

Student Learning Connections



A newsletter from the Student Learning Committee

 Fall 2009

A Letter from Kristin

This semester is certainly not an average one. We've got construction, new parking, renovation, changes in administration coming, and who knows what else! There are changes ahead for the Student Learning Committee as well. Over three years ago, we stopped doing assessment for a year to figure out what JJC faculty wanted out of assessment of student learning. We changed the way the committee runs, and just over two years ago I left a full-time teaching load to have release time to lead assessment efforts.

After two years of leading assessment, including helping departments, individual faculty, and larger general education assessment efforts, I've realized that I can't do everything on my own. Along with this leadership, I've been taking care of the webpage, getting out newsletters, taking care of the budget, overseeing travel, and getting data that faculty have needed. This fall, the committee is hiring someone to help out with the administrative tasks assessment requires. I'll still be leading assessment efforts, but as the chair of the Student Learning Committee and all around cheerleader for assessment of student learning. But, the webpage updates, newsletters, and data needs will be take over by this new person who will be here for faculty. Thus, when a department needs data for assessment, this person will be there to help. If someone needs help developing an assessment plan, I'll still be here, but I'll have some back-up.

I'm excited about the changes here at JJC and looking forward to the day when things settle back down. They will settle down, right?

Kristin LaTour, Student Learning Coord.

Inside:

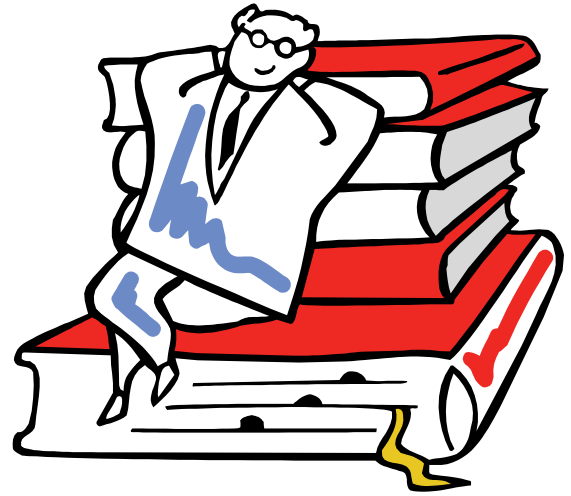
Andy Neill looks at using memory strategies to improve student learning. (pg.2)

Pam Dilday explains how learning takes place outside the classroom. (pg.3)

And SLC introduces the Spring PPD Day Assessment Fair

SAVE THE DATE!

Thursday, February 11
P&PD Day
JJC Faculty
Assessment Fair!



Assessing Student Memory & Learning

By Andy Neill

Introduction:

Willingham (Winter 2008-2009) asks a simple question about a fundamental aspect of learning in the title of his article, "What will improve a student's memory?" He goes on to provide an understandable framework for explaining how memory works to students, techniques for committing items to memory, ways to avoid forgetting and determine when they have studied enough.

As college teachers we assume that our students have acquired and mastered these fundamental learning skills from their elementary and secondary schooling. Willingham reports that actual instruction in memory and associated skills to enhance it are seldom if ever taught explicitly. Most college students report that they improvise their own systems of study. This then suggests that students in college may or may not happen upon an effective study system that will help them succeed academically.

During the 2009 spring semester at Joliet Junior College, I prepared a synopsis of Willingham's (Winter 2008-2009) article for use in all of my biology classes. The synopsis included a summary of Willingham's three memory principles and strategies to improve memory and academic success. In this particular assessment report I summarize preliminary findings about Willingham's strategy for "Learning the Meaningless". There are other facets of memory and learning that Willingham develops that will be the focus of additional future assessment.

According to Willingham, the "meaningless" are terms or concepts that do not carry much meaning alone yet are still necessary for explaining a meaningful concept or process. Meaningless material is difficult to learn because it is hard to find a good cue for memory. As Willingham points out, memories are formed as the residue of thoughtful thinking—only those matters to which a considerable amount of attention is devoted will be better remembered. Multiple forms of engaged intentional studying improve memory and therefore better learning outcomes (i.e., improved grades).

This semester I introduced my biology students, perhaps for the first time, to seven mnemonic devices summarized by Willingham. Like Willingham, I emphasized the utility of using mnemonic devices in producing meaningful relationships among the material to be learned. I urged my students to get outrageously creative with the mnemonic so that strong memorable cues are produced in the brain so that recall is improved. It is then assumed that students will have an easier time working on assignments and tests and thus improving their academic success.

Methods and Results:

Shortly after my students had prepared a mnemonic modeled after one of the seven discussed by Willingham, they took a quiz over the related subject matter. In general biology Bio151 and plants & society

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Academy News



We're moving into year two of the HLC's Academy for Assessment of Student Learning. JJC is working on general education assessment, a big concept that faculty have been tackling for years and years. We have very concrete goals in mind to help, and we're forging ahead, thanks to all the faculty who helped with feedback on the gen. ed. surveys that were sent out last spring. We had a great number of people respond with comments, and we've tweaked the outcomes as needed. Now, the outcomes will be sent on to the Curriculum Committee, and used as we update all of our syllabi and get them loaded into CurricuNet. They will also assist faculty in planning courses and with assessment of student learning.

