Focus on Learning: 
A Message From the Editors

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The biggest change in higher education during the decade since the term “Scholarship of Teaching” was first used (Boyer, 1990) is the understanding that student learning is the sole measurement of educational quality. It is difficult, perhaps, to remember that institutional status was once measured in terms of inputs such as the number of books in the college library, the percentage of faculty members with advanced degrees, or the amount of federal funds awarded to the institution. Since the teaching-learning connection began to be investigated in a scholarly way (Richlin, 2001), the emphasis on learning outcomes has become the primary focus, with student satisfaction an important but secondary concern.

Today, as we look at the presentations being proposed and selected for the Lilly Conferences on College and University Teaching, we see that upcoming additions to the higher education teaching and learning literature will include the connection of the physiology and psychology of learning to how we conduct teaching activities in and out of the classroom. The focus will remain on how we are best able to assist our students to learn both the processes and content of our disciplines.

The articles in this issue of the Journal represent three areas of research into how teaching can better effect learning: providing structure, organizing for creativity, and incorporating technology.

Providing Structure

Fleming describes three methods of helping students get organized for learning: a checklist, modified rubrics, and e-mail, and reports significant improvement by those students who used the tools. She finds that “passing [such learning-enhancing methods] on to the class empow-
ers students to take an active role in their learning” (p. 14).

Verkler, Wiens, Lynch, Gurney, Higginbotham, Siebert, and Wise report on how developing a professional portfolio enables students (in this case preservice teachers) to reflect on what they have learned so that they can continue to build their skills. While many students did not enjoy the portfolio process, they appreciated its ability to enhance their reflective skills.

Organizing for Creativity

Texeira and Marx describe how they developed specific assignments and creative processes to lead their students to think critically about race images in the media and report how their students developed more sophisticated critical-thinking skills. They suggest that “if students can learn to examine more critically the media, an institution that is so influential in their lives, they can transfer this skill to other areas of their lives” (p. 59).

Rehorick and Perry created a learning activity so that their Japanese students, who were extremely concerned about avoiding mistakes in their writing in English, could think critically and write creatively. Their method shifts the classroom dynamic from teacher-centered to student-centered, encouraging students to take risks with ideas, to speak out more often in class, and to work together in teams.

Berk uses music to create humor in order to attract student interest in classroom demonstrations, appealing to a broad range of the students’ multiple intelligences. His techniques encourage active student involvement that enhances learning.

Incorporating Technology

Montagu makes the important distinction between teaching students how to use technology for its own sake versus teaching technology in support of disciplinary content and processes. He has identified four facets that, when learned together, enable students to master using computer-based tools and specific learning outcomes.

Yarbrough compared student grades and satisfaction in computer-assisted and lecture-based learning environments. He suggests that classroom success may be less dependent on a particular learning environment than on an instructor’s savvy within that environment.

The editors of the Journal hope that you find the experiences of these
authors helpful and encourage you to try their techniques out in your classrooms. Then share your results to add to the knowledge base for the scholarship of teaching.

References
