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Volume 14, Number 2, Winter/Spring 2004

# Working Together, Working Towards: **An Approach to Outcomes Based Learning**

Susan Thomson, Political Science

**WHEN I WAS ASKED** by Leonard Preyra, then Chair of the Political Science Department, to teach the Scope and Methods of Political Science course (POL 401.0) in the middle of June 2003, I thought to myself, “how hard could it be? I can put together a year-long course in a few months.” I had just published a book on research methods for African universities and thought that teaching research methods to SMU students would be much easier from a pedagogical point-of-view; we would have at least language and culture in common. Senior undergraduates, I assumed, would already be well-versed in research methods. I could simply build on my own field and library-based research experience, draw some useful examples from my own book, and the students would walk away ready to undertake empirical research.

What I quickly realised was that the research process, while intuitive, was not easily downloaded from a textbook, despite the best intentions of an eager instructor. Compounding this was the fact that my course is populated with a mixture of 2nd, 3rd and 4th year students. Many are political science majors,

several are not; some have yet to declare a major. With this pot-pourri of students, I began lecturing about the basics of theory, the importance of hypotheses and how we know what we know. While I found the material gripping, students were worried at best and openly nervous at worst about their prospects of not only grasping the basics of research but of how we would be able to survive the monotony of the nitty-gritty details of the research process.

I mentioned my student's concerns to a colleague at Dalhousie and her reply was simply that research methods is something students must do, it is a rite-of-passage that is suffered, not valued since, as she correctly pointed out, students don't remember anything they learned in a lecture anyway. Her point troubled me, particularly since it was likely true. The difficulty I faced was in getting students to work with the material – to analyse text,



undertake literature reviews, formulate good research questions and be able to set about answering them quantitatively and/or qualitatively.

### **Workshop Generates an Idea**

In October, 2003, Dr. Pierre Zundel, Faculty of Forest and Environmental Management, UNB, and a recent recipient of an AAU Instructional Leadership Award and a national 3M Teaching Award, came to Saint Mary's at the invitation of the Office of Instructional

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Teaching and Learning at Saint Mary's

A forum on teaching and learning sponsored by the Quality of Teaching Committee and produced by the Office of Instructional Development. Articles and responses by faculty, students and administrators are welcome.

**Quality of Teaching Committee Members, 2003/2004**

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Mary Brooks  
Office of Instructional Development  
(unless otherwise indicated)

The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the editor or the Quality of Teaching Committee. The editor reserves the right not to publish a submission.

# Getting the Most Out of Students' Evaluation of Teaching Data

## April 2, 1:30-4:00pm – Sobey 255

**Registration deadline  
Tuesday, March 30th**

To register, call Mary at ext 5087  
or email [oid@smu.ca](mailto:oid@smu.ca)

### Lynn Taylor, Executive Director Dalhousie Centre for Learning and Teaching

In our work with students, we all appreciate the value of providing detailed, meaningful feedback in the teaching and learning process. It is somewhat ironic then that the feedback we, in turn, receive from students about our teaching is often under-valued and under-utilized.

Not surprisingly, this feedback has a more dramatic impact on the development of our teaching when it lends itself to effective interpretations that can be used to modify the teaching and learning experiences in a particular course.

In this workshop, we will critically examine the issue of students' evaluation of teaching and the kinds of information provided through the Students' Evaluation of Educational Quality (SEEQ) process. Following a refreshment break, participants will engage in a case-based "consultation" designed to demonstrate how this information can be interpreted and applied to enhance our understanding of our teaching and the learning experiences of our students.

For more information on the SEEQ:

- the website at Curtin University, Australia, has the most comprehensive online information on the SEEQ instrument, its uses, and teaching strategies <http://lsn.curtin.edu.au/seeq/menu.html>
- a collection of research reports on the SEEQ and on students' evaluation of teaching have been placed in the Senate Office, MM2o6AB.

Lynn Taylor is a faculty development specialist and Director of the Centre for Learning and Teaching at Dalhousie University. In her doctoral studies (PhD, 1992), she specialized in cognitive science theory and research methods, and in particular, in human problem solving. Her areas of practice and scholarship include: teaching and learning in higher education; faculty development; academic integrity; and academic leadership.

