

ACADEMIC PROGRAMS



College of Agricultural,
Consumer and
Environmental Sciences

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

From the Office of the Associate Dean

Vol. 6 No. 6

Even Statistics Can Be Palatable Via Distance Education

Adapted from an article by Scott Carlson, *The Chronicle: Daily News*, May 21, 2002.

If you think teaching online is tough, Allan Gray says, try teaching statistics online.

Mr. Gray, an assistant professor of agri-business management at Purdue University, teaches an online quantitative-methods course in Purdue's agri-business M.B.A. program. It's a class that most students anticipate as they would a root canal, but he must be doing something right: Last month, Mr. Gray won a teaching award from the United States Distance Learning Association.

His students, typically professionals who are returning for degrees, are a demanding bunch who are juggling kids and jobs on top of the statistics course. "They immediately come into my course with this preconceived notion that this will be terrible," Mr. Gray says. "I have to deal with this notion, and I have to do it at a distance, so that's pretty challenging."

From a delivery standpoint, Gray says that he makes this more palatable with PowerPoint presentations that he records with his voice. The students download them off the Internet. The PowerPoint presentations are the same every time he teaches the class, but he re-records the lecture with his voice every year. "I take a posterboard that has a set of pictures of each of the students in the class with some background on them -- their current positions, and such. It's taped on my wall in my office."

"So as I'm giving that lecture in my office, all by myself, I'm look at their pictures on the wall, and I will call them by name. So Jim Tate is a student in the class, and as I'm talking about probability theory, I'll mention Jim's name: 'Jim, if you'll recall, the other day we were talking on our discussion forum about this very issue.' The students, remember, are taking this all by themselves, at 10:30 at night, in the

basement -- trying to listen to a lecture on stats. It couldn't be more miserable than that, I think. But now I've called their name. They think, Hey, it's not like I'm here all by myself. Allan knows I'm here, and he's talking to me. Students love that. The lecture is a big part of what makes this successful."

Fall Teaching Symposium

The ACES Fall Teaching Symposium is scheduled for Friday, August 23, 2002 in the Heritage Room of the ACES Library. The program begins with refreshments at 8:30 a.m. and will conclude by 1:00 p.m. The planning committee (Michael Plewa, Phil Buriak, Jeff Moss and Mike Hutjens) has selected Dr. Mark Ryan, University of Missouri-Columbia, to be the featured speaker and workshop leader. Dr. Ryan uses case studies in his teaching (fisheries and wildlife) to promote active learning and the development of problem-solving skills.

The symposium will focus on the importance of developing in our students the ability to utilize what they have learned to solve real-life problems. Participants will identify content areas and examples of how case studies can be developed and used in any course.

The ACES Academy of Teaching Excellence sponsors the annual symposium. Registration information will be distributed in early August, so mark your calendar now for August 23.

New Student Convocation

August 26, 2002

4:30 p.m. Assembly Hall

Tips for Better Teaching

Adapted from an article by Ted Hipple and Tricia McClam, *The Chronicle: Career Network*, March 11, 2002.

"This university doesn't help its professors to teach better. It just expects them to." So observed a colleague recently. "What I want are some specific, usable ideas," she added. "I may reject them, but I'd like to hear about the techniques -- even the gimmicks -- other professors are using."

We've decided to take up her challenge, to offer a few techniques -- gimmicks maybe to some readers. Our search for ideas has been focused on answering one question: What are some of the things that good college teachers seem to do?

They go to class 5 or 10 minutes early.

The stereotype, we fear, is all too common: the harried professor dashes into the classroom just after the session is supposed to start, throwing his briefcase on the desk, digging through it for today's notes, taking a breath and beginning his lecture. Such a picture conveys what we believe is a counterproductive notion about the importance of teaching -- that this instruction stuff I'm doing isn't as valuable as the research I just left or even the committee meeting I was in. Getting to class a few minutes early allows you to ease into the teaching, to relax a bit, to chat informally with your students.

They not only have a syllabus, they have a visible plan for the day.

Although a few professors argue against the value of a syllabus, we think its advantages are many and significant. The syllabus functions as a road map through the course, highlighting the shared journey you and your students will be taking. You can put material into a syllabus that you then don't have to spend as much class time on: course objectives, evaluation criteria, attendance policies, your office hours.

