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ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

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Faculty Retreat on Teaching

Provost Richard Herman has issued an invitation to all instructional staff to participate in the 2001 faculty retreat on teaching. The theme for this year's retreat is *Teaching Critical Thinking Using Active Learning*. The retreat is scheduled for Wednesday, February 7, 2001, in the Illini Union.

The retreat this year will highlight the use and assessment of active learning strategies to promote critical thinking. The keynote speaker is Charles C. Bonwell. Dr. Bonwell has facilitated over 200 workshops nationally and internationally on active learning and critical thinking. In 1986 he was one of 50 faculty honored nationwide by the American Association of Higher Education and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching for his "outstanding educational leadership." He is co-author of the best selling ASHE-ERIC monograph *Active Learning: Creating Excitement in the Classroom* and *Using Active learning in College Classrooms: A Range of Options for Faculty*. In 1995 Dr. Bonwell was the keynote speaker of the first UIUC Annual Retreat on Active Learning and received rave reviews. UIUC is pleased to welcome him back to discuss critical thinking skills.

This year the Teaching Advancement Board has two new UIUC Distinguished Teacher Scholars: Professors Joseph Squier of Art and Design and Philip Buriak of Agricultural Engineering. They will be introduced at the retreat.

The retreat also provides an opportunity to meet other faculty on campus and to interact with them on various aspects of college teaching. Past attendees have found not only practical information at these events, but also have been re-energized and excited about their teaching.

You may register for the retreat on-line at <http://nautilus.outreach.uiuc.edu/conted/>

College Receives Major Gift

The College of ACES has received one of the largest gifts ever for scholarship support. The estate of the late Maydee L. Lehman has established an endowment in the college that will generate nearly \$200,000 annually.

The late Mrs. Lehman was a 1929 graduate of Illinois, receiving an A.B. in liberal arts. Her father, Louis V. Logeman, was a graduate of the College of Agriculture in 1907. Mrs. Lehman and her husband, who passed away more than 30 years ago, owned a successful insurance business in Westwood, California.

She was one of the first six donors for the JBT Undergraduate Scholarship Program, and she frequently assisted "her JBT students" as they continued their education. Two JBT scholarships are awarded annually in the name of Mr. Logeman.

Income from the new endowment fund will be used to support scholarship programs in ACES Honors, study abroad, leadership, public policy internship, and minority programs. The fund will also provide continual support for two graduate fellowships and the graduate student teaching award program, as well as provide additional incentive scholarships for high-ability undergraduate applicants.

Student Debt - FYI

Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs Pat Askew met with advising coordinators and assistant deans recently and shared lots of information about various campus programs. Of particular note was data on student debt. The average loan indebtedness of ACES seniors is \$11,673, the second lowest among all undergraduate colleges and below the campus average of \$12,857.

How We Grade

Grading systems should be based on performance benchmarks. Each grade (A, B, C, whatever) should be described by the appropriate kind of performance for that level. The key skill is for the instructor to describe clearly the differences between each of the levels.

Grading systems should be valid and recognizable. A valid grading system accurately measures whatever quality it is supposed to measure. Grading should be tied to course goals those statements of what you want students to know and be able to do as a result of instruction. Grading systems are recognizable when students can see how assessment measures relate to the goals, content, and processes of the course.

Grading systems should be reliable and consistent. Grading standards must be applied the same in all cases, ignoring the pleadings of students who "tried hard".

Grading systems should be logical and based on real differences in performance. Grades should be a logical extension of how the individual performance benchmarks have been applied across the semester. And different grades should acknowledge real differences in performance, not just a statistical artifact (89.6 vs 90.0 as B+ and A-).

How do we help students understand how and why our grading system works?

Give students the written description of the grading system to compare with their own grade. This is a description of the criteria for the assignment, not just a general guideline such as the assignment description in the course syllabus.

Impose time for thinking between the receipt of a grade and any discussion. Let the passion flame and then die down. Give the students and yourself time to think and reflect. Announce the time when the assignment will be discussed. Have students submit grade objections in writing, defending their position rather than sharing emotion.

Have students apply the grading system to a common example. Use this technique for an exam review

session. Distribute an essay question or problem, an answer to it, and the grading criteria. Let the students, individually or collectively, grade the prepared response using the stated criteria. *Have students participate in setting the standards for grading.* Obviously this approach must be used with discretion, and it may not be appropriate for all course levels.

This technique can also be used in conjunction with review sessions where students write potential exam questions and responses.

Adhere to the rules of good communication. In discussing grades, keep the focused on the grade and not the individual. Try not to let the discussion become confrontational or adversarial. Discussion should center on how the grading system was applied to the situation.

Adapted from "Helping students understand grades" by M. D. Savilla in *College Teaching*, Summer 1998.

College Awarded PITA Grant

ACES partnered with the College of Engineering in obtaining a \$15,000 grant from the Teaching Advancement Board through the Provost's Initiative for Teaching Advancement. The grant will fund an intensive workshop for deans, department heads and others on the topic of faculty performance evaluation systems. Dr. Raoul Arreola, a nationally-known scholar on performance evaluation, will conduct the workshop in Spring 2001. The workshop is a follow-up activity to the performance assessment survey completed by tenure-track faculty in the college and is part of an on-going effort of the Academy of Teaching Excellence to review and improve the annual performance assessment process in the college.