Prior to joining Dalhousie in January, 2004, Lynn worked at the University of Manitoba, where the use of the SEEQ is well established and where she consulted with faculty and administrators on the use of SEEQ data.



Photo: Lynn Taylor

Development. Dr. Zundel was offering a workshop on his innovative and successful ‘outcomes based’ approach to teaching with a focus on student-centred teaching, learning and assessment. Interested in learning more about this, I attended the seminar with about fifteen other faculty colleagues from Saint Mary’s.

It was during Dr. Zundel’s presentation that I began to play with the idea of re-tooling the Scope and Methods of Political Science course to suit the outcomes I wanted students to take away from the course. After discussions with the class about how to re-format the course to best fit the needs of my varied groups of students, I adopted a series of research outcomes that would allow students to work in groups, with the material, doing hands-on research at a level that was appropriate to their existing skills. I felt that each student, regardless of year-of-study or major, should be able to grasp the basics of research and actually begin to use the methods in their other courses. The outcomes-based model of teaching suited this requirement well – it allowed me to start at the comfort and substantive level of students and bring them along to where I wanted them to be.

### **Outcomes-based Teaching, Learning and Evaluation**

In the outcomes-based method of evaluation, students are given two opportunities to grasp the required work. This double opportunity is more labour-intensive for me, but is also a source of much relief and satisfaction as I am better able to evaluate student work. I am also more confident that students are internalising the cumulative elements of the research process. Since instituting the double opportunity, students have been more creative and imaginative in their group and written work and, in turn, have found research to be fun!

Instead of marking students once on work they may or may not understand, outcomes-based learning sets out the “outcome” and matches it with a set of indicators that students can refer to when reading the text book in preparation for

lectures and assignments. I then evaluate student work based on these indicators, which facilitates the clarity of my comments and feedback for students. Students who have not grasped the core elements of the outcome, for example, “theory testing” or “identifying cause and effect”, are then requested to re-do assignments, replete in the knowledge that they are building their research skills without compromising their grade. The double opportunity also facilitates the ability to provide better feedback; it pinpoints where the student is, or is not, grasping the required research method and the gaps that need to be filled in student knowledge of specific elements of the research process. This knowledge has allowed me to spend more time on elements that I thought were relatively straightforward and intuitive but were, in fact, a stumbling block for students. Generating testable hypotheses, for example, only appears easy and makes sense to students during the lecture. In group work, when the actual process of generating such a hypothesis is undertaken, the difficulties that students face become apparent. Knowing this, I was able to spend more time on what students required, rather than only touching the surface of what I perceived as straightforward and what students themselves deemed difficult.

### **Outcomes of the ‘Outcomes-based’ Approach**

Since adopting the outcomes based teaching and evaluation approach this semester, students have become more engaged in both coursework and assignments. The classroom average went from a “C” following the first two assignments to a “B+” by the end of the term. The number of students who regularly attend class has also improved, as has our rapport. Students regularly email me about various elements of the course and I know they are applying methods to research projects in other courses. The responsibility for learning the technical aspects of research and of the role of research in generating knowledge has been taken on by students.

I should also mention that the preparation of this article for the Office of Instructional Development was integrated into the classroom. While the act of sitting down to write is a singular process, good writing is the result of ideas generated through exchange of ideas and information with others. This article was generated with student input and is the embodiment of active, student-centred learning – it is part and parcel of the process of research in which my students are currently engaged.

## **Writing in the Disciplines Spring Institute May 3rd and 4th, 2004**

As a capstone to the previous four workshops in this series, this Institute will offer participants an opportunity to work, both individually and collaboratively, to review, revise and revitalize our curriculum, particularly as it relates to developing and incorporating writing intensive learning activities in our courses.

A more detailed flyer will be sent to all full and part-time faculty in early April.

In the meantime, if you wish further information, please contact Pat Saunders, Director, Writing Centre or Margaret-Anne Bennett, Director, Office of Instructional Development.

# Liberated Learning and Speech Recognition: A New 'On-Demand' Teaching Technology

Keith Bain, International Manager, Liberated Learning Initiative, Atlantic Centre for Students with Disabilities

*Q: Who was the first university in the world to use speech recognition (SR) technology in a university lecture to improve access to information?*

*A. Saint Mary's University, Halifax, Nova Scotia*

Since becoming the first university in the world to use speech recognition (SR) technology, Saint Mary's Liberated Learning team has been providing leadership to a growing international community intrigued by its potential. Over the past few years, the concept, our understanding of it and, most importantly, the technology has evolved significantly. Entering 2004, we are close to achieving our goal of making this technology more universally available, easy to use, and, from an institutional perspective, economically viable.

