

# A Community of Learners

**Lana Wachniak, Director  
Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning  
Kennesaw State University**

I STOOD AT THE PODIUM, looked out at the crowd attending the Georgia Conference on College and University Teaching, and posed the question “Who was the best teacher you ever had in college, and why was that person so effective?” There was a slight murmur in the group of almost 300 people as one person yelled “Was that a rhetorical question?” It was a good rhetorical question, but my intent was to get responses from participants. I wanted colleagues to reflect on this question for a few seconds, then share with the larger group the memories they had of their outstanding professors and the ways in which they helped them learn.

“My professor acted as a role model and made me want to learn more!” was one response. Another person said “My professor took time out of a busy schedule to talk to me and act as both mentor and facilitator.” Yet another member of the audience pointed out that he and other students would converge on a specific faculty member’s home and discuss issues brought out in class. The boundaries of his course extended well beyond the classroom walls. One brave soul told about the worst teacher she ever had, and how that experience helped her become the teacher she is today. I asked her what approach was used. “Just lectures — and I will never do that to my students,” was her response.

The purpose of this annual conference hosted by Kennesaw State University was to help us become the most effective teachers that we can be. We came to this conference to learn from one another. Faculty mem-

bers from Georgia and a few other states shared with others the philosophies and pedagogies that work for them. The teaching conference and this edition of *Reaching Through Teaching* are avenues of exchange that help us become more effective in what we do. Many articles were written by colleagues who presented at the conference. Other articles were written by faculty members who have information to share with others.

Why do we attend teaching conferences, read articles, and try so hard to improve our teaching? Faculty members’ rewards do not come easily or quickly. We do not measure our successes by the numbers of students taught during the year or the numbers of grades handed out.

Our “course evaluations” have meaning when students walk down the aisle at graduation and feel as though we are walking with them because we contributed to their educations. We are rewarded when we find that our graduates have reminisced about the “good old days” and that we are a part of their anecdotes and their fond memories. Because of how we teach, and what we teach, we want our students to talk about us, and to remember us because we made a positive impact on their lives. Ultimately, we strive to improve our teaching because we want our students to learn and to be excited about learning.

# New Chalk in the Biology Classroom

**Mark Davis, Associate Professor, Biology,  
North Georgia College and State University**

“I HAVE TO MISS CLASS TOMORROW. Are you just going to lecture?” It was an innocent question from a student during spring quarter 1995. She simply wanted to inform me politely about her impending absence, not cause me to wrestle with my notion of appropriate pedagogy. Many students had asked me this question in the past eight years, but this time it prompted me to think more seriously about my teaching. Like most science faculty, I received no formal training in instruction. I patterned my classroom style after that of my favorite professors and tried to emulate their technique. I never questioned

whether my class performance could be improved by different pedagogy.

In 1995 I was aware of the emerging instructional technologies creeping into the classroom. Popular and professional journal articles referred to these newer teaching tools, but I dismissed the articles as “techspeak.” I had a nagging feeling that I should learn more about the new equipment, but I was a technophobe, not a technophile. Fortunately, my rescue from technophobia came with a small amount of initiative. I applied for and was selected to participate