



Focus on Faculty

Teaching in a Middle Eastern Country

by Harry St. Ours, Professor, Communication Arts Technologies, Rockville

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In many Middle Eastern countries too often thought of in the West as Third World and politically repressive, especially in the Persian Gulf region, petrochemical prosperity and a virtually obsessive commitment to obtaining bleeding-edge technologies have spurred on the development of the most up-to-date communications infrastructures and top-tier higher education institutions. Now, despite (or perhaps because of) ongoing tensions in the region, essential lines of colloquy are being opened as new and established Middle Eastern universities collaborate with Western educators, particularly in the field of communication design.

Design students in the Middle East are voracious for the best the West has to offer, yet misunderstandings between our cultures seem to increase as students struggle to reconcile their reverence for and revulsion of images in Western media, while remaining eager to retain and even enhance the traditional values they sincerely cherish.

During my recent sabbatical leave, I joined a dedicated team of Middle Eastern and Western faculty and administrators to help found the new American University in the emirate of Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates, a university affiliated with the American University in Washington, D.C. Experienced in curriculum development in the field of communication design, I was appointed Chair of the Department of Design and acting Associate Dean of the School of Architecture and Design. During my tenure, I was able to help write and revise the Visual Communication and Multimedia Design degree programs to include the latest in coursework and professional practices. I also created a continuing education program that was able to reach out to interested adult learners, built a Design Management program with the Department of Business and Management for students interested in running communications design companies, and oversaw the creation and installation of state-of-the-art media labs that included hundreds of Macs and PCs and dozens of video workstations and digital photography labs. My department also housed a robust Fine Arts program where I was able to promote visual arts as the backbone of communication design. I helped steer the school through the complex Middle States accreditation process and recruited faculty and staff from around the world.

But most importantly, I was able to reach out to the students in my capacity as a teacher. To me, touching the lives of these wonderful young people was the highlight of my two years there. The students in my classes in many respects reminded me of my classes at Montgomery College. Bright and eager, with perhaps a bit less diversity in the classroom, my students amazed me with their command of English as a second language and their commitment to the coursework as well as to each other. The classes I now teach are better, I think, because of the wider perspective I can bring, especially to international students and others of diverse backgrounds.

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(See *Teaching in a Middle Eastern Country*, page 5)

Strategies to Improve Student Learning from Skip Downing's "On Course" Workshop

by Carol Malmi, Associate Professor, English, Rockville

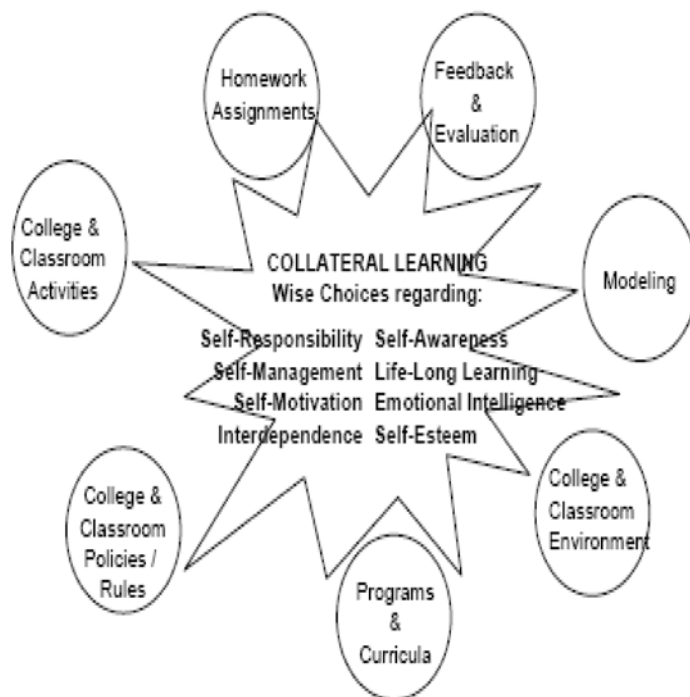
"You must be the change you wish to see in the world."
– Gandhi (quoted by Dr. Skip Downing)

After Skip Downing's intensive, three-day "On Course" workshop in June, 45 MC faculty members emerged with many "positive, personal, specific, and achievable" adaptations of On Course tools for immediate use in summer and fall courses. The workshop took us through seven "domains of influence" and eight "collateral learning" areas experiencing On Course tools and methods that we can use in our own classrooms. (See figure below for the seven "domains of influence" and the eight "collateral learning areas.") "Struggling students don't see options," Skip said. "They see either/or conflict. How can we help them choose wisely and avoid self-sabotage? A lens – a view of the world – determines the view of choices. We must all be opticians." Our way of seeing changed as we tried out different "lenses."

