

Pre-Workshop Writing Assignment – due Wednesday, October 29 (so we can get responses to the workshop facilitators). Fine if you do this this weekend and get it to us early!

Assignments that Improve Arguments: CLA in the Classroom

CALL and Response Workshop

Friday, October 31 - Saturday, November 1, 2008

Georgetown University professor and assistant provost, Randy Bass has been widely quoted for the following observation:

One telling measure of how differently teaching is regarded from traditional scholarship or research within the academy is what a difference it makes to have a "problem" in one versus the other. In scholarship and research, having a "problem" is at the heart of the investigative process; it is the compound of the generative questions around which all creative and productive activity revolves. But in one's teaching, a "problem" is something you don't want to have, and if you have one, you probably want to fix it. Asking a colleague about a *problem* in his or her research is an invitation; asking about a problem in one's teaching would probably seem like an accusation...How might we think of teaching practice, and the evidence of student learning, as problems to be investigated, analyzed, represented, and debated?

Randy Bass, "The Scholarship of Teaching: What's the Problem?" *Inventio* (February 1999, Vol. 1, No. 1)

In preparation for our workshop, we would like you to write not more than one page telling us about your "teaching problem."

The goal of this workshop is to help instructors design course-specific assignments that require students to evaluate an array of evidence – qualitative and quantitative, relevant and irrelevant, reliable and questionable – and make a convincing recommendation that is appropriately supported by that evidence. Our view of arguments is an expansive one, but we are particularly interested in those situations where students are asked to solve complex problems involving "messy data". A geologist might want his students to be able to determine whether a site is suitable for an office building. An economist might want her students to be able to use quantitative data to recommend whether small Central American coffee growers should shift to another crop. A faculty member teaching English literature might want his students to choose a poem from a group of several and argue why it deserves a particular literary prize.

We would like you to think about a specific course in which your students have trouble either making good arguments, or making arguments at all, or in which you would like to see them make better arguments.

- Tell us what course you would like to work on. You might also tell us something about the students in this course. For example, are they majors or non-majors? Are they beginning or advanced students?

- What kinds of arguments do you want your students to be able to make at the end of this course?
- What assignments do you use in this course both to teach and to evaluate your students' ability to make an argument?
- What do you do currently to help your students learn to make the kinds of arguments you are looking for in this course?
- What problems do you find your students have making arguments in this course? Do they have trouble recognizing assumptions? Evaluating evidence? Sorting out the relevant from the irrelevant? What would you like them to be able to do better?

Please send your responses to kmoldenh@carleton.edu by Wednesday, October 29, so we can share them with facilitators (and get you a summary).