Good instructors of our acquaintance also have daily lesson plans that achieve at least two objectives. They suggest what the instructors hope will occur during that class meeting and, possibly of greater worth, they convey to the students that their professors have thought about the session and its activities.

But they get off the syllabus and the daily plan now and then.

We sometimes explain about the Tennessee Instructional Model, (TIM). TIM provided a lesson plan format that teachers in Tennessee were expected to follow as their classes were

observed by principals and supervisors. Points were taken off if these teachers were guilty of "birdwalking," the term used when teachers strayed from the plan of the day. But good teachers we've known often birdwalk, sometimes intentionally.

Episodes of birdwalking of this sort permit breaks in the classroom routine. They reveal you as a person of many interests, among them, of course, the subject you are currently teaching. But you're also a European traveler, a reader of junk novels, a person of broader horizons than the mechanical engineering or the political science that is your first love. And letting students see that your first love is one of many may, in fact, enhance its appeal for them as well.

They vary their routines.

Good teachers seem to have a lot of different activities going on in their classrooms, not concurrently, of course, but over time. True, they lecture, they have class recitations. But they do a lot of other, things too.

- They have students give occasional oral reports, say of three or four minutes in length. These might open the class and lead in to the professor's presentation.
- They pause for what we'll call the "instant group activity." The professor says, "Let's stop here and look at the problem on page 119. Get with the person next to you and solve it." Then follows a general classroom discussion. This kind of interaction is more than a bit worrisome for many professors. They ask, "What if my students don't say anything?" A technique we've found is simply to move away from the lectern, approach the students, and say, "Please talk with me." This courteous request usually elicits responses and it conveys to students a sense of, "Look, gang, we're all in this teaching-learning business together; let's help each other out."
- They vary the furniture arrangement if they can. If the chairs move, they move them, in a semicircle one day, rows another, a circle a third. And if they use seating charts, they change them every so often.
- They bring in occasional guest speakers, a colleague in their field or someone from beyond the university's walls, to provide variety in presentation and viewpoint.
- They sometimes give collaborative assignments. Universities are highly individualized places, with classroom competition the norm, even though we know that many of our graduates will enter an economic world where cooperation is

often demanded of them.

- They allow different modes of intelligence to operate. We can't resist a mention of Howard Gardner's *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*, first published in 1983, and his later books in which he posits that, in addition to the verbal and quantitative intelligence so privileged around the campus, students also possess other kinds of intelligence that instructors should think about when they teach -- spatial, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, naturalistic, and existential. (see February 2000 issue of *Academic Programs*.)

Good college teachers help students get to know each other.

Good teachers recognize the rich resource that friends can be in a classroom and set aside time for students to get to know each other. Use first names when you talk with students in class. We like to use manila folders, with the student writing her name on the outside with one of those visible-at-forty-yards markers and then hanging the folder over the edge of the desk so that everyone can see it.

They expect good work from their students.

Teachers who regularly receive high marks from their students about their teaching are often very demanding. These professors recognize that teaching and learning are serious enterprises, and they convey that recognition to their students in many ways and not simply, we hasten to add, by harsh grading. They give challenging and insightful homework assignments, make up imaginative assessments, provide a variety of exciting in-class activities that provoke student thinking and encourage student involvement.

They expect good work from themselves.

The many good teachers we know are a diverse bunch, but they all possess one trait -- they work hard at their teaching.

They consider how they grade.

We all want our grading to be seen as "fair." But in fact, to be fair, we should remember that grading is always somewhat subjective, even on the most objective-appearing tests. Good teachers think about their grading and discuss it with their classes, not to its overemphasis but enough so that students, too, understand the mysteries of describing what a student knows and should be able to do with an "A" or any other grade.

They talk to their students about teaching.

Good professors also talk about teaching generally -- about, for example, their planning and motivational techniques, their desire that students learn, their hopes that students will be

frank with them about the class. One professor we know uses a mid-term evaluation of his teaching so that the very students he has that semester can benefit from the recommendations they make. And his students develop a useful sense of participation in the teaching of his classes.

They talk with their colleagues about their teaching.

Most of us share scholarly accomplishments with faculty members in our departments, being sure to mention the article that is about to be published, the paper that was given, the pending book contract. We even talk about our service on this committee or that task force. How often do we talk about our teaching, about the problems we are having, about our classroom success stories? And how about asking a colleague to visit your class, with a proviso that you later visit hers? What your colleagues can tell you -- the good, the bad, and the truly ugly -- can help you become a better teacher.

