

ACADEMIC PROGRAMS



College of Agricultural,
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From the Office of the Associate Dean

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Five Key Changes to Practice . . . A Final Word

The last five issues of Academic Programs provided a synopsis of an article by Mary Weimer on focusing on learning and transforming teaching. The original article appeared in *Change*, September/October 2003. Dr. Weimer concluded the article by asking, Will focus on learning transform teaching?

Are faculty members likely to incorporate changes in their teaching practices that will make their teaching learner-centered? And is the adoption of learner-centered techniques likely to lead to fundamental change in the classroom? The answer relates to how faculty manage the instructional change process.

College teachers find educational research intellectually appealing, sometimes even convincing, but it almost never motivates change the way learning techniques that address everyday classroom dilemmas do. In particular, techniques that focus on student learning tackle widespread problems like students' passivity and their failure to act as mature, responsible learners. And instructional improvement aimed at increasing learning avoids the negative baggage associated with efforts to "fix" teaching (and teachers). Finally, trying something new, especially if it can be easily implemented, gives an invigorating lift.

But the way faculty select and implement new teaching strategies often compromises their effectiveness. Faculty often choose new techniques quickly; they rely on gut feelings. The process is neither systematic nor reflective. And then, if faculty adapt the chosen strategy to fit how they teach, what they teach, and whom they teach, they are apt to make those changes intuitively, not analytically.

Finally, the assessment of how well the technique has worked is generally emotional and unsystematic, rather than a process of thoughtful analysis that incorporates objective feedback. So even though the

new approaches may change what happens in the classroom, they do so haphazardly and often without leading to more significant changes.

For these techniques to effect deep and lasting change in the classroom, they must work synergistically. If faculty members are to incorporate learner-centered techniques into their teaching in an unsystematic or piecemeal way, then those techniques must build and grow on each other in ways that are obvious and compelling enough to motivate faculty to keep changing.

In my own case I didn't begin by aspiring to be learner-centered. I simply thought students would do better in my public speaking course if they were not so anxious. I started giving them choices about assignments to build their confidence. But these modest changes produced results: My students started changing, and the differences I saw in them implicated me. It was no longer enough to fuss with the course; I needed to do things differently. Once I did, that changed my students even more, and at some point there was no going back. Later I realized that the process had changed some of the most fundamental things I believed about teaching.

Can learning transform teaching? It has potential to do so. Those of us who have implemented learner-centered approaches sometimes hardly recognize the teachers we've become.

**ACES Student Convocation
Sunday, May 16th, 2004**

**Undergraduates
9:30 a.m. Krannert Center for the
Performing Arts**

**Graduate Students
10:00 a.m. Smith Music Hall**

What We Know About Motivation

While the subject of motivation is complex, and can be approached from a variety of theoretical perspectives, some basic aspects of student motivation for learning can be culled from the numerous studies done on the subject. According to Barbara McCombs, for students to be optimally motivated to learn, they must:

1. See schooling and education as personally relevant to their interests and goals.
2. Believe that they possess the skills and competencies to successfully accomplish these learning goals.
3. See themselves as responsible agents in the definition and accomplishments of personal goals.
4. Understand the higher level thinking and self-regulation skills that lead to goal attainment.
5. Call into play processes for effectively and efficiently encoding, processing, and recalling information.
6. Control emotions and moods that can facilitate or interfere with learning and motivation.
7. Produce the performance outcomes that signal successful goal attainment.

Adapted from *Speaking of Teaching*, the Stanford University Newsletter on Teaching, Fall 1998.

What Motivates Students?

Adaptive self-efficacy and competence perceptions motivate students.

Provide clear and accurate feedback regarding competence and self-efficacy, focusing on the development of competence, expertise, and skill.

Design tasks that offer opportunities to be successful but also challenge students.

Adaptive attributions and control beliefs motivate students.

Provide feedback that stresses the process nature of learning, including the importance of effort, strategies and potential self-control of learning.

Provide students opportunities to exercise some choice and control.

Higher levels of interest and intrinsic motivation motivate students

Provide stimulating and interesting tasks, activities, and materials, including some novelty and variety in tasks and activities. Higher levels of value motivate students. Classroom discourse should focus on the importance and utility of content and activities.

Goals motivate and direct students.

Adapted from *The Teaching Professor*, March 2004, from an article by P.R. Pintarch.

It's a Banner World

The Student Registration and Records portion of Banner went “live” on March 22, with Fall 2004 students starting registration in Banner on April 5. Lots of changes – but an excellent computer program for students to register for courses. One huge change – registration times do not expire; once the “Time Ticket” starts student can continue to access registration.