## Advances in Technology

Since beginning this work in 1999, Liberated Learning has been tested by faculty on a limited basis due to some fundamental technology and usability issues. However, a number of recent discoveries may make this technology generally available to anyone interested in exploring its use, and to Saint Mary's faculty as soon as the 2004/05 academic year. Since creating a unique Joint Study partnership with IBM Research, the Liberated Learning team and the world's top SR scientists at IBM have transformed a 'proof of concept' application first developed here into a robust and rapidly evolving technology platform. The application is called IBM ViaScribe, and the Liberated Learning team acts as its public stewards.

When used during a presentation, IBM ViaScribe speech recognition automatically transcribes speech into text. The application then instantly creates a series of

accessible multimedia files that can be published through learning portals such as WebCT, or our specially designed On-Line Notes System. Professors who use this Liberated Learning approach automatically create a rich set of teaching resources every class, with limitless options for utilizing these learning objects. For professors who use PowerPoint or other visual media, IBM ViaScribe can automatically synchronize speech, text and visual media into a "one click" presentation package. Students enrolled in Liberated Learning courses can access course notes, available in various accessible formats through freely available media players such as RealOne or Windows Media Player. IBM ViaScribe provides flexible delivery of lecture content, allowing students to select lecture information that suits their individual learning preferences. For example, students can download searchable transcripts, streaming media, digital audio, and MP3 files.

## Partnerships for Research and Development

In addition to technology developments, the Liberated Learning team is active in the international arena championing the concept and sharing information about its advancement. There are now twelve institutions in our consortium and we maintain a network of researchers in North America, Australia/New Zealand, Japan, and Europe.

In addition to continuing development with IBM Research, we are partnering with a number of universities on other key challenges.

The Australian National University and the University of the Sunshine Coast, Australia: working with these two Australian universities, we are prototyping a network version of IBM ViaScribe. This technical advancement will make IBM ViaScribe available - on demand - in every teaching space on campus, just as PowerPoint is available in every classroom. By networking the application, we will no longer require specialized hardware and professors will be able to access the software by simply logging into the Saint Mary's network. At the end of class, simply closing the application sends all the SR data to the network, where the professor can subsequently access the information, publish it over the web, edit or transform it in a number of ways. We expect to pilot this networked access over the summer.

Massachusetts Institute of Technology: MIT agreed to partner with us after we gave a public lecture there about our work in this field. MIT recently submitted a National Science Foundation grant to support a unique research and development partnership with Liberated Learning.

Alexander Graham Bell Institute and the Bell Museum, Baddeck, Nova Scotia: an ACOA grant was recently awarded which will allow us to work with the

Photo: IBM Japan



Institute and the Museum to implement the Liberated Learning concept in the museum.

We also have a number of corporate applications pending, whereby we hope to instantiate the Liberated Learning concept into the corporate infrastructure and study its impact on employee and client stakeholders. We believe these forays into heretofore uncharted territory will demonstrate what we feel is the truly compelling nature of this concept: its universality in any learning situation.

These are the kinds of relationships we hope to continue fostering in our efforts to solve the remaining hurdles which prevent this technology from becoming a turn key solution for institutions everywhere.

### Implications for Teaching

Although Liberated Learning is predicated on two fundamental applications – real time transcription of speech and creation of transcripts – there are a number of other exciting pedagogical applications being explored. At a recent information session sponsored by the Office of Instructional Development, three Saint Mary's faculty experienced in the use of Speech Recognition (SR) technology, Dr. Gene Barrett (Sociology), Gerry Cameron (IDS), and Nadine Legier (English), shared their perspectives on the impact this technology has made on their teaching. Plans are underway to exploit this technology as a distance learning application and as a teaching tool to help meet the needs of our burgeoning international student population.

### Invitation to Participate

We invite the entire SMU community to keep in touch with our activities, either through our website ([www.liberatedlearning.com](http://www.liberatedlearning.com)) or by getting in contact with any of our team members. We would be happy to discuss this exciting work and to identify ways to involve and support more of our colleagues from across campus.