The workshop was a workout. We popped up spontaneously for round robin readings, changed partners and groups more often than square dancers, and periodically stopped the seminar with cries of "Aha!" to share sudden insights. Both exhausted and energized, we left with specific classroom strategies ready to go.

One popular technique was "frontloading" classes with activities to anticipate issues and transform student attitudes. For example, using a case study of diligent and dilatory student performance during the first week can encourage students to take responsibility for their participation and plan ahead for success. "Case studies persist," Skip said. "Students don't want to let go." As students analyze the case study, they are drawn into conflict and tension. They may recognize the roles that they tend to play in real life and turn the scenario into a reality check for their own learning habits. "The one thing that I will use on the first day of class is [a] case study activity to set the stage with students from day one about being responsible and the consequences of their actions. The . . . case will get everyone involved from day one [and] the lesson learned will be powerful!" said Wanda York, an adjunct at MC who teaches education.

The "fork in the road" is another image that can help students make wise choices from the start. It symbolizes the student's ability to choose among options and among attitudes. Attitudes can be negative (from a victim's point of view) or positive (from a creative point of view).



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SEVEN DOMAINS OF INFLUENCE



Fork in the Road: CHOICE

(See *Strategies to Improve Student Learning*, page 3)

(Strategies to Improve Student Learning, from page 2)

“I plan to talk with my students during their orientation hour about ‘fork in the road’ decisions and ‘victim’ versus ‘creator’ mind-sets,” said Sylvia Pulliam-Lackey (Nursing, Takoma Park). “Hopefully this will give them a more positive outlook into the challenge of the nursing program. It should help them assume responsibility for their learning rather than blaming the faculty for problems encountered. They should become pro-active once they can see the options available to them.”

Another method to foster student responsibility is to give the class a list of students’ top ten complaints, ask the class to rewrite the complaints in a positive or problem-solving light, and then ask if they hear and feel the difference. This might take place on the first day, when students read the syllabus and recognize challenges ahead. Instead of leaving anxiety or frustration to fester in silence, bring the issues out into the open. Raising awareness about expectations and attitudes can help students position themselves to overcome challenges and avoid problems.

Victim Vs. Creator Attitudes

VICTIM	CREATOR
Response to Challenge: •Blaming •Complaining •Excusing •Repeating behavior Result: •Seldom achieves goals	Response to Challenge: •Seeking solutions •Taking action •Trying something new Result: •Often achieves goals

Mixing it up is another method faculty are trying out. One technique is the “jigsaw puzzle.” The jigsaw puzzle breaks up stagnant groups, exposes students to a variety of viewpoints, and helps them integrate ideas. Diane Chapin (English, Germantown) planned to use the jigsaw with small groups or teams in English101. “In English 101, we teach writing by examining different types of essays – descriptive, cause and effect, compare and contrast, etc.,” she said. “But we’re limited in how many we can read and how deeply we can examine them. Each person on a team will read and analyze a different essay. Team members then will leave their ‘home’ team and work with those reading the same essay on other teams. Then they’ll return to their home team to share what they’ve learned.”

Another way to encourage students to participate in relatively comfortable ways is to use the “popcorn” method. Instead of reading or assigning students to read long passages, the instructor asks students to volunteer in a spontaneous round robin –when one student finishes a passage, another pops up to read the next. If a long silence occurs between pops, the



Sylvia Lackey and Arsu Chellaiah, Workshop Participants

(See Strategies to Improve Student Learning, page 8)

From the Interim Co-Director of the CTL



The CTL, along with the faculty and staff, has started the year looking forward to new initiatives and new challenges. As Interim Co-Director of the CTL, I am responsible for the programming, and it is exciting to witness all of the meaningful professional development activities that are occurring at Montgomery College. This issue gives you a taste of what is happening: one faculty member writes about his sabbatical in the Middle East, another professor shares his experience with using contracts with his students, while another reports on her experience at the highly successful three-day workshop with Skip Downing this summer. Rounding out the articles in this issue is a report on the part-time faculty fellowship program.

