related  
to College Teaching  
for General  
Readership  
Topical Resources  
Useful Links

**Sitemap****Recent site activity**

[Contact the Editor \(Fall  
2014\)](#)

edited by Emily Gravett

[Contact the Editor \(Spring  
2015\)](#)

edited by Emily Gravett

[POD Network News](#) > [POD Network News Archives](#) > [Winter 2013](#) >

## Journal on Excellence in College Teaching

**POD Network News****Winter 2013****INSIDE THIS ISSUE:**

[Notes from the POD  
Office](#)

[Conference Wrap-up](#)

[2012 Award Winners](#)

[Election Results](#)

[Guest Columns](#)

[Journal on Excellence in  
College Teaching](#)

[Committee Updates](#)

[Member News](#)

[Reminders and Save-the-  
Dates](#)

[POD Essays on  
Teaching Excellence](#)

[Contact the Editor](#)



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### Comments

[POD Essays on Teaching Excellence](#)  
edited by Emily Gravett

[Member News](#)  
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[Committee Updates](#)  
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[View All](#)

## Navigation



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Add a comment

## Committee Updates

Updated Apr 15, 2013, 8:21 AM


 Search this site
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Welcome to WikiPODia

Topics

POD Conferences

POD Committees

POD TIGs

POD Awards

▼ **POD 2014 Conference**

Presentations 2014  
Information for  
Presenters 2014

▼ **POD 2013 Conference**

Create@POD 2013  
Excursions 2013  
Pre-Conference  
Workshops 2013  
Plenary Sessions  
Presentations 2013  
Information for  
Presenters

▼ **POD Network News**

POD Network News  
Archives

▼ **Ground Rules and  
Guidelines**

Page Format  
Guidelines  
Step by Step  
Directions for  
Adding New Pages  
to WikiPODia  
Wiki Explanation  
Video

**Thoughts about  
WikiPODia?****WikiPODia Working  
Group Members (a  
partial list)**▼ **Resources & Useful  
Links**

Educational &  
Faculty  
Development  
Websites & Program  
Information  
Periodicals Related  
to College Teaching  
for General  
Readership  
Topical Resources  
Useful Links

**Sitemap****Recent site activity**

[Contact the Editor \(Fall  
2014\)](#)

edited by Emily Gravett

[Contact the Editor \(Spring  
2015\)](#)

edited by Emily Gravett

[POD Network News](#) > [POD Network News Archives](#) > [Winter 2013](#) >

## Committee Updates

**POD Network News****Winter 2013****INSIDE THIS ISSUE:**

[Notes from the POD  
Office](#)

[Conference Wrap-up](#)

[2012 Award Winners](#)

[Election Results](#)

[Guest Columns](#)

[Journal on Excellence in  
College Teaching](#)

[Committee Updates](#)

[Member News](#)

[Reminders and Save-the-  
Dates](#)

[POD Essays on  
Teaching Excellence](#)

[Contact the Editor](#)

### Electronic Resources Communication Committee

The Electronic Communications Resources Committee (ECRC) was very involved with the Pencils to Pixels Conference in Seattle. We incorporated the use of electronic media for the conference program, working closely with the Conference Committee and implementing ideas from POD members.

Using an application called Guidebook, we developed a version of the conference program that provided multiple ways to view the conference sessions, by day or by topic area, maps of the hotel to easily find session rooms, and a link to the conference Twitter feed. The Guidebook had 306 unique downloads and was viewed on iOS, Android, and other web-enabled devices. We also produced an ePub version of the conference program that could be downloaded from WikiPODia and viewed on any mobile device.

We encouraged conference attendees to see the value of social networking at the Pencils to Pixels Conference and we promoted the use of nametag inserts (a paper version of social networking) and Twitter (an electronic version of social networking). The active Twitter feed during the plenary sessions allowed attendees to dialogue and share resources during and after those sessions.

ECRC is excited about the upcoming year, which will include the launch of a new POD website, increased social media activity, and greater collaboration with other POD committees. Look for the new POD website in late February or early March. The new website will be more dynamic and a members-only area will include access to fantastic resources!

