



Learning about learning

Books faculty have been reading together

Thanks to funding from the Bush Foundation, faculty at Gustavus have been able to hold book discussions about topics relating to teaching and learning, some during January Term, others at “Teachers Talking” lunches, which are held monthly.

Here are some recent discussion books.

Discussion as a Way of Teaching: Tools and Techniques for Democratic Classrooms, second edition, by Stephen D. Brookfield and Stephen Preskill (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005).

This book, read by a cross-disciplinary group of faculty, provides practical guidance for teachers who want to improve the quality of discussion in their classrooms, and who want to model for students the kinds of dis-

course that enhance democratic participation through encouraging diverse perspectives. The 10 participating faculty members, drawn from departments as diverse as nursing, computer science, and English, met throughout January Term to share their experiences and techniques.

How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School, ex-

panded edition, published by the National Research Council (Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press, 2000).

A group of science faculty, led by Jeff Dahlseid '90 in biochemistry, tackled this book, which looks at learning through the lens of cognitive science. The book summarizes the research on how infants and children learn, how learning is transferred (and why that is difficult), how the learning of experts and novices differs, and more. Blending insights from cognitive psychology, neuroscience, and the classroom, the book offers much food for thought. It can be browsed online at <www.nap.edu>, along with new books on learning math, science, and history.

What the Best College Teachers Do, by Ken Bain (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

An engaging exploration of what really good teachers really do in their classrooms, this book provides research-based insights into how teachers prepare, what they expect of their students, how they draw students into learning, and how they might go beyond a transmission-style form of teaching to figuring out how students actually learn. And it does all this in a highly entertaining and insightful short book.

Shakespeare, Einstein, and the Bottom Line: The Marketing of Higher Education, by David Kirp (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

This book opens, provocatively, by contrasting two campuses. One is green and pleasant

and has up-to-date and well-kept buildings; the other is decaying and neglected and seems equally dismal and dispirited. The latter institution is the University of Chicago; the former is McDonald's “Hamburger U.” Kirp explores, through chapter-length case studies, the challenges facing higher education as it becomes “corporatized.” He concludes that colleges and universities must take charge of communicating to the public the value of education if that value is to be sustained.

Life on the Tenure Track: Lessons from the First Year, by James M. Lang (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005).

Lang chronicles his first year on the tenure track in a book that is funny, insightful, disarming, inspiring, and an utterly honest look at the challenges facing the new teacher. Particularly valuable for beginning college teachers, this memoir tackles basic issues as it chronicles Lang's first year, month by month—what to do on the first day of class (and how to recuperate when you bomb); how to fit research and writing into your schedule; how to balance life and work; how to decide if you're teaching in the right place.

Although this book was added to the Faculty Development Center library primarily for new faculty and their mentors, it is recommended to anyone who is involved in, or is contemplating, the academic life. 

