

DR. SALLY KUHLENSCHMIDT, PROFESSOR OF PSYCHOLOGY AND DIRECTOR OF THE FACULTY CENTER FOR EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING — FaCET — SAID SHE CONDUCTED HER FIRST RESEARCH STUDY IN THE THIRD GRADE. DRIVEN BY A DESIRE TO LEARN WHAT HER CLASSMATES WERE LIKE, SHE DEVISED A QUESTIONNAIRE AND DISTRIBUTED IT TO THE CLASS.

"I got the teacher in trouble," Dr. Kuhlenschmidt said. One of her questions asked about the salaries of the students' fathers, something that prompted concerned parents to call the teacher.

"I think I was born interested in psychology. I know a lot of people go through a kind of wondering phase. All I wondered was what to call what I was interested in. When I found out in junior high that it was called psychology, I was delighted," she said.

Dr. Kuhlenschmidt said that her experience as a professor of clinical psychology (with minors in industrial/organizational psychology and statistics) fits well with her role as FaCET director.

"The professor part is important because having gone through the tenure and promotion process as

a faculty member and having taught students each term gives a legitimacy to my role at FaCET, and it also keeps me grounded in reality."

She has also found her diverse psychology background to be beneficial. "Teaching and learning are fundamental psychological principles. Learning is what psychology was founded on," she said.

Dr. Kuhlenschmidt said she has no difficulty finding research projects that incorporate both teaching principles and psychological methods. "I think about the world as a psychologist so when I look at a problem, I try to solve it using psychological approaches."

Teaching and Learning

BY KIMBERLY PARSLEY

Sally Kuhlenschmidt (right monitor) connects with administrators and faculty at the University of Cincinnati through an interactive television classroom.





"Americans as a group are test happy. In my opinion, we tend to over test. We may test without ever evaluating the data, and if we test too much, we don't have time to evaluate the data."

Psychology and teaching have in common an emphasis on assessment, an area on which much of Dr. Kuhlenschmidt's research has focused.

"There's a lot of assessment in teaching and in higher education, everything from testing students to faculty evaluations to program evaluation," she said. "Being comfortable with this field is a useful skill to have."

In a recent study, Dr. Kuhlenschmidt and psychology colleague Dr. Steve Wininger conducted an online survey to determine the testing habits of Western Kentucky University faculty. Dr. Kuhlenschmidt said that there were assumptions prevalent on campus about testing habits, such as the frequency of grading on a curve, or of using multiple-choice vs. essay questions, but there were no data regarding any of the assumptions.

There were 215 full-time, part-time, and adjunct faculty who completed the thirty-five-question survey. The major findings of the report were published in the FaCET newsletter, "The Teaching Spirit," which can be found on-line at http://www.wku.edu/teaching/newsletters/14_4.html#2. Both Kuhlenschmidt and Wininger plan further publications and presentations based on the results. In addition, they intend to expand the survey to get a national sample.

Dr. Kuhlenschmidt said that investigations of common testing habits are particularly pertinent given the current national movement toward an increased focus on assessment and accountability. She said that assessment can be a useful tool, but that opportunities for misuse of assessment are abundant. She explored these opportunities for misuse in a panel presentation (with psychology faculty John Bruni and Patty Randolph and Provost Barbara Burch) titled, "Dirty Little Secrets of Educational Assessment."