### Professional Development Committee

The Professional Development Committee (PDC) is proud to announce that there were several POD sponsored events held in conjunction with the AAC&U 2013 Annual Meeting held in Atlanta, Georgia from January 23rd-26th. Dr. Connie Schroeder, Dr. Mary Deane Sorcinelli, and Dr. Adrianna Kezar led the Organizational Development Institute (ODI) titled, "Building the Missing Infrastructure of Higher Education: Developing Centers of Teaching and Learning, Departments, and Instructors as Change Agents." Dr. Deandra Little represented POD by leading a workshop titled, "Building Collaborations from in-between Places: Faculty Developers' Roles Leading Institutional Changes." Dr. Kathryn Plank and Dr. Eli Collins-Brown gave a POD sponsored session titled, "Teaching Centers and the Evolving Role of Technology in Higher Education." The work of these esteemed presenters

[POD Essays on Teaching](#)[Excellence](#)

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[Member News](#)

edited by Emily Gravett

[Committee Updates](#)

edited by Emily Gravett

[View All](#)

## Navigation

helps POD to develop presence with other organizations and demonstrate our expertise in faculty development. The PDC will issue a Call for Proposals for the 2014 Leadership Development Institute in early spring. Look for this call and others soon!

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Topics

POD Conferences

POD Committees

POD TIGs

POD Awards

▼ **POD 2014 Conference**

Presentations 2014  
Information for  
Presenters 2014

▼ **POD 2013 Conference**

Create@POD 2013  
Excursions 2013  
Pre-Conference  
Workshops 2013  
Plenary Sessions  
Presentations 2013  
Information for  
Presenters

▼ **POD Network News**

POD Network News  
Archives

▼ **Ground Rules and  
Guidelines**

Page Format  
Guidelines  
Step by Step  
Directions for  
Adding New Pages  
to WikiPODia  
Wiki Explanation  
Video

**Thoughts about  
WikiPODia?****WikiPODia Working  
Group Members (a  
partial list)**▼ **Resources & Useful  
Links**

Educational &  
Faculty  
Development  
Websites & Program  
Information  
Periodicals Related  
to College Teaching  
for General  
Readership  
Topical Resources  
Useful Links

**Sitemap****Recent site activity**

[Contact the Editor \(Fall  
2014\)](#)

edited by Emily Gravett

[Contact the Editor \(Spring  
2015\)](#)

edited by Emily Gravett

[POD Network News](#) > [POD Network News Archives](#) > [Winter 2013](#) >

## Member News

**POD Network News****Winter 2013****INSIDE THIS ISSUE:**

[Notes from the POD  
Office](#)

[Conference Wrap-up](#)

[2012 Award Winners](#)

[Election Results](#)

[Guest Columns](#)

[Journal on Excellence in  
College Teaching](#)

[Committee Updates](#)

[Member News](#)

[Reminders and Save-the-  
Dates](#)

[POD Essays on  
Teaching Excellence](#)

[Contact the Editor](#)



**Chris Garrett** has accepted a new position as Director of Faculty Development and Associate Professor of English at the University of Southern Indiana. Prior to assuming this position, he served five years as the Director of the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning at Oklahoma City University. [Learn more about his role at USI.](#)