I encourage you to write about your experiences for a future *Focus on Faculty* newsletter. Visit the CTL on MyMC and the CTL website <http://www.montgomerycollege.edu/ctl> ❖

- Patti Bartlett

Putting Contracts on Students

by Stephen Newmann, Professor, English, Germantown

When the three English departments of MC were invited to attend an all-day workshop held by Peter Elbow about a year ago, I didn't expect to discover a teaching strategy that would profoundly change the way my students respond to learning to become better writers.

Elbow's workshop was primarily about using portfolios in the writing classes –especially in EN 101/A –but Elbow mentioned using Contract Grading numerous times throughout his workshop. After the workshop was over, I contacted Elbow via e-mail and asked for more information about using Contract Grading. With his permission, I began using a modified form of the Contract that Elbow uses in his own composition classes. The results were startling.

The Contract almost Guarantees Students Earn a B

Using the Contract, I guarantee my students a grade of B in EN 101/A so long as the student satisfies all the terms of the Contract. It is almost impossible for a student to satisfy the terms of the Contract without actually earning a B in the course.

My Contract requires students to turn in all assignments on time; to edit their work carefully so that what they submit is nearly free of grammatical error, including spelling errors; to revise every essay (not just edit and correct errors, but revise); to attend class regularly; and to be on time. My Contract allows students to have one late assignment without penalty, and I will make exceptions about late work when exceptions are warranted. Students who produce outstanding quality writing can earn an A in the course so long as they satisfy all the terms of the Contract.

Students Revise More with Contracts

Here's what happens when I use the Contract in EN 101/A.

I return essays to my students without grades. However, I put ample comments on the essay –both throughout and at the end. My students don't know whether the essay they've submitted is D, C, or B work. All they know is that they've done some things well in the essay and that there is ample room for revision that will make the essay more effective. Consequently, they revise –even when they've written an above average essay to begin with. They are unwilling to take a chance on the essay not being acceptable. When they get the revision back with no grade but with ample additional comments, they usually revise it again and re-submit it. Of course, their essays usually

improve –sometimes greatly. I have had students revise an essay up to 5 or more times. Usually, when a student does that, the essay moves into the above-average range. So revision –not just to satisfy my requirements, but to make a more effective essay –is one result of my using the Contract.

Students Take More Risks with Contracts

Since I reassure my students again and again throughout the semester that their grade is not based on the quality of their work but rather on their **doing** the work, almost to a student they become much more willing to take risks and to experiment in their writing. Sometimes the risks pay off big time, and sometimes the risks flop big time, but the risks do not affect the student's grade in the course. I require my students to submit a "reflection on the writing process" with the original draft of each assignment they hand in. In these reflections, my students can tell me if they've tried something they are not sure about. They can

... they become much more willing to take risks and to experiment in their writing.

tell me what they were trying to accomplish and how they went about it. That way, I can comment in their essay on how effective they have been, and I can

suggest alternative ways to accomplish the same effect. When I grade essays, my students are afraid to take chances and try something they are unsure of. They don't want to risk their grade in the course –even if it might mean they will write a better essay. So, risk taking is another result of my using the Contract in my writing courses.

When my students can take risks and try new things, they start to feel that the essay they are working on is more their own than something they are doing because I've told them to. They become more vested in what they are writing. This is partly a function of the Contract and partly a function of my requiring my students to create their own topics to write on.



(See *Putting Contracts on Students*, page 6)

(Teaching in a Middle Eastern Country, from page 1)

Attending the only co-educational university in the region, students at the American University of Sharjah hail mostly from progressive families of the Middle East. These are the sons and daughters and nieces and nephews of the rulers and leading citizens of the U.A.E., Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Turkey, Egypt, and Pakistan. These students not only want to make a difference in their native countries, but they are the ones actually in a position to do so.