But, the next phase will be the most work, and the most rewarding. We will have to choose one outcome to assess across several disciplines. If we go with writing, we'll be looking at several different courses that have written assignments. If we go with mathematics, we'll be looking at several different courses that use mathematical methods. This means going across departments and looking at large samples of students. It also means cooperating on methods of assessment and gathering data. Call me an optimist, but I know we can do this, and it will be enlightening, exciting and fun! ~ Kristin

Student Learning Outside of the Classroom

By Pam Dilday

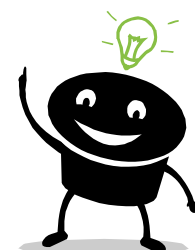
What can a student learn from participating in co-curricular activities? Singing karaoke? Attending club meetings and events? Taking part in stress relief days? These are a few of the events offered by the Office of Student Activities (OSA) with the goal of informing, involving and connecting students with JJC.

Many of the activities are designed to enhance the classroom experience for students. Diversity programs ranging from Hispanic Heritage Month (Aztec Stories), to Native American Heritage Month (drummers, dancers etc.) to Multicultural Holiday Celebrations and Martin Luther King, Jr. Week and many other celebrations of culture expand the understanding of another culture or an individual. On evaluations students complete for cultural programs, students have answered the question why JJC offers programs like this: "to experience stuff from other cultures and to have a better understanding", "to increase our understanding of other ways of life" and "to give students a better understanding of things happening in our world, whether locally or around the world. It was nice to hear/see something rather than reading about it".

Faculty recommend speakers who will enhance the classroom experience as well. Fine Arts, English and World Languages, CIOS and other departments have taken advantage of OSA's offer to help bring in speakers who will enhance the knowledge gained in the classroom. We've brought in authors and artists who can share their expertise with stu-

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**Got a great idea for an assessment project?
Does it go beyond regular department assessment efforts?
Need some extra funding to make it happen?
Apply for an Assessment Grant!
Talk to your department rep. for details, or see the SLC website www.jjc.edu/about/committees/student-learning**



Student Learning Outside the Classroom, cont. From page 3

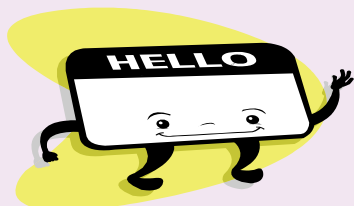
knowledge gained in the classroom. We've brought in authors and artists who can share their expertise with students.

But what's the purpose of the monthly Karaoke, mentalists, hypnotists, comedienne etc.? Some programs are purely entertainment and provide events for students to do when not in class. They get students connected to the college, provide a place to hang out with friends, and have some fun or unwind and relax between classes. Students need that opportunity to have some fun too.

Some awareness campaigns seek to educate the students about relevant topics of their population. National Collegiate Alcohol Awareness Week, Wellness Week, Sexual Responsibility Week, Eating Disorders Awareness etc. are topics often addressed by the Wellness program which is also part of the Office of Student Activities.

Do we evaluate our programs? As much as possible, we do have students complete evaluations for programs to see what they are gaining from participating. There are times when it's difficult to evaluate a program but in those cases, we try to track the numbers of students who attend. Try getting across the bridge when the mentalist or hypnotist is doing their show! Imagine trying to count the number of students out there too! It's not an easy task, but one we try to do when we can.

Participation in these events has been great and we welcome the opportunity to work with faculty members to bring in more speakers and programs. If you have ideas, please don't hesitate to contact us and never hesitate to encourage students to attend programs, both for fun and education!



Want to learn more about assessing student learning?

Attend a conference!

Funding may be available through the SLC.

Contact Kristin LaTour, ext. 6707, for details.

2009 Assessment Institute
Indianapolis
October 26-27, 2009

AAC&U General Ed. &
Assessment
Seattle
February 18-20, 2010

2010 HLC Annual Meeting
Chicago
April 9-13, 2010

Assessing Student Memory cont. from page 2

Bio107 students were learning about cell structures and basic plant anatomy respectively. Seventy-two percent of those students who responded (18 of 25) to a post-quiz survey indicated that the mnemonic had helped them to remember a term(s) useful in answering a question(s) on the respective quizzes they took. Several of the students that did not think that the mnemonic helped them on the particular quiz mentioned that they thought it would be helpful at another time.

Conclusion:

This preliminary assessment suggests that our students can benefit from using mnemonic strategies for improving their memory and overall learning. It is not clear however from this initial study whether students continue to utilize this technique. It was obvious to me, that once I stopped discussing Willingham's memory paper and his strategies, my students seemed to return to ineffective modes of studying Willingham noted many college student rely on- copying or highlighting their notes and reading over the textbook. As Willingham notes, neither of these strategies guarantees students will think about the material in meaningful and memorable ways. Even worse, viewing the material several times in these ways lead to the illusion that one knows it because it seems increasingly familiar, but viewing the material does not give it much sticking power in memory.

Willingham, Daniel T., "What will improve a student's memory?" *American Educator* 32 (2008-2009): 17-25.