

Application of St. Jerome's University, University of Waterloo, Canada
“uPods 2006:
Fostering Integrative Learning Through Community Collaboration”
(Liberal Education and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning)

Darren Becks, Director of Residences and Facility Operations. Darren has been a leader in the development in curricular and co-curricular support programs for students in residence. He initiated and has mentored a very successful residence Don program at St. Jerome's. (dbecks@uwaterloo.ca)

Maureen Drysdale, Associate Professor of Psychology; Acting Director, Sexuality, Marriage, and Family Studies. While at the University of Calgary, Dr. Drysdale was a Research Associate in the Teaching Development Office from 1995 to 2001, and she served as a member of the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (STLHE) Planning Committee for the 1998-99 year. She has attended numerous STLHE and Lily conferences on college teaching. Since coming to St. Jerome's University, she has been a member of the University of Waterloo Teaching Based Research Group (2002 – present), where she has focused her attention on innovative teaching and service learning. She is an Associate of the Waterloo Centre for the Advancement of Cooperative Education (WatCACE); her emphasis here has been on the examination of learning outcomes. She teaches courses in educational psychology, learning disorders, and problem behaviour in the classroom. (mdrysdal@uwaterloo.ca)

Ted McGee, Associate Dean; Professor of English. Dr. McGee is a co-chair of the Learning Initiatives Task Force at St. Jerome's, and he is a member of the University of Waterloo's Teaching Excellence Council. He has published on the teaching of Shakespeare and Renaissance drama, and he has been nominated several times for the University of Waterloo's Distinguished Teaching Award. (cemcgee@uwaterloo.ca)

Tracy Penny Light, Acting Associate Director, Teaching Resource Office (TRACE) and Office of the Associate Vice-President, Learning Resources and Innovation, University of Waterloo. Dr. Penny Light has worked across the University of Waterloo campus with groups engaged in teaching and learning initiatives. She is a resource person deeply familiar with ongoing developments in teaching and learning research and also a dedicated university instructor in History and Sexuality, Marriage and Family Studies. In addition, she is founding Co-Editor of the MERLOT Journal of Online Learning and Teaching (JOLT) which seeks to provide college and university instructors a venue to present their scholarship on teaching and learning. Her current research focuses on the use of electronic portfolios to promote deep learning, helping students to make connections between their learning experiences. The latter makes her an important team member in our attempt to integrate the classroom, student life, the prospective workplace, and the community. (tplight@admmail.uwaterloo.ca)

Myroslaw Tataryn, Vice President and Academic Dean of St. Jerome's University. Dr. Tataryn's involvement in the Instructional Development Committee of the University of Saskatchewan, prior to coming to St. Jerome's provides a breadth of familiarity with current scholarship on teaching and learning. He has brought to St. Jerome's a central commitment to

integrating the manner in which the university serves the needs of the whole student.
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STUDENT: TBA

Dana Woito, Director of University Mission and Communications. Longstanding experience in recruitment and facilitating student transition from high school to university. She continues to foster direct contact with prospective students and entering students. As Registrar she has collected data on the characteristics of SJU students and we'll use that data to inform the uPods project. PRIMARY CONTACT. (dwoito@uwaterloo.ca)

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St. Jerome's University and the CASTL Leadership Program

By its history and commitment to its mission, St. Jerome's University (SJU) has demonstrated a longstanding attachment to the notion that the best liberal arts education focuses on educating the whole person.¹ This is best done by engaging the entire educational team in creating a learning environment which serves all undergraduates maximally. Today, St. Jerome's is looking at integrating the best of current scholarship in the area of teaching and learning into its plans for the twenty-first century. Involvement in the CASTL Leadership program would facilitate our participation in the broader conversation around innovation in the liberal arts and allow us to extend the work we began in 2005 to renew our tradition of superior undergraduate education with the establishment of a Learning Initiatives Task Force (LIT Force) comprised of faculty, staff and students.² We have engaged in a process of research and reflection in order to begin to hone a plan for SJU's future educational vision.

In our LIT Force work we have been introduced to extensive research, documentation and implementation which is increasingly characterizing higher education in the U.S.A. and from this, have identified five areas for our development:

- First-year transition: engagement and skills development;

- Identifying clear learning outcomes in a liberal arts curriculum;
- Technologies to facilitate documenting outcomes;
- International service-learning;
- Team engagement and development (including classroom strategies).

We have identified a project which will begin to address the above areas and will allow us to provide a community-based program to assist students integrate their learning experiences.

Our participation in the Liberal Education and Scholarship of Teaching and Learning theme group will be developed around this project which we are calling:

uPods 2006: Fostering Learning Through Community Collaboration.