**John Zubizarreta** made numerous presentations on teaching and learning topics at a variety of academic conferences, including "Using Electronic Learning Portfolios across Disciplines in the LeBow College of Business to Transform Undergraduate Curriculum," at the 25-28 Jan. 2012 Association of American Colleges and Universities in Washington, DC, U.S.A., with colleagues Dana D'Angelo, Chris Finnin, and Jennifer Wright from Drexel University; "Learning Portfolios and the International Student: Students Reflect on a Brave New World of Learning" at the Electronic Portfolio Symposium of the same 2012 Association of American Colleges and Universities, with several Honors Program students; "Are We Really 'Academically Adrift'? Valuing and Promoting Teaching Excellence," a plenary session at the 10-12 Feb. 2012 Lilly-South Conference on College and University Teaching in Greensboro, North Carolina, U.S.A., with colleague Scott Simkins of North Carolina A&T State University; "Reawakening the Value of English and the Humanities in Higher Education," a roundtable discussion with several students at the 29 Feb.-3 Mar. 2012 International Sigma Tau Delta Convention in New Orleans, Louisiana, U.S.A.; "Enhancing Honors Learning with Online Reflective Writing Forums" and "Using the Learning Portfolios for Honors Learning and Program Assessment," both with students, at the 30 Mar.-1 Apr. 2012 Southern Regional Honors Council in Tampa, Florida, U.S.A.; "Improving College Teaching: What Really Works?" at the 24-27 Jul. 2012 International Improving University Teaching conference in Innsbruck, Austria, with colleague Peter Seldin of Pace University; "Faculty Development in Honors through Creative and Active Teaching" and "Defining Core Principles of Honors Education" at the 4-5 Oct. 2012 Evoking Excellence in Higher Education and Beyond International Convention in Groningen, The Netherlands; and "Challenging Faculty to

[POD Essays on Teaching Excellence](#)

edited by Emily Gravett

[Member News](#)

edited by Emily Gravett

[Committee Updates](#)

edited by Emily Gravett

[View All](#)

## Navigation

Challenge Their Students," "Auditing the Development of Honors Programs in The Netherlands," "Discovering Hidden Talent for Honors," and "The Honors Learning Portfolio: Basics and Useful Models," all at the 14-18 Nov. 2012 National Collegiate Honors Council in Boston, Massachusetts, U.S.A., with various colleagues from Holland, Miami University, and University of Washington.

His involvements in POD include serving as a workshop leader and mentor in the pre-conference workshop "How's It Going?" at the 24-28 Oct. 2012 POD conference in Seattle, Washington, U.S.A., and presenting "Creating and Sustaining Faculty Learning Communities at Small Colleges," with colleagues Chris Garrett of the University of Southern Indiana, Crystal Benedicks of Wabash College, Noreen Light of Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, and Claire Parham of Siena College.

John also served as a consultant, workshop leader, and program reviewer at institutions such as Oklahoma City University and Hanze University and Utrecht University in The Netherlands. He also presented "Creative Teaching and Active Learning: Good News about the Road Ahead for Higher Education," at a TEDx event on 16 Jan. 2012, in Columbia, South Carolina, U.S.A.

**Shaun Longstreet**, director of the Center for Teaching and Learning at Marquette University, co-authored an article titled [The Alt-Ac Track](#) that appeared on Inside Higher Ed.

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## Reminders and Save-the-Dates Updated Apr 15, 2013, 8:24 AM


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[Welcome to WikiPODia](#)
[Topics](#)
[POD Conferences](#)
[POD Committees](#)
[POD TIGs](#)
[POD Awards](#)
▼ **POD 2014 Conference**

[Presentations 2014](#)  
[Information for Presenters 2014](#)

▼ **POD 2013 Conference**

[Create@POD 2013](#)  
[Excursions 2013](#)  
[Pre-Conference Workshops 2013](#)  
[Plenary Sessions](#)  
[Presentations 2013](#)  
[Information for Presenters](#)

▼ **POD Network News**

[POD Network News Archives](#)

▼ **Ground Rules and Guidelines**

[Page Format Guidelines](#)  
[Step by Step Directions for Adding New Pages to WikiPODia](#)  
[Wiki Explanation Video](#)

**Thoughts about WikiPODia?****WikiPODia Working Group Members (a partial list)**▼ **Resources & Useful Links**

[Educational & Faculty Development Websites & Program Information](#)  
[Periodicals Related to College Teaching for General Readership](#)  
[Topical Resources](#)  
[Useful Links](#)