Degrees Awarded

The College participates annually in several reports of students and faculty in colleges of agriculture and related sciences. The report of degrees conferred in 1998-99 was recently released, showing U of I at twelfth in the nation in the number of baccalaureate degrees conferred (556 degrees). Nationally, the three largest baccalaureate degree areas were natural resources, animal sciences, and agribusiness and management. Females comprised 46% of the degree recipients (ACES is now more than 55% women).

Student Ratings of Learning

Excerpted from "Are Student Ratings of Instruction Useful?" by J. Scott Armstrong, University of Pennsylvania, in November 1998 *American Psychologist*

I believe that teacher ratings are detrimental to students because they are a signal that responsibility for learning lies not with them, but with teachers and administrators. Studies suggest that when people do not accept responsibility for their learning, they are not very successful. The loss of responsibility is

expected to be most serious when the goal is skill development, especially when these skills are important to the learner.

Why not assess learning directly? Ask the students to answer questions about their own performance because it is the students, not teachers, who are the producers of learning. Students could be asked "Were you clear about your objectives? Were you well prepared? Were you organized? Did you spend much time on learning tasks? Did you do the assigned work to the best of your ability? What new concepts and techniques did you master?" Their responses are likely to be related to learning.

An even more insightful way to assess learning would be for students to keep learning diaries describing how they applied concepts and techniques to new situations. In addition to aiding the learning process, these procedures would provide information to teachers about what the students are learning and how they are learning.

Campus Leadership Initiatives

Illinois Leadership is a new comprehensive student leadership model and philosophy created through a partnership with Academic Colleges, Office of the Provost, Student Affairs, and students. Its four core programs, which focus on clusters of leadership skills, are grounded in theory and also reflect the unique input from the stakeholders involved in the process.

Insight Illinois is the first of four parts in this program and deals with self-awareness and self-management skills; with the aid of facilitators and small group leaders, Insight Illinois attendees address critical personal issues related to goals, values, ethics, initiative, and community.

Intersect, the second component of the program, is designed to help students discover the importance of interpersonal communication and teamwork skills in producing positive results.

Illinois Leadership programs are open to all students. The goal is to have a group of participants in each session who reflect the profile of the campus community. The underlying philosophy is that all students can exercise leadership; leadership does not require formal authority, and can be practiced by anyone interested in making a contribution and influencing a more positive future.

All colleges are represented on the Coordinating Committee for this program by a faculty or staff member and student. Assistant Dean Charles Olson co-chairs the campus committee and is the ACES contact. You will be hearing more from him about the various components of the program in the months ahead.

What is Teaching?

Teaching is the process not merely of effecting the transfer of knowledge to the next generation, but of creating contexts within which students, whether young or old, can grow into the fullness of their uniqueness as human beings. Good teaching also involves more than the narrow process of instruction; it includes the deeper relationships of mentoring, guidance, tutelage, and supervision. Mere instruction alone is irrelevant to the student who does not learn; good teaching, on the other hand, is a form of creativity that links discovery with integration and application.

Returning to Our Roots: Toward a Coherent Campus Culture. Kellogg Commission on the Future of the Land-Grant Universities, January 2000.

The really difficult part of teaching is not organizing and presenting the content, but rather in doing something that inspires students to focus on that content to become engaged.

Robert Leamson, "Learning as Biological Brain Change," in November/December 2000 *Change, the Magazine of Higher Learning*.

Enhancing Learning with Technology Telementoring

Telementoring involves the use of tele-communications technologies to develop and sustain mentoring relationships when face-to-face interaction may not be practical. The web site noted below contains a report on a telementoring project, including a guidebook with case studies. You can access the report (58 pages long) in a pdf file at http://olt-bta.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/download/89116final_e.pdf

Study Abroad

ACES and UIUC have made excellent progress in providing international study opportunities for undergraduate students. From 1991 to 2000, the number of U of I Study Abroad students has increased 168%, from 460 to 1,236 students. In ACES, the number of students in study abroad programs increased from 11 to 118, an increase of 972 %. The 118 ACES students represent 10 % of campus participation.

CAS Fellows

Nominations for Center for Advanced Study (CAS) Fellows for 2001-02 are due February 12, 2001, in the office of CAS. Fellows are "promising untenured Assistant Professors" who are released from teaching responsibilities to concentrate on programs of research or creative activity and participate in the CAS community of scholars. More information is located on the CAS web site at <http://www.cas.uiuc.edu/home.html>.

Prior Knowledge and Learning

We learn by making connections between prior knowledge and new information.

It is easier to make those connections when we see relationships between new information and prior knowledge.

The biggest hindrance to learning is usually not the lack of prior knowledge but incorrect or partial prior knowledge.

We are generally reluctant to give up or change our prior knowledge.

Thus, learning can often be difficult and emotionally costly, and sometimes involves loss and grieving.

Thomas A. Angelo, DePaul
University School for New Learning

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101 Mumford Hall, MC-710

1301 W. Gregory Drive

Urbana, IL 61801