The Stranger Vs. Your CTL:
A Message from the Editor-in-Chief

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In his "Special Feature" contribution to this issue of *JCTL*, **Todd Zakrajsek** follows up on his earlier contribution (Zakrajsek, 2013) that outlines the budget and staff considerations pertinent to sustaining a Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL). Todd's contribution to this current volume offers an overview of the more or less common practices that teaching centers undertake, along with a few new twists and a few added activities CTLs might consider. This second installment in what will represent a series of essays on the practicalities of CTL work comes at a good time in light of this issue's featured articles, which I see as a collective doubling down, or, better yet, deepening down on functions that CTLs frequently comprise.

At the assured risk of evoking far more associations than might actually benefit my attempts to provide context for the works collected here, I have to admit that I often found myself, in the course of preparing them for publication, thinking about a passage in Albert Camus' *The Stranger*. In the scene, the narrator/title character, Meursault, is imprisoned for murder (Did I mention the association would be problematic?). While in his cell, Camus' infamously indifferent character devotes huge portions of his time to close scrutiny of his living space. "Sometimes I would get to thinking about my room," Meursault says,

> and in my imagination I would start at one corner and circle the room, mentally counting everything there was on the way. At first it didn't take long. But every time I started over, it took a little longer. I would remember every piece of furniture; and on every piece of furniture, every object; and of every object, all the details; and of the details themselves—a flake, a crack, or a chipped edge—the color and the texture. . . . And the more I thought about it, the more I dug out of my memory things I had overlooked or forgotten. I realized then that a man who had lived only one day could easily live for a hundred years in prison. (pp. 78-79)

While CTL workers do experience moments of discontent, I see in Meursault's comment here more a lesson in meaning making than one in absurdist angst. Setting his dire situation aside, I think Meursault's musings reflect a principal mission of this journal, that being its function as an arena in which educators might gaze evermore deeply into the everyday items of their rooms or, in this case, CTL practices—organizing workshops, coordinating the judgment of teaching awards, observing classrooms, conducting needs assessments, etc. Along with *JCTL*'s habit of committing no crimes (we hope), its distaste for indifference, and its willingness to contribute to society, *JCTL* also parts ways with Meursault in that the journal does not seek to kill time or compile endless inventories; it seeks, rather, to translate deep scrutiny into discovery, and that discovery into new teaching and learning spaces.

In their contribution to this *JCTL* issue, "Faculty Development for Fostering Students' Critical Thinking," **Laura C. Edwards**, **Stephen J. Snyder**, and **Andrea L. Sanders**, for example, challenge the workshop model that persists across many CTLs, particularly as that model has been used to address critical thinking skills. The authors describe and assess a long-term faculty development program, highlighting their CTL's use of semester-long training, classroom observations, and consistent feedback to produce new and positive outcomes for instructors seeking to strengthen their approaches to aching critical thinking. Just as Edwards, Snyder, and Sanders illustrate how CTLs can recast and reinvigorate standard venues for teacher development, contributors **Tracey Birdwell**, **Tiffany A. Roman**, **Leslie Hammersmith**, and **Douglas Jerolimov** revisit the practice of classroom observation, another service typically provided by CTLs, in the context of the emergence of active learning classrooms. In "Active Learning Observation Tool," the authors present a new protocol for classroom observations that provides for consideration of the technological and spatial dimensions of learning spaces, a protocal that, as a result, generates meaningful feedback and reflection fitting the specific needs of instructors who employ active and collaborative learning pedagogies.

In "An Innovative Award Catches Faculty in the Act of Great Teaching," **Robert S. Bledsoe** and **Deborah South Richardson** describe their CTL's implementation of a teaching award in a way that helps readers dig deep into yet another of the more common duties of CTLs—incentivizing and recognizing teaching excellence. The award they describe facilitates the successful merging of two universities toward development of new research institu-

tion, and the authors' reflection on the award's development, implementation, and effects highlights the various functions such awards do and can serve, as well as the central role CTLs play in determining the shape of awards in relation to particular institutional situations and missions. While Bledsoe and Richardson's article helps underscore why CTLs must consistently revisit and reshape its practices to fit their institution's needs, **Ismael I. Munene**, **Simon Ngigi Kangethe**, and **Justus G. Mbae's** description of their efforts to initiate a CTL at a school in Kenya testifies to how teaching centers themselves can, from the start, compose their mission in regard to the faculty they will serve. In "Faculty Development in a Private University in Kenya," the authors solicit faculty perceptions in ways that help developers (re)see what, we might call, "the genre of the CTL" in light of data that situate the center's purpose more in line with the career aspirations of the specific faculty (in this case, junior faculty) most likely to seek its services.

You might say, then, that articles collected in this volume "circle the room" of CTL practice and that they provide readers with the skills to take "a little longer" each time, to see a little more, to discover a little bit more of the places they might already occupy and where they might go as faculty developers; the end game, though, is not at all to "live for a hundred years in prison," but conversely, to generate new spaces, new ways to enhance and gauge the work they do, to invite new constituencies, and even, to build new CTLs altogether.

References

Camus, Albert. (1989). *The Stranger*. (M. Ward, Trans.). New York, NY: Vintage. (Original work published 1946)

Zakrajsek, Todd (2013). Essential skills in building and sustaining a faculty development center: Budget and staff. *Journal on Centers for Teaching and Learning*, *5*, 121-132.