**Sitemap****Recent site activity**

[Contact the Editor \(Fall 2014\)](#)

edited by Emily Gravett

[Contact the Editor \(Spring 2015\)](#)

edited by Emily Gravett

[POD Network News](#) > [POD Network News Archives](#) > [Winter 2013](#) >

## Reminders and Save-the-Dates

**INSIDE THIS ISSUE:**

[Notes from the POD Office](#)

[Conference Wrap-up](#)

[2012 Award Winners](#)

[Election Results](#)

[Guest Columns](#)

[Journal on Excellence in College Teaching](#)

[Committee Updates](#)

[Member News](#)

[Reminders and Save-the-Dates](#)

[POD Essays on Teaching Excellence](#)

[Contact the Editor](#)



**Center for Academic Excellence to host 12th Innovative Pedagogy & Course Redesign Conference**

**May 29–31, 2013**

Back after a one-year hiatus, Fairfield University's Center for Academic Excellence will host its 12th Innovative Pedagogy & Course Redesign conference in Fairfield, Connecticut, USA.

The 2013 conference theme is "Collaborations for Empowerment & Learning" and will offer strands on collaborative teaching & learning, technology, the scholarship of teaching & learning, and community-engaged scholarship. Featured interactive presentations include: Dr. Mary Deane Sorcinelli (University of Massachusetts Amherst) on mutual mentoring; Dr. Katie Linder (Suffolk University) on teaching & learning collaborations in higher education; and journal editors Dr. Cathy Burack (Brandeis University) and Dr. Cathy Jordan (University of Minnesota) on community-engaged scholarship and advice on getting your community-engaged scholarship published.

Join us in May on the campus of Fairfield University in Connecticut for this affordable professional development and networking opportunity!

For more information, please visit the Center for Academic Excellence (CAE) conference site: [http://fairfield.edu/cae/cae\\_conference.html](http://fairfield.edu/cae/cae_conference.html)

Questions? Contact the CAE at [cae@fairfield.edu](mailto:cae@fairfield.edu) or (203) 254-4000, extension 2876.

Click [here](#) for a directory of teaching conferences.

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[POD Essays on Teaching Excellence](#)

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[Member News](#)

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[Committee Updates](#)

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[View All](#)

## Navigation

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## POD Essays on Teaching Excellence

Updated Apr 15, 2013, 8:2



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Welcome to WikiPODia

Topics

POD Conferences

POD Committees

POD TIGs

POD Awards

▼ **POD 2014 Conference**

Presentations 2014  
Information for  
Presenters 2014

▼ **POD 2013 Conference**

Create@POD 2013  
Excursions 2013  
Pre-Conference  
Workshops 2013  
Plenary Sessions  
Presentations 2013  
Information for  
Presenters

▼ **POD Network News**

POD Network News  
Archives

▼ **Ground Rules and Guidelines**

Page Format  
Guidelines  
Step by Step  
Directions for  
Adding New Pages to  
WikiPODia  
Wiki Explanation  
Video

**Thoughts about WikiPODia?****WikiPODia Working Group Members (a partial list)**▼ **Resources & Useful Links**

Educational &  
Faculty  
Development  
Websites & Program  
Information  
Periodicals Related  
to College Teaching  
for General  
Readership  
Topical Resources  
Useful Links

**Sitemap****Recent site activity**

[Contact the Editor \(Fall 2014\)](#)  
edited by Emily Gravett

[Contact the Editor \(Spring 2015\)](#)  
edited by Emily Gravett

[POD Network News](#) > [POD Network News Archives](#) > [Winter 2013](#) >

## POD Essays on Teaching Excellence

**POD Network News****Winter 2013****INSIDE THIS ISSUE:**

[Notes from the POD Office](#)

[Conference Wrap-up](#)

[2012 Award Winners](#)

[Election Results](#)

[Guest Columns](#)

[Journal on Excellence in College Teaching](#)

[Committee Updates](#)

[Member News](#)

[Reminders and Save-the-Dates](#)

[POD Essays on Teaching Excellence](#)

[Contact the Editor](#)

*Toward the Best in the Academy Volume 22, Number 3, 2010-11*

*We continue featuring a selected POD Essay on Teaching Excellence in each issue of the POD Network News.*

### Talking with Faculty about Cognitive Science and Learning

*John Girash, Harvard University*

When it comes to teaching, faculty at a research-intensive institution can be very much like our students in relation to their studies: very smart people whose primary interests lie elsewhere or, at least, whose expertise is not in this area. And we hear over and over again the common wisdom that faculty want research-based ideas on teaching. This implies that we can treat the teaching of teachers about research-supported aspects of learning in ways analogous to teaching students about other academic topics.

