

Newsroom

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Georgia Southern University

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Register for SoTL Commons Conference at Georgia Southern

MAY 16, 2007

When you earn a doctorate and prepare to teach at the college level, you become an expert in your subject area. You learn a lot, but you don't necessarily learn to teach.

'Many college faculty are instinctively good teachers,' says Raleigh Way, instructional designer in the Center for Excellence in Teaching (CET) at Georgia Southern University. 'But many find they need to know more about the process of teaching and the ways in which students learn. Out of that grew the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL), a new wave in education and research that focuses on pedagogy, or the effort to improve teaching.'

The CET will address that new wave when it hosts the first SoTL Commons Conference Thursday and Friday, Nov. 1 and 2, bringing together people whose goal is to improve learning outcomes in higher education. More than 100 scholars have already registered to present their research, and 300-400 are expected to attend the conference, which will be held in the Nessmith-Lane Building on the campus of Georgia Southern University in Statesboro. Early registration is available until July 15 at <http://www.georgiasouthern.edu/ijsoil/conference/registration.htm>.

'Teaching and learning is a vital topic that draws worldwide attention,' says Way, pointing out that professors from around the globe are planning to take part. 'Many of the scholars who will present their research at the SoTL Commons Conference live and work as far away as England, Switzerland, Australia, Sweden, Swaziland, Singapore, South Africa, Canada, New Zealand, and more are coming from all over the United States. We've got something really international here.'

The keynote speaker for SoTL Commons will be Mary T. Huber, author and senior scholar on SoTL at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. She directs the Integrative Learning Project and works closely with the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. Her latest book, co-authored with Carnegie Vice President Pat Hutchings, is *The Advancement of Learning: Building the Teaching Commons* (2005).

Featured speaker will be Robert Beichner, Alumni Distinguished Undergraduate Professor, Department of Physics, North Carolina State University. His work focuses on increasing the understanding of student learning and the improvement of physics education. One current project is the creation and study of a learning environment supporting a new way to teach called SCALE-UP: Student-Centered Activities for Large Enrollment Undergraduate Programs.

The International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching & Learning, published by the CET at Georgia Southern University, is a companion to the SoTL Commons Conference. This open access, peer-reviewed eJournal is at <http://www.georgiasouthern.edu/ijstl/current.htm>.

More information about the SoTL Commons Conference and its participants is at <http://www.georgiasouthern.edu/ijstl/conference/>. For questions about the conference, call the CET at 912-681-0049.

Conversations with Professors set for Aug. 12

MAY 16, 2007

During the fall 2006 semester, a task force comprised of faculty from each college and including a representative of the Bulloch County School System met regularly to discuss ways to improve the First-Year Experience (FYE), a program that serves students new to Georgia Southern University. One result of the task force's work is a new event: Conversations with Professors.

'The philosophy adopted by the First-Year Experience Task Force emphasizes that the program must set a proper academic tone,' said Chris Caplinger, FYE director. 'We need to articulate our academic expectations to incoming students right away, and one way to ensure this is to involve faculty with new students at the very beginning of their experience at Georgia Southern. Conversations with Professors will accomplish this.'

More than 100 faculty members have already volunteered to take part in Conversations with Professors on Sunday, Aug. 12, from 3:30-4:45 p.m. Students are assigned to a section and enrolled at summer SOAR session by their academic college. Faculty who've volunteered will be assigned a section of 25 students from their college.

'Students entering Georgia Southern are welcomed to their residence halls and to the student life opportunities on campus,' said Tom Case, professor of information systems and a member of the task force. 'On the academic side, we thought students should receive an academic welcome to the classroom.'

'When the task force brainstormed with faculty about the specific content of Conversations with Professors, it became apparent that there are many different ways to structure effective sessions,' explained Jessica Orvis, assistant professor of chemistry and a member of the task force. 'We've provided some faculty resources on the FYE Web site. Other than a focus on students' roles as learners and faculty expectations in the classroom, faculty members are free to craft their

conversation in any manner they see fit. What's important is that, as a faculty, we are setting an academic tone for students."

Faculty in each Conversation will have the assistance of a student "Conversations Assistant" (CA). In addition to the administrative task of checking attendance, CAs are meant to model the types of productive relationships faculty and students should develop. Participating faculty members may invite a student of their choice to assist in the program or ask the FYE office to assign one.

For more information about Conversations with Professors or to volunteer, visit the Georgia Southern Web site at <http://academics.georgiasouthern.edu/fye/conversations.htm>.

You can also find more information by calling the First-Year Experience office at 912-681-5401.