

Prof: Computers communicate concepts

One of the prime obstacles in getting science across in practical, understandable terms to students is making the lesson vivid and dynamic.

Scott Schneider, a physics professor at Lawrence Technological University and a resident of Farmington Hills, said computers are playing a greater role in making students understand rather than memorize scientific principles.

"This program of conceptual learning and confronting predictions is gaining a lot of momentum in the physics teaching community," Schneider said.

The key to this revolution is a piece of hardware, a universal lab interface, which permits a computer to be connected to various sensors — ultrasonic detector, force probe, temperature probe, and a microphone.

Currently, one Lawrence Tech physics lab is equipped with 10 terminals and interface hardware. This equipment, just starting to show up in Michigan's colleges and universities, allows students to conduct physics experiments and chart results in mere minutes. This approach is meant to give students more time to actually sit down and look at the data.

"We find a lot of students who go through the motions, and do well on tests but miss a lot of conceptual ideas," said Daniel Mioduszewski, chairman of Lawrence Tech's natural sciences department and a resident of Detroit. "They miss a lot of important points."

Mioduszewski said the current lab, which should soon include another two terminals, is showing the way to expansion of another physics lab in the near future. Schneider said that 250 sophomores in Physics II are serving as

willing "guinea pigs" to test prove the lab and find areas of improvement. So far, students are giving the lab thumbs up, according to Schneider.

"One student told me that in his lab he had to do some tests dropping beams to measure acceleration, and vibration with equipment just like this," Schneider said. "Industry is applying all kinds of uses to sensors. This is an introduction to that."

Schneider admitted he has embraced the new equipment so quickly he finds it hard to think about going back to the old way; students using stopwatches, counting, and plotting numbers on a graph.

"The primary goal is not to have students worrying about actually taking the data, but in understanding what's going on. Let the computer take, store and graph the data," Schneider said.

"If you let the computer do all the drudge work, then we can concentrate in the lab on what's going on. They can seek the answer to what does it mean when they get this result or that result, and they can see it by looking, and comparing the readout on the screen."

"This is opposed to taking the data and chart home to graph it and seeing that something was done wrong. Here we can see whether an experiment worked in results with thousands of measurements that would be impossible without the sensors and interface."

These lessons are not restricted to science majors. Schneider said the practical applications for the lessons embrace "just about every major on Lawrence Tech's campus. Engineers to architects — they are all being exposed to the sensors."

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Attorney takes seat on Christian Legal Society board

BY WENDY PIERMAN MITZEL
GRAY WARR

Farmington Hills attorney Sebastian Grassi Jr., who credits his involvement in the Christian Legal Society with giving him direction in life, has been appointed to a seat on the organization's national board of directors.

Grassi, a Troy resident, has been Michigan's membership director of the society since 1992.

The Christian Legal Society is made up of 4,700 lawyers, judges, law professors and law students who concentrate on protecting the religious liberties of all faiths under the U. S. Constitution — including both the idea of separation of church and state and the free exercise of religion.

CLS writes legal briefs for religious cases, aids Congress in drafting religious legislation, provides low cost legal assistance to the poor, works with alternative methods to litigation and meets regularly for Bible study and prayer.

During his last year of law school at the University of Detroit Mercy, a member of his church asked him a question that stumped him. "What do you plan to do to make a difference in your life and in the lives of others?"

Grassi decided to join CLS to find out.

"For me it was a practical way to think through and work through my religious beliefs and put them into the practice of law and assist others," he said.

As a national board member, Grassi hopes to establish chapters in every law school in the nation. So far, CLS works with 130 of the 176 law schools in the country.

He also plans to continue to inspire other attorneys and students, he said. "CLS provides a framework to help law students become practical and compassionate in their future delivery of legal services."

Grassi concentrates his own practice in the areas of business law, tax planning and estate planning. He has published many articles, gives frequent lectures and travels to other countries to teach legal skills.

He is a member of the State Bar of Michigan, American Bar Association and the Financial and Estate Planning Council of Detroit.

Grassi has lived in Troy since 1984 with his wife, Elizabeth, and three young children.

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Circuit Court Judge Fred Mester spends his days laying down the law, and his nights teaching students how to do it. For over ten years, Judge Mester has been a part-time instructor at Oakland Community College, guiding students studying the legal system. Just as people from all walks of life pass through his courtroom, his classrooms are filled with people of all different ages and backgrounds — from recent high school graduates to older learners returning to school for the first time in years. They all receive the same affordable, quality education that only a community college can provide.

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