In introducing research-based ideas into the pedagogical discussion, it can be tough to find a balance between concepts drawn directly from “hard research” vs. ideas that are so digested for practitioners’ use that the underlying research is completely obscured. If you rely too heavily on the former, the content becomes so specific and jargon-filled as to be impenetrable, while at the other extreme, you can end up with just another set of random-seeming “teaching tips” rather than a coherent and well-supported conceptual framework. And, surely, it is not surprising that having a coherent, comprehensible framework of ideas turns out to be of central importance for learning.

### The Brain, Memory & Perception

It’s tempting to think of the human brain purely as a wonderful thinking machine of almost unlimited ability; while this is true in many ways, there are limits to our cognitive capacities that can seem oddly restrictive to the academic and which can, in turn, produce bottlenecks in the learning process. One of the most limiting aspects is the capacity of short-term memory to hold multiple concepts in thought at one time, which is particularly inconvenient as short-term memory is the gateway to the brain’s ability to understand in the present and to long-term learning and retention.<sup>i</sup> Tests of humans’ ability to recall information show that we can only hold up to around seven, perhaps eight, distinct concepts in active thought at one time.<sup>ii</sup> Any more than that and ideas simply get dropped — which provides a

[POD Essays on Teaching Excellence](#)

edited by Emily Gravett

[Member News](#)

edited by Emily Gravett

[Committee Updates](#)

edited by Emily Gravett

[View All](#)

## Navigation

fundamental constraint on lesson design. Fortunately short-term memory seems to have two independent “channels”, one for verbal/textual and one for visual/graphical information, which can double the number of concepts possible to think about at once if they’re chosen with care.

If the teacher you’re working with has a scientific bent, you may wish to discuss the limits of short-term memory pretty much as described in the previous paragraph, but even then you risk running afoul of another limitation of how the brain learns—that even if a person learns something “well”, when that knowledge is completely disconnected from anything else that person already knows, then it’s highly unlikely that the knowledge will ever be activated later on in that person’s thinking; they’ll “know” it but they’ll never use that knowledge.<sup>iii</sup>

### Getting to Learning & Teaching

You probably won’t be surprised that the technique to connect new learning to prior knowledge is called bridging. For example, in discussing novice/expert differences you could talk with a scientist about how, for the novice learner, neurons fire across large swaths of the brain when thinking about a given concept whereas, for an expert in that field, thinking about the same concept, only very specific neural pathways are activated; thus, thinking is just plain easier for an expert. In short, the novice cannot attend to multiple ideas at once, while the expert can.<sup>iv</sup> But this line of reasoning might not serve as bridging for a teacher outside the natural sciences. For example, with a teacher in performance arts or another creative field you might invoke the idea of coaching students on a specific skill so that the students can attend to that aspect alone; in coaching it’s possible – even expected—that the student’s overall performance may suffer temporarily (as their brains are preoccupied with learning the one skill to the exclusion of the whole) but once that is learned (and that neural pathway is well established) then the student can work on integrating it into their overall knowledge.