I'd like to thank Margaret-Anne Bennett and her office for their support over the past few months, as well as the many individuals across campus who continue to help us maintain Saint Mary's widely recognized leadership in this field.

## 8th Annual Dalhousie Conference on University Learning and Teaching – May 5, 6, & 7, 2004

### Call for Presentations

#### Conference Theme: “Involving Students in Their Own Learning”

The Dalhousie University Centre for Learning and Teaching is pleased to invite Saint Mary's faculty to participate in the 8th Annual Dalhousie Conference on University Learning and Teaching.

Interested individuals are invited to submit proposals for 25, 50, or 90-minute presentations on how you actively engage students in diverse learning environments including, classrooms of all sizes, labs, clinical settings, and on-line courses or learning activities. We particularly welcome proposals addressing:

- motivating students to participate more actively in their learning;
- designing and evaluating effective assignments and learning activities using small group work;
- applying technologies to enhance interaction with and between students.

In the spirit of active engagement in learning, conference organizers strongly encourage presenters to provide opportunities for audience participation in their sessions. There will also be opportunities for more informal interactions during poster sessions.

Proposals should include the following information:

- name, position, organization, mailing and email address, fax, and phone, number of presenters;
- presentation title;
- brief description (no more than 250 words in length) of the session objectives and content, and how you plan to involve participants (required for 50 and 90-minute sessions);
- preferred format (25, 50, or 90-minute sessions or a scheduled poster session); list of any audio visual equipment or other requirements;
- notice of scheduling restrictions.

Proposals should be forwarded by regular mail, fax, or email to be received **no later than Monday, March 29, 2004**. You will be advised about the outcome of the proposal review process on or before April 5, 2004.

Please send presentation proposals to:  
Dalhousie University  
Centre for Learning & Teaching  
1234 LeMarchant Street  
Halifax, NS B3H 3P7  
Fax: 902.494.3767  
Email: [clt@dal.ca](mailto:clt@dal.ca)  
Phone: 902.494.1622

Call for Presentations

# Students' Teaching Suggestions

Lloyd Rieber, Marketing/Communications

**AS AN EXERCISE IN COM 293** (Communication), we had several groups of students write a letter recommending a professor for Professor of the Year. Heather Thompson made a summary of the students' reasons for recommending specific people. We thought this summary might be of interest.

## How To Make Your Students Love You

- be in class on time (at least) or early;
- demonstrate a positive, upbeat attitude and smile; exude enthusiasm and interest in your subject;
- make sure students really understand the class content; keep explaining until you're sure they do;

- use plenty of "real-life" examples;
- don't rely on lecture notes, slides, or overheads; know the material well enough simply to talk about it unassisted;
- help students do well; repeat reading chapters as necessary, and let students redo some assignments;
- create an atmosphere that allows students to ask questions freely;
- treat the students' questions respectfully;
- treat students equally (what this means was not well explained);
- be accessible; students want to see you when they need you.



Photo: Sandor Fizli

For the professor who received the most nominations, students like that:

- the professor did very little lecturing;
- they (the students) taught each other, moving around the class to do so;
- the professor also moved around the class, not remaining at the front.

## New in the Office of Instructional Development Resource Center, MM202C

The following new books and journal editions have been added to the OID Resource Center during the 2003/04 academic year.

*Building Partnerships for Service-Learning* (2003); Barbara Jacoby and Associates. Jossey-Bass, 360 pages

*Creating Significant Learning Experiences: An Integrated Approach to Designing College Courses* (2003); L. Dee Fink. Jossey Bass, 295 pages.

*Engaging Large Classes: Strategies and Techniques for College Faculty* (2002); Christine A. Stanley, M. Erin Porter, Editors. Anker Publishing, 350 pages.

*Effective Teaching with Technology in Higher Education: Foundations for Success* (2003); A.W. (Tony) Bates, Gary Poole. Jossey-Bass, 306 pages

*Instructional Design and Web Delivery: Design, Development, Delivery* (2001). McGraw-Hill, 152 pages.

*Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation* (2000); Neil Howe, William Strauss. Vintage Books, 415 pages.

