

CELEBRATING PEDAGOGY CONVERSATION XIV: WHAT THE BEST COLLEGE TEACHERS DO

**Robert T. McLaughlin, Ph.D., Chair and Professor, Division of Education
and**

**Timothy J. Doherty, Ph.D., Associate Professor and Coordinator,
Department of English and Communications**



ROBERT T. McLAUGHLIN, Ph.D., chairs Rivier College's education division, directs its seven educational leadership programs, is father to three children who, he enjoys telling them, are usually cute and adorable, and, with his wife, provides a home for four border collies, who all are cute and adorable (except, like his children, when they bite or bark). He's founded and chaired the International Society for Technology in Education's interest groups on innovative learning technologies and digital equity, serves on the national commission on technology and the future of teacher education, and is senior fellow for the Stokes Institute for Opportunity in STEM Education.



TIMOTHY J. DOHERTY, Ph.D., is Associate Professor and Coordinator of the Department of English and Communications at Rivier College, where he also directs the campus writing program. He received his Ph.D. in English from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst in 1996. Tim has written or presented on ways of using new technologies to teach writing, on using theatre to teach writing, and on how faculty across the campus can promote better writing instruction. He enjoys working with other faculty to reflect on teaching and learning.

We very much enjoyed the chance to perpetuate the faculty development conversations about teaching and learning launched by our former Dean, Albert DeCiccio. We used the Celebrating Pedagogy session on October 7, 2008 to think about our future needs: how can we best nurture continuous improvement in our teaching lives? To this end, we piloted a self-assessment, based in part on Ken Bain's *What the Best College Teachers Do*, drawing upon his research findings regarding effective postsecondary pedagogy. The results of that informal survey were then used to design an online survey presented to all faculty on October 24, 2008, in order to target a manageable number of specific, widely-shared priorities for faculty development in teaching.

During our dinner conversations, we were struck by participants' candor and willingness to identify areas in which they would most like to "strengthen skills." Participants commented about the need for more time for reflection about their own teaching practices. We generated many ideas about how to proceed, such as offering sessions about technique (e.g., integrating technology) or sessions that are more conceptual in nature, about specific books (e.g., Bransford's *How People Learn*) that might help us probe guiding principles for college teaching. Many recommended that we continue informal Celebrating Pedagogy events. Others envisioned expanding the venues for conversation, such as holding regular "faculty teas" a couple of afternoons each week to discuss teaching and learning. We were very encouraged by the camaraderie and ideas! ■