Tiger Woods has a swing coach. Presidents keep a cabinet of advisors. Most professional experts rely on a network of colleagues who serve as sounding boards and consultants. Why shouldn’t you? The University at Albany’s Institute for Teaching, Learning and Academic Leadership (ITLAL) is a resource for those faculty who are looking to sharpen their professional practice, but don’t have time to spend years conducting formal research before moving to action. Sometimes it’s enough to find an idea that already has a proven track record and just run with it. ITLAL’s function is to play this role of faculty teaching resource and “personal coach” in ways that work for a range of disciplines, instructional needs and even personalities. Every professor and every teaching situation is different. The resources and services needed in each case will vary—and here are a few of them that ITLAL supplies for UAlbany faculty and staff.

General Events and Workshops
ITLAL’s fall and spring workshops and other events are more than presentations on teaching. Whenever possible, they are designed to replicate for participants the experience of active, inquiry-driven learning. The purpose of these sessions is to induce reflection on what it might be like to try a certain strategy, method or technique in an actual classroom. ITLAL events also present opportunities for faculty and graduate students to build community across the university by interacting with colleagues outside their home departments. ITLAL events often feature the work of UAlbany faculty who have been successful at an instructional innovation.

Instructional Leadership Academies
Instructors who want to lead through their teaching and therefore decide to make deep changes (e.g., adopt wholesale a new method or technology) sometimes seek a systematic, sustained process of support and feedback. ITLAL Academies begin with a one- or two-day boot camp in a teaching method or an issue. This is followed by a semester of personalized consultations with one or more ITLAL staff members throughout the semester. Faculty participants receive modest financial support for their professional development once the implementation has advanced to an agreed-upon benchmark.

Customized Workshops
Increasingly academic departments find that multiple members of the faculty share an interest, such as improving the process for evaluation of teaching, looking to engage undergraduate students more actively, structuring and managing in-class interactions, or using clickers. In these cases ITLAL accepts requests for department-specific sessions, designed, planned and scheduled to fit with a department’s explicit preferences and needs.

One-on-One Consultations
It’s not always easy in academe to find a collaborator in your own department or field who is willing to join you on high-risk experimentation in teaching. ITLAL fills this need. Bring in a question you’d like to explore, and a member of the staff will accompany you on your journey toward innovation. The consultation process offers such services as assistance with design of courses and learning activities, direct feedback on assignments, help with documentation and data collection on your innovations.

Feedback
One of ITLAL’s most requested service is the Midterm Survey, a rapid, anonymous survey intended to generate actionable data on how students are responding to an ongoing course. It’s also possible for instructors to request a live observation or videotape of a class meeting, or even a focus group interview of a class, for purposes of collecting data on a specific teaching practice, or for overall reflection on how one is teaching. These are all effective ways to verify the success of a teaching strategy, as well as to build your teaching portfolio.

Teaching Portfolios and Tenure Dossiers
Do you maintain a teaching portfolio that tells your individual story as a teacher? Does it say more about your teaching than can be said via SIRF scores? It had better!! As SIRFs are now online the data you counted on for evaluation of your teaching may not be abundant for the foreseeable future. ITLAL works with individual faculty to identify the kinds of additional data and documentation that match with various methods of teaching.
Graduate Student Support
ITLAL provides focused, specialized support to graduate students who teach and who plan careers as faculty members. In addition to regular ITLAL workshops on teaching and an annual series on the academic job market, graduate students can attend and even present at the annual College Teaching Symposium. ITLAL also sponsors the Certificate Program in College Teaching, a sequence of three 1-credit courses and some additional activities that bolsters graduate students’ preparation as university instructors, and improves their chances in the academic job market.

Instructional Technology
It’s hard to escape the influences of technology on teaching and learning. Not having a web presence is less and less an option. Making mediated materials (recordings, web texts) available to students is fundamental to the college courses of the 21st century. ITLAL provides services to ease the transition to the new world.

Media Conversions
Whenever it can be done so legally, ITLAL will digitize your existing media (tapes and disks) into formats that are exportable for use in web pages and in visual or audio presentations. Access to all of these files can be managed through Blackboard or ERes. Bring your materials to ITLAL and complete a request form with clear indications of what is to be captured digitally. Turnaround time is usually a few days, depending on the time of the semester. A self-serve scanner is also available for fair use copying of articles and book chapters.

Clickers
ITLAL is the focus of support for faculty who want to use clicker technology in the classroom. Clickers are wireless handheld devices that allow instructors to poll students in real class time, for active learning, quizzing, and other functions. ITLAL’s Clicker service includes training in the technology, materials to help in the development of clicker questions and discussion management, and administrative assistance in coordinating an instructor’s clicker plans with bookstore supply.

Blackboard LMS
While ITS has ongoing training on learning the basic functionality of Blackboard, ITLAL maintains an open, walk-in lab where instructors can receive one-on-one support for their questions on using Blackboard for the greatest impact on learning. For best use of this service, we recommend that you call ahead to ensure that a staff member will be present to work with you.

Web Resources
ITLAL’s website contains a wide array of Teaching Resources for Faculty and Graduate Students in teaching roles. These materials can serve as a community crossroads for all instructional staff. Special web areas include the following:

- General Teaching Resources
- Resources for Graduate Students
- Resources for New Faculty
- Resources for Part-Time and Adjunct Faculty
- Faculty Handbook
- Peer Observation Handbook

The ITLAL web site also features a series called Faculty Spotlight which are videos of UAlbany professors demonstrating their approaches to teaching.

ITLAL Library/Reading Room
If you are among those who still like to sit with a cup of coffee in a quiet, cool place and get your ideas from something written on paper, you may find the ITLAL Reading Room to be to your taste. We keep a library of about 100 of the best books on university teaching, in a lounge/meeting area with comfortable chairs and a conference table. Paper copies of the New York Times and the Chronicle for Higher Ed are also at your disposal.

Finding ITLAL UNDERGROUND
We are located in LI B69, on the lower level of the main campus between the University Library and the Business Administration building. Use the outdoor stairwell leading down from the podium level (marked by the “X” on the map). At the bottom of the stairway make a U-turn and enter the building through the door under those stairs. ITLAL will be directly in front of you.