*New Directions for Teaching and Learning Journal* (Jossey-Bass):

- Valuing and Supporting Undergraduate Research, No. 93, Spring, 2003
- Technology: Taking the Distance out of Learning, No. 94, Summer, 2003
- Problem-Based Learning in the Information Age, No. 95, Fall, 2003
- Online Student Ratings of Instruction, No. 96, Winter 2003

*No Place To Learn: Why Universities Aren't Working* (2002); Tom Pocklington, Alan Tupper. UBC Press, 224 pages.

*Teaching At Its Best: A Research-Based Resource for College Instructors* (2nd edition, 2003). Linda B. Nilson. Anker Publishing, 245 pages.

*The Learning Paradigm College* (2003); John Tagg. Anker Publishing, 380 pages.

*The Teaching Portfolio: A Practical Guide to Improving Performance and Promotion/Tenure Decisions* (3rd edition, 2004); Peter Seldin. Anker Publishing, 350 pages.

Materials are purchased for the Resource Center by Saint Mary's University Quality of Teaching Committee and the Office of Instructional Development.

Books, journals, and other publications in the Resource Center can be borrowed and signed out by contacting Mary at 5087 or by dropping by MM202C.



# No Place to Learn: a critique of higher education

Reviewed by Jill Grose, Associate Director, Center for Teaching, Learning and Educational Technologies (CTLET)

Brock University

Reprinted with permission

## BOOK REVIEW

*No Place to Learn: Why Universities Aren't Working* (2002)

Tom Pocklington, Alan Tupper  
UBC Press, 224 Pages

*No Place to Learn*, written by Tom Pocklington and Alan Tupper, both Professors in the Department of Political Science at the University of Alberta, is an interesting, albeit controversial, read. The premise of the book is that, despite the increasing rhetoric in universities which asserts that scholarship includes both teaching and research, teaching remains undervalued and unrewarded in Canadian universities and, as a result, students are being short changed. The undervaluation of teaching is perpetuated by “the myth of mutual enrichment;” namely the notion that “good researchers make good teachers.”

According to Pocklington and Tupper, the myth of mutual enrichment works to direct institutional resources towards the support for research (which is in turn rewarded by various granting agencies) and to allow universities to argue ways in which they are distinctively different from colleges. In theory, a good researcher is at the cutting edge of the knowledge in his or her field and is passionate about conveying that knowledge. The myth perpetuates the notion that active researchers create knowledge and exciting courses while teachers simply transmit knowledge. But, according to Pocklington and Tupper, the reality is that today's research has become more and more specialized and is often not understood by, or relevant to, undergraduate students who are still struggling with basic theoretical considerations. Moreover, Pocklington and Tupper argue that university systems

reward professors for their research publications (which are not necessarily read by undergraduates) and for quantity over quality. For many faculty, particularly in research intensive universities, teaching is then relegated to part-time and sessional instructors who are underpaid and undervalued.

While there is much in this book that is oversimplified, particularly in its assertion that “Canadian universities no longer provide effective, high quality undergraduate education,” there is much that rings true. Of note is their argument that, despite the 40/40/20 model of faculty roles and responsibilities, teaching and research are neither mutually enriching nor balanced in Canadian institutions because “university practices contradict university ideology.”

They cite three persuasive arguments for disproving the “mutual enrichment” theory: 1) professors are awarded “course reliefs” and “buy out” time to conduct research but the reverse is often unheard of; 2) teaching responsibilities are contracted out to sessional instructors who do not conduct research; 3) new faculty are often awarded a reduced teaching load in order to develop their research, but not their teaching competencies. In reality, then, research and teaching are not mutually enriching but rather mutually antagonistic endeavours in that they frequently compete for time and resources.

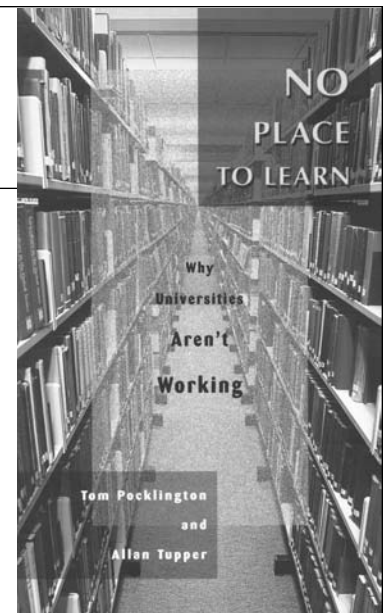
Pocklington and Tupper suggest a number of recommendations for improving university education and providing undergraduate students with “a place to learn.” Among others, they suggest that universities should put a greater emphasis on the quality rather than the quantity of research publications, particularly early on in a faculty member's career; universities

should reverse the practice of sessional lecturers teaching

junior courses and tenured faculty teaching advanced specialized courses (so that tenured faculty can spend more, not less, time with undergraduate students); and universities should engage in training graduate students (the future professorate) to teach as well as to conduct research. In fact, doctoral candidates should be required to take courses not only in the mechanics of teaching but also in issues relating to “the history, problems and prospects of university education.”

