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News From The Hedge

Summertime is the Write Time

Ah, May. During three decades as a faculty member, I very clearly recall the frisson of pleasure I experienced each May when the last grade was posted and the summer was spread before me as an open invitation to read, write and do research. It was not that none of these activities occurred during the academic year, but the demands of formal teaching, with the highly varied needs of students, the need to stay current in content and pedagogy, and the centrality of teaching to any university's mission, are often all-consuming commitments. It was that summer offered a very welcome change in focus and a change of pace, with fewer externally imposed schedules – and no grading! Summertime was not a time of less effort, but it was a different sort of effort that was called for, and for that reason welcome.

Summertime offers that chance to read those reviews and articles that one only glanced at or read the abstract of during the year; it offers one the chance (gasp) to read an entire book. Summertime also offers that chance for one to attend a conference or workshop in an area of interest, without looking over one's shoulder at the work piling up back at the ranch. Above all, summertime offers the best time to write, write, write. To update Francis Bacon's famous quote: "Reading maketh a full *person*; conference a ready *person*; and writing an exact *person*."

Furthermore, summer is the only chance one has time to follow the advice of my favorite writing coach, Mark Twain: "The time to begin writing an article is when you have finished it to your satisfaction. By that time you begin to clearly and logically perceive what it is that you really want to say." While writing is not the only creative endeavor faculty members engage in, I believe that every form of writing – a poem, a short story, an article, a review, a chapter, a novel, a textbook, or even a grant – embeds elements of critical thinking and creativity. Consequently, a well-written piece offers a sense of satisfaction to the author. Grant writing is a particular form of writing that calls for a deep knowledge and synthesis of the literature in a particular subject, a careful and critical analysis and presentation of what is known, a crystal clear description of what further needs to be known, a convincing display of the author's unique qualifications to uncover the unknown and his/her grasp of the necessary methodology to be used, and a telling summary of the transformative impact this new knowledge is likely to have on the field of inquiry. Whether a particular grant garners any funding, internally or externally, for the author, the work of grant writing has great value for a person in helping to organize his or her thinking in an area. I would invite you to take part in the up-coming ORSP grant writer's workshop (May 8-10, 2012) if you would like to kick start your efforts in this genre; space is limited so it's first come, first served. In any case, I wish you all a great summer – it is the write time!

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Virtual Reality Rehab: CMU's Ksenia Ustinova is Exploring The Future of Physical Therapy

For Dr. Ksenia Ustinova, an assistant professor of physical therapy in the College of Health Professions, a new and exciting area of research is simply a continuation of several long-time interests. She is the lead researcher on a U.S. Department of Defense-funded project that is investigating the role of virtual reality gaming therapy for soldiers and other individuals recovering from traumatic brain injuries – a research area that evolved naturally for someone keenly interested in how the body responds and reacts.

“I graduated from the Institute of Physical Education and Sport in Moscow, Russia,” she says. Ustinova was a competitive athlete in the sport of cycling. “That formed a natural interest in human movement, and also in the area of movement disruption due to injury.”

After graduation, Ustinova worked as a physical therapist at the Institute of Neurology in Moscow, and later earned a PhD in the methodology of therapeutic exercises. Her research led to the awarding of a prestigious postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Montreal, to conduct research at one of the leading laboratories working in the area of human motor control.

“While I was in Montreal, I was introduced to the concept of using virtual reality technology for rehabilitation and research,” she says.

“Later I brought these ideas to CMU's College of Health Professions, which has a rich base of technology. Together we have been able to build a platform for this area of research. Virtual reality gives me the ability to influence some mechanisms underlying human movement, and thereby manipulate a patient's motor behavior for their advantage.”

Digital technologies like virtual reality and videogaming are extremely useful in rehabilitation. “Videogaming is another form of the task-oriented approach to rehabilitation,” she notes. “This approach is commonly used in physical therapy practice for people with acquired brain injury. Virtual reality just brings this approach to the next technological level.”

Although she still believes nothing can replace traditional hands-on physical therapy, Ustinova sees a bright future for this approach. “The technology will be more incorporated

into the conventional practice of therapy,” she predicts. “It makes the work of a therapist more efficient, productive and fun.”

Her advice for new grant seekers? “At the beginning, get an idea and apply for as many grant opportunities as possible, even if it seems unrealistic. Remember that writing a grant is a skill you need to master in the same way we master our teaching and research skills.”



Post-Award Tip #4

Are you hiring hourly student employees through your grant or contract? If so, it is important to know that sometimes FICA (Social Security) may be charged on their wages. FICA is a percent of wage withheld and placed in the government's Social Security Trust Fund. FICA is calculated at 7.65% of wages earned. FICA expenses will be charged to your grant or contract, along with the student wages.

Students enrolled at least half time during the period in which they are working will not have FICA withheld. In the summer, because students are usually not enrolled half-time and do not need to be in order to be student employees, FICA charges will be made on their wages earned during those months.

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