After several years of advanced design and liberal arts study, as well as a constant and lively exchange of ideas, students with majors in the Design Department of the U.A.E. will internship at and later work for (or run) companies like Al Jazeera, Al Arabiya Television, Saatchi & Saatchi Mid-East, Middle East Broadcasting (MBS), CNN Mid-East, and more. Graduates from the A.U.S. will become the multimedia leaders of their region's generation. They will fill positions in publication and Web design, film and video production, broadcast news, photojournalism, public relations and mass communications, and fine and applied art. These young professionals will help mold their societies' cultures using the skills of visual persuasion taught to them in the Western style. As long as our motives and methods are worthy, and, given the ubiquity of modern mass communication in all its myriad forms, who among tomorrow's promise in the Middle East but these designers are more important for our attention?

Questions both obvious and subtle arise almost daily when Western faculty endeavor in such an environment. Should design educators in the Middle East strive to ensure that students comprehend the political power of visual communication and are given the insight to use these skills in progressive and ethical ways, or should design be taught as pure theory and technique, distinct from the stain of global politics and cultural misoneism? Is there a balance between cultural hegemony on the one hand and universal truths on the other that bare telling in a design context? Can this even be done without fear of being misunderstood? Does cultural contamination occur simply by the presence of Western faculty, or does the influence of mature design study transcend the differences of religion, language, and dress?

My findings from this experience suggest that reasoned discourse and practical application are essential ingredients in integrating Western-style design education in the Middle East. The designs produced by

these students are a celebration of East-West synergy. By providing rigorous design foundation studies to open students' eyes, critical thinking in a liberal arts venue to open students' minds, and respect for cultural diversity in an open dialog to open students' hearts, this program assures success in cross-cultural design education, particularly in the Middle East.

Something that stands out in my mind that is perhaps emblematic of my experience is that students in assembly at the University would heartily cheer when their sheik's name was mentioned from the podium. Coming from American education systems, this was foreign to me. Leaders are people that get ridiculed on late night TV, and they change on a regular basis anyhow. Yet these young people are genuine, and they aren't looking around for secret police making sure they cheer, either. They cheer like American students cheer their favorite sports teams, and it comes from a deep-down, genuine sense of love for their leaders. This has revised my thinking about the supremacy of democracy as the paragon of systems. The local rule of the state of Sharjah by Sheik Dr. Sultan bin-Mohammed al-Qassimi is mostly focused on preserving traditional Arab culture, but it was Sheik Qassimi who had the vision to build a co-educational American university in his emirate, rooted in Arab sensibilities. He not only ensures that his government provides cradle-to-grave support for his people (free health care, housing—mini palaces, really—education through college level, and guaranteed employment), but he also believes in the modern world and wants to ensure a place for his people in a global society. Even his children have helped continue this love of education and the arts by helping to promote Western-style libraries and a new academy for the arts opening soon in Sharjah's sprawling University City. Probably if our leaders took as good care of us, we'd cheer when we heard their names too. ❖

Guidelines for Contributions to

Focus on Faculty

The deadline for submitting articles for the next issue of *Focus on Faculty* is **November 14, 2005**. Please submit your article(s) of no more than 800 words in Microsoft Word to:

Bryant Davis, 134 Humanities (Germantown Campus)
or
bryant.davis@montgomerycollege.edu

This publication was produced by Kim Emery and Bryant Davis for the Center for Teaching and Learning.

(Putting Contracts on Students, from page 4)

When a student submits an essay that has been poorly edited or not edited at all, I return the essay with no comments other than to say that the work is unacceptable and it needs to be carefully edited before I will read it. That usually happens only once with any student. I don't require that they edit their work by themselves. They are free to seek help with the editing from friends, family, or the Writing Center. What they learn is that editing is an essential part of the writing process. When students know they are required to revise, they are tempted to submit unedited work thinking that they can just fix the errors and submit the result as their revision. However, I emphasize that editing is not revision. Revision is much more substantial than editing.

Reminding Students They Are under Contract Quells Anxiety

At first my students resist not getting grades on their essays. They are uncomfortable with not knowing where they stand in the course regarding a grade. However, eventually, they trust that the *B* they have Contracted for is their grade so long as they satisfy the terms of the Contract. Their grade at any given point in the course is at least a *B* unless they have failed to comply with the Contract. When students write outstanding essays that are better than *B* work, I mention that in my comments on the essay so that they will know that they are in the running for a better than *B* grade.

