

## ***Disseminating Teaching Tips to Faculty: The “Chalk Talk” Email Column***

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### ***Abstract***

This paper describes an innovative approach to disseminate best teaching practices among instructors of first-year engineering (FYE) students. A weekly advice column, known as “Chalk Talk,” was created as part of a GE Foundation grant at Northeastern University (NU). In this column, questions are posed regarding teaching situations or problems encountered, and each week, an editorial board formulates a response. Drawn from participants in the GE Master Teachers grant, the editorial board consists of NU faculty from the Colleges of Engineering and Arts and Sciences, and representatives from the Center for Effective University Teaching and the Educational Technology Center. Responses are based on the board’s experiences, the teaching literature in a particular area, and/or knowledge about teaching technology, and are signed by a fictitious teacher, dubbed “Jonas Chalk”, who represents the personification of the editorial board. This “Dear Abby” approach to dissemination has been found to be not only cost effective, but also available to a large number of faculty, who are at various points of the teaching attitudes change continuum. The column provides strategies and alternatives in an explicit way, but with enough options to allow faculty members to make individual decisions.

Methods for implementation of this non-threatening approach at other institutions will be addressed. Topics include: generating appropriate themes, creating a column outline around the theme, adding a teaching Quick Tip, and writing and rewriting with a team of nine faculty until a quality product is ready to ship via email. Data on feedback from readers and the effect the column has had at NU will also be included. This forum provides an opportunity for interested faculty to convene and confer on teaching issues.

A compilation of these columns will be available in a book (in press), with chapters categorized according to particular sets of issues. While columns were originally targeted for First-Year instructors, they are generally applicable for teaching university students at upper levels as well. This dissemination mechanism provides a resource for instructors, and illustrates how collaborative efforts can be successful for improving the learning environment to maximize student learning. See <http://gemasterteachers.neu.edu> for more information.