The coaching model brings up the idea of rehearsal, namely that because concepts held in short-term memory fade or decay unless used, one needs to keep practicing them in order not to lose them. (An everyday example of this is repeating an unfamiliar telephone number to oneself in order to remember it in the short term.) For the teacher this implies the importance of repetition of key ideas, so that students don’t lose track of them during the lesson. Even better is to build in redundancy and opportunities for students’ reflection — for example, foreshadowing, referral, comparisons with related concepts, and different methods of presentation both in order to address the need to keep key concepts alive in short-term memory and to take advantage of its dual-channel nature.<sup>v</sup>

Should one bring up ideas like “rehearsal” and “redundancy” with a teacher and let them stand on their own merits with only “it comes from cog-sci research” as a supporting basis? Possibly not, unless you can link those ideas to practices in the teacher’s field of study (or everyday life) you risk not providing the bridging needed for the teacher to activate and use that knowledge later when they’re actually teaching. Fortunately if they’re interested enough to be discussing these matters in the first place, they may be familiar with something like the classical learning cycle; even better, much of what we can glean from cognitive science maps nicely onto a learning cycle framework.<sup>vi</sup> Undertaking a complete mapping of the learning cycle onto our understanding of cognition would require a separate essay but it is worth noting that in presenting such a mapping (in whole or in part) to a teacher already familiar with the learning cycle you yourself are performing the same sort of “chunking” of low-level information into higher-level organizational units that you might suggest a teaching do for his or her students. This allows the learner (whether your teacher-client, or that teacher’s student) to use up fewer “slots” in their short-term memory in thinking about it, since the unfamiliarity with the low-level information gets subsumed by the more familiar higher-level units. Also this mapping creates ‘bridging’ between current knowledge and new ideas so s/he can access it more easily later.

### Back to the Brain

There's one more cognitive factor that comes into play in the learning cycle: it turns out that the creation of robust neural connections is strongly fostered by the presence of neurochemicals associated with feeling an emotional connection to whatever is being thought about. In other words, learning for long-term retention is more likely when the learner feels an emotional attachment to the material.<sup>vii</sup> (This should come as no surprise, since our strongest memories tend to be of our most emotional experiences.) Reflection, in general, is both an intellectual and an emotional process. I tend to think of it as the learning cycle being bathed in a nutritive bath of emotive neurochemicals, but you can use whatever metaphor works best for the teacher you're working with. So in the end, the idea that making your students care about the material isn't just fluffy "ed school talk" but has a strong scientific rationale behind it.<sup>viii</sup>

There are other ways you can use cognitive concepts in working with faculty, but may want to be careful how and when you choose to do so. For example, if a given teacher's lesson plans implicitly seeks either simple stimulus-response patterns (e.g. asking students only factoid-type questions requiring no thinking) or raw information transfer from teacher to student (e.g., cramming in maximal content with little context or redundancy), but the teacher's assignments look for a high level of analysis or synthesis on the students' part, simply pointing out the contradiction is a form of cognitive conflict that at least has a chance of making an impression — i.e., of breaking the teacher out of a familiar but undesirable cognitive-behavior pattern. No teacher wants to create parrots or automatons out of their students!

The above may be an extreme example that you use with caution, but those times when you come across lower-stakes examples of cognitive conflict within a teacher's practices can be prime opportunities to bring up why breaking a student out of a prior misconception or misapplied skill by using cognitive conflict often makes for a powerful learning moment. Hopefully this essay has brought to mind for you other ways in which you can use the content of your discussions with teachers to illuminate for them.

<sup>i</sup> Even though I use it here, short-term memory is no longer a favored term among researchers, who now refer to the brain's buffer of currently in-use information as working memory, or as a combination of sensory memory + working memory [see for example Mayer & Moreno, 2003. *Educational Psychologist*, 38(1), 43-52.]

<sup>ii</sup> E. F. Redish, 2003. "Teaching Physics with the Physics Suite." (Wiley)

<sup>iii</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>iv</sup> In fact, the ultimate novices – newborn babies – grow new neurons only for the first year or so of life; from that point on learning seems to consist mostly of creating new, efficient neural pathways using existing neurons. The more one learns something, the fewer neurons need to fire in order to think about it effectively. [cf. J. Zull, 2002. "The Art of Changing the Brain." (Stylus)]

<sup>v</sup> A nice side-benefit of bringing up students' learning practices (such as self-reflection) specifically in relation to a teacher's pedagogical practice is that they can be seen as leading directly to the idea of "active learning" — in that the students are engaged cognitively, intellectually and personally with the material — while bypassing any debates as to the specific definition of active learning and of what particular activities students need to be performing for a

given lesson or activity to "count" as active learning per se. To the extent that the teacher fosters students' intentional self-reflection, you may see that as a jumping-off point to discuss such student metacognitive practices in general – but that would also be a topic for another essay.