I have had a couple of students (between 1-4 out of 25) who do not meet the terms of the Contract. Those students usually earn a *D* or an *F* for the semester. I've never had a student argue with me about those lower grades. I have never assigned a *B* to a student who I didn't think had earned that grade. Occasionally, a student will either not have written *B* papers or will have only written one or perhaps two *B* papers by the end of the semester, but those students have worked hard enough to make their writing much better than it was when they began the course. When I was assigning grades to essays, I also used to set aside a certain number of points that I could award a student at the end of the

The Contract . . . makes the system more equitable . . .

term for effort or whatever else might be deserving of extra points. The Contract relieves me of the necessity of assigning extra points here and there and makes the system more equitable since everyone gets the opportunity to earn the *B*.

The Contract Benefits Students and Professor

Another effect of not grading my students' writing has been that I can grade essays more quickly than I used to be able to do. I used to get an overall sense of what grade the essay deserved, and then I'd have to tailor my comments to support that grade. Now I just apply comments as they occur to me without having to worry about whether or not they support or contradict whatever grade the essay might deserve. This is a result of using the Contract that works more for me than for my students.

Finally, by giving students a grade based on their doing the required work rather than on the quality of that work, the emphasis in the course is shifted from the student's writing to the student's becoming engaged in the writing process.

I have been very satisfied with my use of the Contract for a Grade of B in EN 101/A. I will be happy to discuss using the Contract with anyone who is interested or who has questions about how I use the Contract. I will also be happy to share my Contract for a Grade of B with anyone who wants to see it. ❖

**Upcoming CTL Workshop Topics
November and December 2005**

Adobe Acrobat

Good Practice in Undergraduate Education

MyMC Course Tools

Support for Macintosh Computer Users

New Online Tutorials from the CTL

File Management for Busy Professors

Designing Assignments that Avoid the Pitfalls of Plagiarism and that Meet Your Objectives

Lesson Plannin: The Steps to Promote Student Learning and to Help Your Students Reach the Course Objectives

Reinventing Yourself as a Teacher

by Diane Chapin, Adjunct, English, Germantown

Comments from Participants in the Part-time Faculty Fellowship:

"I have an increased appreciation for how to develop multiple strategies to encourage student participation and interaction in the classroom"

- Kelly Kleine, R

"I will take away . . . a greater appreciation in general that the lecture process must be more than personality and that different techniques can improve the effectiveness of a presentation."

- Mitch Tropin, TP/SS

"You've provided opportunities for us to see new strategies in action and resources to locate them"

- Betty Rossi, R

"Teaching better doesn't necessarily mean teaching more or doing more."

- Kay Douglas, R

"My most significant takeaway will be to remind myself often what tremendous insights and resources can be found in my fellow faculty colleagues."

- Sharon Griffin, G

"Foremost, for the first time in nearly six years of teaching, (I felt) a sense of camaraderie."

- Natalie Maiden, TP/SS

"I have validated many of my teaching methods and feel confident in my ability to succeed in the future."

- Corinee Smith, TP/SS

"I have been challenged to evaluate my own teaching style and strategies."

- Diane Chapin, G

If you're an adjunct looking for a new MC experience, one of the most exciting options available is the Part-time Faculty Fellowship to be offered this spring. Open to adjunct professors on all campuses and in all disciplines, the fellowship focuses on invigorating all aspects of classroom teaching. As a recent participant describes her experience, "I feel refreshed as a teacher, whereas before I felt I had stagnated. Now I can't wait to reorganize how I do things."

But the program is not a remedial course. It was created for faculty members who already have demonstrated effective teaching but are looking for an opportunity to fine-tune and further enhance their skills. Last spring's program included professors from all three campuses and from such diverse disciplines as English, reading, math, nursing, and philosophy. Some had only a few years of teaching experience; others had more than 15 years of experience.

Notice of this spring's program will be publicized this month. The Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) will send program information to faculty chairs, who will share it with interested faculty members. To be selected, individuals must be nominated by their departmental chairs. They may not apply on their own.