St. Jerome's has long prided itself on providing a learning community within which our students grow and mature, together with staff and faculty. St. Jerome's in fact has three student constituencies which overlap but are not wholly identical: registered SJU students (approx. 1,000), students taught in SJU classes (approx. 13,000 annually from all University of Waterloo faculties), and the students living on campus in our residences (approx. 280). We are endeavoring to uncover strategies that will facilitate learning for students in all three of these groups. A number of factors have over the past years, we believe, eroded our effectiveness in providing such an environment. The most significant debilitating factors have been: a decrease in student involvement in on-campus life; an erroneous messaging of the liberal arts as not practical; and increased class sizes which have decreased student-faculty contact. To address these factors, we will be launching uPods in Fall 2006 for all entering first-year students. uPods will consist of small groups of first-year students (10 students/group) who will meet at least once a month with a volunteer faculty or staff member. The purpose of these groups is to provide an environment through which first-year students can quickly and easily come to know their fellow students and at least one member of our faculty/staff team. The uPods will be communities for discussion, activities, and will facilitate the connection of students with workshops, programs, etc. which may be needed for them to

have a successful experience at SJU. Alongside the uPods, the Student Services department will be organizing regular skills development sessions to support first-year students in their development of skills in English, Mathematics, budgeting, time management, meta-learning, etc. uPod leaders will be expected to encourage students who could benefit from these services to participate as well as being mentors to the new students. The initial stage of this project is designed to assist in transition to university life. It will also allow us to hear from the students themselves, what additional support they would like to receive. It is, in essence, a way to conduct institutional research which engages the entire SJU community in exploring how and what students are actually learning.³ Over the past few years we have begun to survey our student population in a number of ways: first year entrance, first year satisfaction, graduate satisfaction. In addition, we have a small SJU sample from the University of Waterloo's participation in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) in 2003-4 and this year we have a significant SJU sample in the UW-NSSE survey. The uPods data, therefore, will build on the data we have already collected about the student experience at St. Jerome's. We expect that this project will provide us with a much richer view of the "new student"⁴ entering the institution and hope to do cross-tab analysis with the NSSE data.⁵

At the same time and in conjunction with the uPods initiative, the LIT Force will identify liberal arts learning outcomes at St. Jerome's and in 2006 we will engage the entire community in a process culminating in clearly defined outcomes which could be mapped against specifically identifiable markers. Simultaneously we would hope to learn from other institutions how they have managed the process of assessing learning outcomes. By bringing the external research and internal discussions together, we would provide "uPodders 2006" (at the beginning of their second year) with a clear outline of how we hope to mark (through their own reflection and documentation) their progress in their SJU Learning Outcomes. Evidence

suggests that electronic portfolios (ePortfolios) are useful tools in promoting deep learning and in helping students to articulate and document what they know and are able to do.⁶ We intend to introduce ePortfolios as a tool for reflection and documentation to the uPod groups as part of their meta-learning skills-building. Given the changing world in which we are living and in which our students live and interact, we need to promote integrative thinking early in students' careers. The key to this, of course, is to provide scaffolding and we believe that our uPods initiative is the right place to begin this development.⁷ We foresee embracing digital portfolios as a user friendly and completely portable mechanism by which the student's will be able to make use of their documented markers in multiple environments. Faculty interest is also inviting us to study the value of podcasts of lectures to enhance student learning. St. Jerome's is interested in utilizing the technological savvy of its students to engage them in learning through as many media as possible.

Finally, in the second and third year of the uPod experience we will increasingly move to senior student mentorship in the uPods so that the uPods would also be fertile areas for the development of student leaders. We hope that the relationships with faculty and staff built up over the first years of the uPod experience will result in a much closer and vibrant learning community than we already have. Such an environment will provide a solid basis from which students would be able to enter our international service-learning program "Intercordia" (<http://www.sju.ca/courses/intercordia/intercordia.html>).

St. Jerome's is well-poised to initiate this longitudinal project, and document and critically assess it. We have a number of benchmarks against which we will be able to test the outcomes (at least initially in the short term) of this project. Further we are committed to utilizing the LIT Force as an overseeing body for this project which would be able to critically assess developments, suggest necessary adjustments, and ultimately reflect upon the achievement of

our goals. We foresee the authoring of a comprehensive report to the St. Jerome's community, to the University of Waterloo (UW) and to CASTL on our outcomes. We would also be eager to present our finding to the ACCUC and AUCC (if interested). The experience of a small liberal arts institution federated with a larger comprehensive university is not common in the United States. Participation in the program comes from our commitment to extend our experience beyond St. Jerome's. As the largest liberal arts institution affiliated with the University of Waterloo, we implicitly provide leadership on the University of Waterloo campus. Given our size (15% of the Faculty of Arts), we are more adept at innovative and experimental practices and yet, since we are the largest affiliated institution, we influence directions and practices at the University of Waterloo. As active members of the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities in Canada (ACCUC) we also collaborate with universities and colleges Canada-wide in the area of teaching and learning. Our role in the CASTL Program would directly impact these cross-institutional developments. Given our facilities and our proximity to Toronto International Airport, we would gladly host a meeting of the teams on the project and if acceptable use that occasion to highlight the CASTL program to the eight universities within a one hour drive of Waterloo. We are confident that our participation in the CASTL program would have clear benefits far beyond the St. Jerome's campus.