They reflect on their teaching.

Good teachers think about their teaching -- all of it, their own classroom behavior, the plans they have, the activities they use, what and if their students are learning. We professors are often given to contemplative moments; good instructors urge that the contemplation be, on occasion, about teaching.

Academic All Big Ten

ACES is especially proud of the student athletes who have been named to the Academic All-Big Ten. ACES students include:

Jessica Aveyard, FSHN, Women's Swimming and Diving

Lisa Fish, FSHN, Women's Swimming and Diving

Erin Frakes, FSHN, Women's Cross Country

Katie Hagberg, NRES, Women's Basketball

Katie Hennessy, ANSCI, Women's Track and Field and Women's Cross Country

Kyle Kopatz, NRES, Men's Track and Field

Jordana Meyer, ANSCI, Women's Cross Country

Janna Sartini, HCD, Softball

Erin Frakes, Sophomore, won Outstanding Scholar-Athlete Award.

Jessica Aveyard, Senior, was one of Dike Eddleman Athlete of the Year Award Finalists.

Congratulations to these athletes on their excellent performance in the classroom.

Labor Crisis Brewing

From *The Kiplinger Letter*, May 17, 2002.

With unemployment at an eight-year high of 6% and likely to climb before it falls again, filling jobs isn't a big worry now. But...

There's a long-term labor crisis brewing. Over this decade, the labor force will increase by about 12%, while the number of jobs, including seasonal, part-time and second jobs, will grow 15%. Worse...

A worrisome skills gap looms five to 10 years down the road.

Simple demographics are part of the problem. From 2000 to 2010, one-fifth of new workers joining the labor force will be immigrants, most with limited English and many with few job skills. In contrast, nearly all of the 24 million people who will stop working this decade will be experienced employees headed into retirement. Starting in 2011, when the first of the baby boomers turn 65, the pace of retirements will pick up, hitting some occupations, such as teaching, especially hard.

Plus youngsters aren't preparing themselves for tomorrow's jobs. Too few study science, math and the computer skills that will be needed. Too many are shunning technical schools and vocational programs, opting for four-year colleges. Unfortunately, 25% of freshmen drop out, sending them straight into the job market with few employable skills.

Thousands of newly created jobs will go unfilled as a result, hurting businesses of all sizes, in all regions and in all industries.

Likely to be in short supply: Information technology workers to manage computerized client records, product lists and inventory. Also, to design, install and maintain data management tools and Web sites for businesses of all sorts...from manufacturers to doctors to retailers.

And experts in high bandwidth...to manage it and to develop and use applications designed for it as high-speed connections spread.

Drafters skilled in CAD, computer-assisted design, systems...to engineer and produce everything from toys to toasters to spacecraft.

Plus people familiar with GIS, geographic information systems. Increasingly employed by urban and transportation planners, engineering and architectural firms, construction, mining, lumber, oil and gas firms, public utilities and an array of environmental and agricultural concerns.

What does all of this mean for ACES?

N.C. Teaching Workshop

North Dakota State University hosted the annual North Central Teaching Workshop in June. The theme for the symposium was "Everyone a Learner - Everyone a Teacher." Mark Ryan, Professor of Fish and Wildlife Sciences at the University of Missouri-Columbia, was the keynote speaker. Dr. Ryan's presentation focused on active learning through problem solving and case studies. Ryan will be the keynote presenter for the ACES Fall Teaching Symposium in August.

Participants from ACES included Mohammad Babadoost, Crop Sciences, Richard Cobb, Animal Sciences and Kirby Barrick, Academic Programs. Participation in the workshop is supported by Academic Programs, the Academy of Teaching Excellence, and the departments.

ACES New Student Welcome

September 17, 2002, 7:00 p.m.

Festival Theatre, Krannert Center

ACADEMIC PROGRAMS is a publication of the College of ACES, Academic Programs, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Permission is granted to reprint all or any part of this publication, with appropriate credit to the source and the authors of individual contributions. *Academic Programs* is also accessible at: <http://w3.aces.uiuc.edu/Acad-Prog/goodteach.shtml>

101 Mumford Hall, MC-710

1301 W. Gregory Drive

Urbana, IL 61801