Anne Kelsch and Kathleen Vacek attended the Professional and Organizational Development (POD) Conference in Atlanta in late October. The POD network is devoted to improving teaching and learning in post-secondary education through faculty development. They share their reflections below.

**Anne:** This annual conference speaks directly to my work at UND in a number of ways. Sessions range in emphasis from working with faculty members as teachers (providing consultation on pedagogy, evaluation of students, and other aspects of student/teacher interaction), as scholars and professionals (offering assistance on grant writing, SoTL scholarship, committee work, and a wide range of other activities), and as people (focusing on stress and time management, career development, and interpersonal skills). Underlying this approach is the belief that faculty members are a primary driving force behind the university and therefore helping faculty be as productive and effective as possible will better the entire institution.

With OID’s long-term commitment to mentoring new faculty, I attended several sessions on effective mentoring programs. I was most impressed by the Mutual Mentoring Initiative at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, which is funded by a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. This initiative takes a fresh approach by thinking in terms of mentoring networks that expand on some of the best features of the traditional (one-on-one) mentoring relationship. The program seeks to empower new faculty to intentionally build personalized, context-appropriate mentoring relationships across cultures, disciplines, career stages, and career competencies. For example, their New Faculty Initiatives Office funded a series of “micro-grants” which gave junior faculty resources to construct those kinds of networks that would best support their individual professional growth. It is still fairly new and research results are preliminary, but the program is showing some promising returns that may translate well to UND.

**Kathleen:** Several of the sessions and conversations I took part in at POD underscored the importance of personal development. In particular, many discussions pointed to one simple but important piece of advice: “Take good care of yourself.”

The first place this theme surfaced was in a workshop on teaching students to apply brain research to become better learners. While we teach students to improve cognitive performance by making good choices about diet, getting enough sleep, and taking strategically-timed breaks, we would be wise to improve our own habits as well. And when we take time to reduce stress—also a topic at POD—we improve our quality of life and the quality of our work.

Other conversations touched on ways faculty can take good care of their intellectual lives. Faculty writing groups have been found to foster work-life balance and to help faculty connect to a community of scholars. POD attendees also talked about ways to connect teaching, research, and service. Not only a strategy for managing a heavy workload, making such connections can help faculty integrate their work and avoid feeling torn by competing obligations. I hope to continue these conversations at UND. With our emphasis on wellness, we are in a good place to generate creative strategies for a balanced and connected faculty life.
CAPSTONES ASSESSMENT PROJECT: WHAT ARE OUR SENIORS LEARNING?
Tom Steen, Essential Studies

At the end of the fall semester, we will examine a sample of student work from several different Essential Studies (ES) capstone courses. The goal is to take a close look at the learning of our senior students as they close out their undergraduate programs at UND.

This December project is our first try at assessment of “C” course work, and it’s our first cross-course look at learning outcomes for the ES program. After this initial project, we expect that the process will become a regular feature of the assessment plan for ES.

The project will be led by Joan Hawthorne, Director of Assessment and Regional Accreditation, and Tom Steen, Director of ES, with support from Anne Kelsch and the Office of Instructional Development. The plan is to organize a team of faculty from across the campus to work together during a half-day retreat where we will review student work samples, using previously-developed UND assessment rubrics. Based on the team’s work, we will gain a picture of the quality of student learning in their general education at UND. Results will be shared with the full campus community, and they will be used in the ES program review planned for 2012-13. Those involved in the scoring will be invited to discuss the results and suggest ways to strengthen our offerings and program features in ES.

The plan is to conduct this assessment work on two ES goals each year, thus setting up a two-year cycle. This year, the assessment focus is on the two goals most frequently used now: Thinking & Reasoning and Communication. In addition, since some “C” courses are approved to also meet the requirement in Advanced Communication, the project will also examine the more in-depth learning that “A” designated capstones are aiming for.