The involvement of the Vice-President and Academic Dean demonstrates the strength of St. Jerome's institutional commitment to this project and the corresponding budgetary support of its initiatives.

¹ St. Jerome's was established in 1856 by German missionaries devoted to the education of German settlers in what is now Wellington County, Ontario. From modest beginnings as a liberal arts men's college, St. Jerome's gained university status (1959), federated with the University of Waterloo (1960), and established its first self-contained Masters degree (MCT-2006). Today St. Jerome's is the largest of four partner institutions to the University of Waterloo and home to a Faculty of Mathematics and a Faculty of Arts.

² The LIT Force is comprised of the following staff, faculty and students: Carolyn Dirks, Senior Library and SJU Coordinator of Learning Resources; Ted McGee, Chair, Department of English; Tracy Penny Light; BJ Rye, Director, Sexuality, Marriage and Family Studies program (SMF); Cynthia Struthers, Professor of Mathematics; Myroslaw Tataryn, Vice President and Academic Dean of SJU; John Tottenham, Senior student; Dana Woito, Registrar.

³ In their recent paper, "Learning About Student Learning from Community Colleges," Pat Hutchings and Lee Shulman discuss the importance of asking what they call the "tougher questions." We also believe that we need to ask, as they suggest, questions like, "What do our students know, and what can they do? What do they understand deeply? What kinds of human beings are they becoming – intellectually, morally, in terms of civic responsibility? How does our teaching shape their experience of learners, and how might it do so more effectively?" We believe that the UPods initiative will allow us to begin to ask these questions and will assist us in our efforts to identify clear learning outcomes and competencies for our students undertaking study in a liberal arts curriculum.

⁴ There has been a great deal of interest lately in the "new student." For instance, see Marc Prensky, "Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants," *On the Horizon*, 9, 5 (October, 2001); "Engage Me or Enrage Me: What Today's Learners Demand," *Educause Review*, (September/October, 2005); Diana Oblinger and James Oblinger (eds.), *Educating the Net Generation*, Educause, 2005. While we certainly recognize some of the characteristics identified in this work in our students, we also realize that they do not exhibit all of these characteristics (for instance, the reliance on technology as essential tools). This may be due, in part, to cultural differences between the United States and Canada. Our goal is to be better able to articulate the characteristics of SJU students specifically (and Waterloo students more generally) to contribute to conversations about student engagement currently underway in Canada and the U.S. This data is clearly needed in order to design programs that will engage our students in meaningful ways.

⁵ The benchmarks identified in the NSSE are important indicators of student engagement. However, as noted above, we do not know enough about the student experience at St. Jerome's (an on the wider University of Waterloo campus) at present to really get the full benefit of participating in this survey. We would like to map the data from the NSSE to the data from UPods and, after the first and subsequent years of students' programs found in student ePortfolios to get a better sense of how students are being engaged and how they view engagement as compared to the results of the NSSE. We anticipate having a large enough response rate to begin to correlate the data. This would build on the work that has already begun which is tracking student learning in different contexts on the main campus. See <http://eportfolio.uwaterloo.ca>

⁶ One of the team members, Tracy Penny Light, has been working with ePortfolios over the past two years to explore how this tool can assist learners to make connections between their experiences in different learning contexts (academic, workplace, and community) and to develop important meta-learning skills. "Thinking Critically in History (and Beyond): Using ePortfolios to Improve Student Learning" in progress. See also <http://eportfolio.uwaterloo.ca>. For early research on student perceptions of ePortfolios and a beginning conceptual framework for their use see Tosh, David, Tracy Penny Light, Kele Fleming and Jeff Haywood, "Student engagement, a key in e-portfolio development: A Collaborative Approach to Investigating Student Perspectives of ePortfolio use in Higher Education," *Canadian Journal of Learning Technology*, Volume 31, Issue 3, Fall / automne 2005; Tosh, David, Ben Werdmuller, Helen Chen, Tracy Penny Light and Jeff Haywood, "The Learning Landscape: A Conceptual Framework for E-Portfolios," forthcoming in Ali Jafari (ed.), *Handbook of Research on Electronic Portfolios*. See also Mary Taylor Huber and Pat Hutchings, *Integrative Learning: Mapping the Terrain*, Washington: AAC&U, 2004.

⁷ Huber and Hutchings, *Integrative Learning*, p. 2-4; George Kuh, et.al., *Student Success in College: Creating Conditions that Matter*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005.