<sup>vi</sup> To see examples of such mappings, search online for "learning cycle Zull Kolb".

<sup>vii</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>viii</sup> I'm not disparaging "ed school talk" in any way, other than noting that teachers in the so called academic disciplines can be wary of it, and so the research result can provide a

counter if you do encounter such resistance. Note that in principle the students' emotional connection needn't be specifically positive or negative; what matters is the perception of emotional importance.

*John Girash*

*Essays on Teaching Excellence*

Editor: Elizabeth O'Connor Chandler, Director

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Topics

POD Conferences

POD Committees

POD TIGs

POD Awards

## ▼ POD 2014 Conference

Presentations 2014  
Information for  
Presenters 2014

## ▼ POD 2013 Conference

Create@POD 2013  
Excursions 2013  
Pre-Conference  
Workshops 2013  
Plenary Sessions  
Presentations 2013  
Information for  
Presenters

## ▼ POD Network News

POD Network News  
Archives

## ▼ Ground Rules and Guidelines

Page Format  
Guidelines  
Step by Step  
Directions for  
Adding New Pages  
to WikiPODia  
Wiki Explanation  
Video

## Thoughts about WikiPODia?

## WikiPODia Working Group Members (a partial list)

## ▼ Resources &amp; Useful Links

Educational &  
Faculty  
Development  
Websites & Program  
Information  
Periodicals Related  
to College Teaching  
for General  
Readership  
Topical Resources  
Useful Links

## Sitemap

## Recent site activity

[Contact the Editor \(Fall 2014\)](#)  
edited by Emily Gravett

[Contact the Editor \(Spring 2015\)](#)  
edited by Emily Gravett

[POD Network News](#) > [POD Network News Archives](#) > [Fall 2012](#) >

## Contact the Editor



## POD Network News

Fall 2012

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

[Notes from the POD Office](#)

[Newsletter Feedback](#)

[37th Annual POD Conference](#)

[Reconnecting with Our Past](#)

[Call for Core Self-Nominations](#)

[Call for Manuscripts & Reviewers: To Improve the Academy](#)

[Guest Column](#)

[POD Leadership Development Institute](#)

[Journal on Excellence in College Teaching](#)

[The National Teaching and Learning FORUM](#)

[IDEA Center Updates](#)

[Grants and Awards](#)

[Member News](#)



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Since fall 2010, **Amanda G. McKendree** has served as editor of *POD Network News*. Amanda joined the Kaneb Center for Teaching and Learning at the University of Notre Dame as Assistant Director in August 2009 where her primary responsibilities include coordinating university-wide graduate student programming and managing a staff of Graduate Student Associates in developing and facilitating teaching assistant orientations, pedagogy workshops for faculty and teaching assistants, certificate programs, and teaching apprenticeships/fellowships. She also consults with graduate students, faculty, and departments, and provides research services on teaching and learning topics. Her teaching interests include presentations and argumentation, business communication, gendered communication, and integrated marketing communication. Her areas of research activity include crisis communication, business communication pedagogy, and graduate student preparation for the professoriate. She holds a BA in Global Policy Studies, an MPA in Nonprofit/Public Management, and a Ph.D. in Rhetoric.

Please direct any questions or comments to [amckendree@nd.edu](mailto:amckendree@nd.edu). She greatly appreciates your feedback!

[POD Essays on Teaching Excellence](#)

edited by Emily Gravett

[Member News](#)

edited by Emily Gravett

[Committee Updates](#)

edited by Emily Gravett

[View All](#)

[Reminders and Save-the-Dates](#)

[POD Essays on Teaching Excellence](#)

[Contact the Editor](#)



## Navigation

[Add files](#)

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