Team Members Needed

We could use your help: To conduct the Capstone Assessment Project, we need campus faculty members to serve on the assessment team. Ideally, team members should include faculty who have taught ES courses, been involved in validation/revalidation of courses, and served on the ES or GER Committee. But ES is a campus-wide program, and faculty from all programs and majors, whether directly involved in ES or not, will also have useful perspectives. If you have an interest in what our students are learning in our undergraduate programs, please volunteer. To do so, contact Tom Steen, Office of Essential Studies, thomas.steen@email.und.edu or 777-4434.

REFLECTING ON TEACHING
Anne Kelsch

In the Faculty Study Seminar I am facilitating this semester we are reading Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses by Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa. The authors analyzed the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) results of 2,300 students at twenty-four universities over four years. While we are only a third of the way through the reading, so far it is pretty disheartening. In the most reductionist sense, Arum and Riska argue that students don’t study very much and therefore don’t learn very much. Just a sampling of the bad news: their findings showed “no statistically significant gains in critical thinking, complex reasoning, and writing skills” for at least 45 percent of their study participants during their freshman and sophomore years. Our cross-disciplinary group of twelve has argued the merits of this research, but we agree the book raises important issues for higher education to consider, especially in an era of economic hardship, increasing student debt load, and greater demands for accountability.

I’m holding on for the chapters in which the authors examine institutions where student learning results run counter to the overall trend. Although I’m not yet persuaded that Academically Adrift portrays a complete and accurate picture, I am convinced that higher education needs to offer more resources and support for faculty who are striving—in a very challenging environment—to improve student learning. This October, 189 faculty from

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UND and around the state gathered at the Reflecting on Teaching Colloquium to do just that: to compare notes, to create together, and to dare each other to imagine something better for our students. I want to thank each presenter and participant for their efforts on behalf of our students and fellow teachers. Arum and Riska’s title partially refers to the significant “drift” higher education has taken from teaching as a primary mission, and they offer strong confirmation of the cultural and institutional challenges facing student-centered approaches in higher education. I feel very fortunate to work with so many colleagues who fight those challenges and successfully anchor their teaching in sound pedagogical practice.

DR. JOAN HAWTHORNE RECOGNIZED FOR CHAMPIONING STUDENT LEARNING

At their 51st annual conference this fall in Miami, Florida, the Association of General and Liberal Studies (AGLS) announced that Dr. Joan Hawthorne, UND’s Director of Assessment and Regional Accreditation, is the 2011 recipient of the Jerry G. Gaff Award for Excellence in General and Liberal Education. This national award is given annually to those “who have demonstrated leadership on their campuses in the area of general and liberal education . . . and to those who have a record of achievement in curriculum development, innovation, or implementation in general and liberal education.” The award is named for Jerry Gaff, Senior Scholar at the AAC&U and a respected advocate for general and liberal education for over thirty years. Dr. Hawthorne’s receipt of the award was also recognized by Provost Lebel at a luncheon for the Undergraduate Learning Working Group in October.

Dr. Hawthorne (middle row, third from left) with the Undergraduate Learning Working Group

MEET OUR NEW FACULTY

Kim Hanson (Social Work). Kim Hanson is an Assistant Professor and PLUS Program Director at the Department of Social Work. Kim received her Bachelor of Science in Social Work and Master’s in Social Work from the University of North Dakota and is a PhD candidate in Educational Leadership—Higher Education Administration. She is a Licensed Certified Social Worker and Certified Child Welfare Worker in the State of North Dakota. For the past six years, she worked as a Foster Care Social Worker at Cass County Social Services in Fargo. Kim supervises the Parents Learning and Understanding Supports (PLUS) Program, a project designed to promote safety, well-being, and stability to at-risk children and their families. In her spare time, Kim loves to spend time in the great outdoors—kayaking, snowboarding, hiking, walking her energetic Jack Russell Terrier, and enjoying theatre productions at FrostFire, Trollwood, and Medora. Her “home away from home” is western North Dakota, where she worked three summers as a manager at the Medora Musical and interned at Home on the Range in Sentinel Butte.
UPCOMING EVENTS AND DEADLINES

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*On Teaching* is published six times a year as a service to UND faculty.
OID Director: Anne Kelsch. WAC Coordinator and newsletter editor: Kathleen Vacek.
OID/WAC Staff: Jeanne Boppre & Jana Lagro.