While there is much in this book to annoy or anger some readers, (probably because each institution would see itself as exempted from the researchers' criticisms), there is also a great deal that is refreshingly honest. Much of what is argued will resonate with faculty members who have felt the need to publish or perish. This book is a recommended read for anyone who teaches and researches in higher education.

*No Place to Learn* is available in the Office of Instructional Development Resource Center.



# Center for Academic Technologies (CAT)

The Center for Academic Technologies is a four-station computer lab set up to assist faculty and faculty support staff who wish to develop or enhance their computer skills or use of technology in teaching and learning.

## Staff

Our student technology assistants, Zoe, Vagarro and Subin are located in the CAT in McNally Main 215A. They can be contacted by e-mail (cat@smu.ca); or by phone, 496.8168. Mary Brooks, OID, can be reached at oid@smu.ca or by phone, 420.5088. Contact information is also available on the OID web site: [www.stmarys.ca/administration/oid/tech\\_assistance.htm](http://www.stmarys.ca/administration/oid/tech_assistance.htm)

## Hours

The CAT is open daily, 9:00am–5:00pm, Monday–Friday throughout the academic year. Evening hours are available on request.

**Spring/Summer 2004: The CAT will be staffed full-time and will follow university business hours during the spring and summer months.**

## Individual Assistance

Faculty and faculty support staff who require one-on-one assistance to develop or enhance their computer skills (basic to advanced) are asked to contact our assistants to discuss and plan training sessions.

## Small Group Sessions

If you are working collaboratively on a project with several colleagues you can plan, as a group, to access the facilities of the lab or to schedule group training sessions.

## WebCT Support for Classroom-based Courses

**New User:** If you are a new user of WebCT, your first step is to contact and register with the Online Course

Development Center (OCDC) in Continuing Education, 420.5024. Once you have registered with OCDC, contact our technology assistants for help in developing and enhancing your expertise and use of WebCT.

We offer introductory training sessions in WebCT to faculty as well as student orientation sessions for your classes.

**Current User:** If you are already using WebCT to support your classroom based courses, please contact the CAT when you require follow-up assistance.

## Multimedia

Do you want to add interest and value to your web pages or PowerPoint presentations? With our multimedia software and the digital cameras we can help you add images, motion clips and sound bytes. With the Adobe Writer we can convert Word and other text documents to PDF files readable and printable from the internet.

## Consultations

Would you like to learn more about using technology to enhance teaching and student learning? Are you interested in discussing your current and future technology needs? Would you like to develop a short or long term plan to enhance your use of technology in the classroom? Contact the Office of Instructional Development (420.5088) to arrange a consultation and to discuss resource availability and access.

## Digital Equipment

The digital stills and digital video camera are available to faculty for use outside the lab for Saint Mary's University related projects. To reserve the camera(s) and/or to discuss outside usage, please contact the CAT.

## Hardware, Software and Peripherals in the CAT

- 3 HP Vectra Pentium III PC's with 260 MB RAM and CD rewriters
- 1 iMac, OS 9.1 with external 3.5" disk drive
- Saint Mary's standard desktop software
- WordPerfect Office Suite 10.0
- Multimedia software:
  - Adobe Acrobat Distiller
  - Adobe Premiere
  - Adobe Photoshop
  - PhotoImpact 6
  - Macromedia Studio MX Suite
  - RealSystem Producer
- Peripherals:
  - High Speed Scanner
  - Printers (Colour Inkjet and Laser BW)
  - Digital Cameras—stills and video
  - DVD Writer
- Resource Material on Teaching and Learning with Technology

*The Center for Academic Technologies is an initiative supported by, and under the direction of, the Office of Instructional Development (OID).*