The fellowship spans the entire semester and offers a stipend. Four face-to-face sessions are held on the Rockville campus on Saturday mornings. Complementing these sessions is a variety of online activities. "Some of the most important learnings take place in the online exchanges between participants. They share ideas and reactions that enlighten and personalize their reading," said Patti Bartlett, a previous fellowship facilitator from CTL. Individual classroom sessions, online modules, and Saturday sessions cover setting objectives, organizing and delivering lessons, facilitating active learning, testing, and assessment. Each participant has the opportunity to practice techniques by presenting a mini lesson. "But there's no stress or sense of competition in these lessons. They're focused on helping each participant bring out the best in his or her teaching style," said Sue Liggett, a retired 38-year MC professor, who co-facilitated the Fellowship with Patti Bartlett.

Talk to past participants, and it is clear that one of the best parts of the program is the opportunity to discuss common problems and resources with other adjuncts. "I have really enjoyed learning from my colleagues. It has been great to hear how they have addressed issues that I've also experienced," said Kelly Kleine from the Rockville Counseling Department. "I have been stimulated to consider and experiment with a variety of new approaches and new techniques," said Diane Chapin, a Germantown adjunct who teaches English. The program also fosters a closer connection with Montgomery College. "I will take several things with me, [but] perhaps the most fundamental to all the others is the sense of being a part of MC, rather than [just] an adjunct," said Hallie Galen-Wallack, a Rockville ESL instructor. ❖

(Strategies to Improve Student Learning, from page 3)

The Wise-Choice Process

In the Wise Choice process, teachers and counselors ask these six questions, in order, waiting patiently for response before continuing to the next question, and avoiding “leading” the student.

1. What’s your present situation? (what’s the problem or obstacle)
2. How would you like it to be? (what’s your goal)
3. Do you have a choice here? (yes...always!!)
4. What are your possible choices? (without evaluating, make a list of options)
5. What the likely outcome of each choice? (not enough data? Stop and get more)
6. Which choice(s) will you commit to doing? (make a promise to yourself)

On Course Workshop I, p. 18

instructor waits it out with a smile (or with gritted teeth). When it catches on, it’s not unusual for several people to pop up at the same time, and then take turns before the next popper is needed. As with “frontloading” and the “jigsaw puzzle,” this method can succeed very early in the course. “I generally read the syllabus to the class and ask if there are any questions and/or clarifications,” Wanda said. “But starting this fall, I will encourage the entire class to participate and to ‘pop-up’ and read a paragraph of the syllabus. This keeps everyone paying attention and will also make them proactive in getting through this important document. Of course I’ll use the ‘pop-corn’ method during the semester too. I just have to remember to embrace the silence when/if no one pops up and know that eventually, someone will. . . .”

These tools to engage students in the class may later give way to methods of empowering them to make decisions about their commitment to the learning experience. One such method is the “Wise Choice.” It’s easy to give advice to solve a student’s problem quickly. It’s more time-consuming to use the “Wise Choice” process. But, recalling the familiar proverb about giving a man a fish to feed him once or teaching the man to fish to feed himself for life, the “Wise Choice” helps the student make decisions independently. “[I’m going to introduce faculty to] the ‘Wise Choice’ strategy for counseling students. It removes the ‘giving advice’ tendency from the faculty member and places the decision-making where it should be – with the student,” said Sylvia.

The teacher’s struggle is to ask the questions, and then wait for answers. If it’s going nowhere, “incubate” the discussion and meet to talk about it later. If the student stops dead, Skip says, ask “I see you don’t know what to do. But if you did, what would it be?”

As the semester progresses, another favorite technique may come into play – the “ring-toss.” Place a target and mark off the thrower’s distance at three-foot intervals as far as you can go. Then invite students to toss a ring over the target. The student can select the throw distance. Inevitably, repeated short throws hit the target more often than tosses from long distance. Students soon get the message about working step by step rather than delaying large projects and trying to complete them all in one long-distance throw. Sylvia will be using the ring-toss later this fall. “The students have a major multi-step project that is due at the end of the semester,” she said. “I plan to use the ‘ring-toss’ to show them the benefit of taking things step by step and not waiting until the last minute to do it all. (As in one very distant ring toss!)”

“I’ve got a million ideas of how to use Skip’s strategies,” Diane says, and other workshop participants might be able to multiply that many times over.

For more information on Skip Downing’s On Course, go to <http://www.oncourseworkshop.com/> or plan to attend CTL’s ongoing series of On Course discussions – watch the CTL Web site for future workshop dates. ❖



Clement Goddard, Workshop Participant