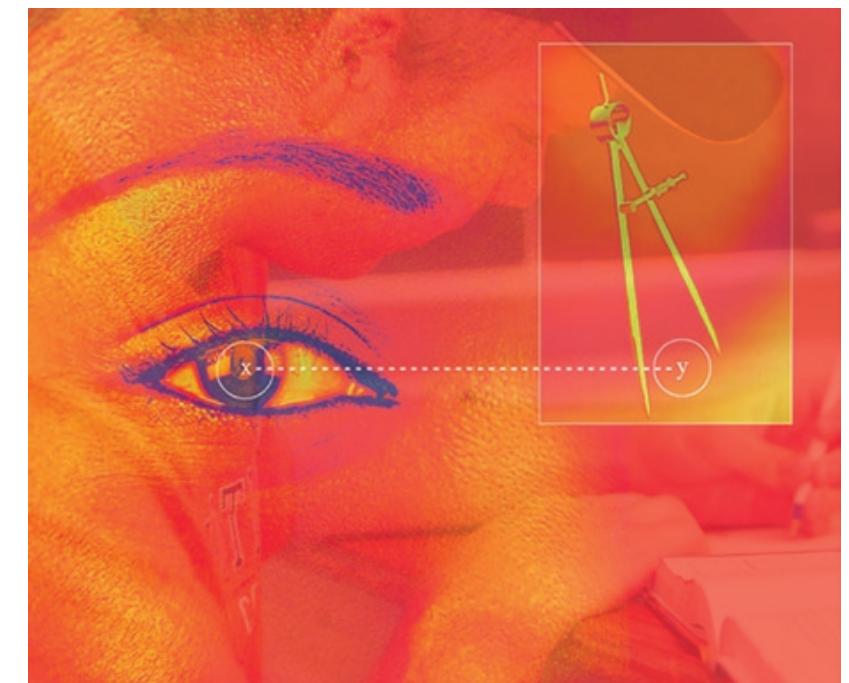
"Waving a test at something doesn't make it all better," she said. "Americans as a group are test happy. In my opinion, we tend to over test. We may test without ever evaluating the data, and if we test too much, we don't have time to evaluate the data."

She explained that there are two types of assessment, summative and formative. Summative assessment is what most likely comes to mind when one hears the words assessment or test. It is a grade on an exam or at the end of a class. For faculty, it might be an evaluation.

"Our mission falls more under formative assessment, that is assessment that helps a person improve, grow, change," Dr. Kuhlenschmidt said. "An example of formative assessment is asking students at the end of class to write

down the most important thing they learned, then looking over the results and drawing some conclusions about how effective a presentation or activity was. Aside from the teacher, no one else might ever see the results, but that kind of formative assessment keeps us going and growing."

In addition to assessment, another national movement on which Dr. Kuhlenschmidt is at the forefront is student engagement, also a focus at Western. The FaCET mission is



to inspire excellence in teaching. FaCET promotes exemplary ideas, activities, and resources designed to engage learners in the classroom and beyond. "Student engagement is a good concept because it captures some of the basic principles of effective instruction," Kuhlenschmidt said.

Student engagement is the idea that learning only occurs when a student is actively processing the information. "When you have a learning experience where students have had to do something or enact something, they are much more likely to remember the information than if they have been passive recipients of a lecture or experience," Dr. Kuhlenschmidt explained.

She said that the benefits of making students active participants in the learning process have been long acknowledged, and she is glad to see a heightened focus on that aspect of teaching and learning.

FaCET has a library that offers faculty a wide range of resources on teaching and teaching approaches and includes information on such specific topics as retention, freshman seminar, assessment, teaching philosophies and more.



Photo courtesy of CSET

Ginger King, an undergraduate chemistry student working in Western's Institute for Combustion Science and Environmental Technology, uses a bomb calorimeter to determine the chlorine content in coal ash.

Digital cameras, laptop computers, digital projectors, a digital video camera, a portable public address system, and other equipment can be borrowed from FACET.

Dr. Kuhlenschmidt said that technology, specifically the Internet, offers faculty enormous opportunities for teaching in and out of the classroom. Much of her own research and creative work has centered on Internet-based information and instruction, including completing a certificate in distance education from the State University of West Georgia. "I wanted to have the experience of being an online student," she said. That experience includes several publications concerning on-line learning.

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In addition to constructing and maintaining both her own professional website and being involved with the FaCET website, Dr. Kuhlenschmidt has also created websites for many of the professional organizations and groups of which she is a member. She was the force behind the development of a writing consortium of ten Kentucky schools and one school from West Virginia, with each school taking a turn at researching, writing and sending out a weekly e-mail message on a different teaching topic each week. More than one hundred WKU faculty members have signed up for the service, which Dr. Kuhlenschmidt created primarily as a way to disseminate information to Western's adjunct faculty.

Of all the web-based projects in which she has been involved, she said her favorite is a quotes database, reached through the FaCET website. She said she had been collecting quotes, mainly on education, for years and decided to put them into a searchable, sortable database for the use and enjoyment of her fellow faculty members. She said she enjoys perusing the collection of more than 3000 quotes, and others do as well. The data collected on the most frequently hit pages on the FaCET website showed the quotes pages to be the most popular.

Dr. Kuhlenschmidt's favorite quote also deals with assessment:

Examinations are formidable even to the best prepared, for the greatest fool may ask more than the wisest man can answer.

— Charles Caleb Colton