Check out this great new website.

www.courses.uiuc.edu

This is a one-stop web site to access: Class Schedules (formally Time Table), Gen Ed Requirements, Course Number Conversions, Course Catalog, Program of Studies, and link to Web Self-Service. Be sure to bookmark this site – we’ll be using it frequently!

Campus Award Winners

ACES faculty will be recognized for their achievements during the Campus Instructional Awards Program later this month

ACES recipients include:

Donald Briskin, NRES, Campus Award for Excellence in Off-Campus Teaching

Shelly Schmidt, FSHN, Campus Award for Excellence in Innovation in Undergraduate Instruction Using Educational Technologies

Robert Skirvin, NRES, Campus Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching

Nicki J. Engegseth, FSHN, Honorable Mention for the Campus Award for Excellence in Guiding Undergraduate Research

Charles Nelson, ACE, Honorable Mention for the Campus Award for Excellence in Graduate and Professional Teaching

End of Teacher/Scholars?

The irony is that American higher education throughout the 20th century grew into worldwide prominence, even achieved a dominant role as measured by many kinds of indicators, and some commentators view the fusion of the teaching and research functions as one of the drivers of that eminence – as distinguished from the model that was practiced by, say, the Soviet Union, the People’s Republic of China, and the Soviet-influenced Eastern European countries.

In those countries, much of the research function – certainly “big science” – was split off from the university and its teaching function. Serious scientific research tended to be housed in academies and institutes that were set apart from and, in many respects, were quite privileged relative to the traditional universities.

The irony, therefore, is that in the United States we’re now beginning to divorce the teaching and research functions. I think we need to be a lot more thoughtful about the implications of doing that. Are we fully aware of what we have wrought in this rush toward specialization – not by academic field, but by function? We need to ask ourselves: Is this a good thing?

From an interview with Jack H. Schuster, Professor of Educational Policy at Claremont Graduate University, in *Change*, March 2004.

Making a Difference in Students’ Lives

Teachers frequently resort to platitudes, especially when it comes to describing the softer, more emotional side of teaching. For example, one thing that many teachers aspire to do is to “make a difference” in the lives of their students. But what exactly does that mean? What is that they want to do? Neil Knobloch (Ag Ed, UIUC) decided to review the literature to see what he could learn about this lofty goal.

What teachers may make different, or change, for students includes a range of possibilities such as learning new knowledge and skills, discovering new interests, getting motivated about a career, discovering a passion for something, growing in self knowledge, or just getting wiser about life.

Sometimes teachers make a short-term difference,

in a given course. When this happens in a course, teachers develop relationships in which students come to trust them and as a result of these trusting relationships students develop confidence, start exhibiting leadership, begin to solve problems, and look for ways to serve others, as their teachers have served them.

Sometimes teachers make a difference in the lives of students after the fact. Apathetic, disinterested students who actually resisted teacher attempts to get them involved may not realize how much effort the teacher invested in them until well after the course is over. Students figure out and come to appreciate what a teacher was trying to do.

Fortunately, teachers who care and aspire to make a difference in student lives can be found on every campus. Unfortunately, teachers who don’t care or care much less, and who often have cynical attitudes about students, work on almost every campus as well. Research consistently documents two effective sources of intrinsic motivation for faculty. First, teachers are motivated when they “experience a sense of personal growth, competence, and accomplishment.” And they are motivated when they “relate, help and connect positively with students.”

Research is helpful in identifying attributes that distinguish teachers who care from those who don’t. Caring teachers nurture. They are accessible and attend to individual student needs. They have rapport and connect with students. They show interest in students, are kind, thoughtful and respectful. Students feel a sense of belonging in their classrooms. And in those learning environments, caring teachers affirm students, show empathy, and are understanding and patient. They are flexible and fair and make learning fun. They challenge students, believe in their ability to learn and never give up on students even when circumstances are difficult.

Teachers shouldn’t expect to make a difference in the life of every student. They don’t and won’t. But making a difference in one life is a powerful motivator. We never forget those students who tell us we have, and a lot of us continue to try because we’ve never forgotten that teacher who made a difference in our lives.

Adapted from an article by Neil A. Knobloch, *The Teaching Professor*, March 2004, that first appeared in the *NACTA Journal*, September 2003.

Demonstrating Good Web-based Teaching

Often candidates for tenure and promotion, as well as course designers, complain that too little credit is given for their use of technology in teaching. Usually, they're wrong. Most disciplines at most colleges seek out and honor the capacity to use technology in teaching and research. The problem is not undervaluing the use of technology or not undervaluing the importance of good teaching. The problem is *measuring* effective teaching.

Professors being evaluated can help themselves as well as the evaluators by taking advantage of available technology to measure and make visible good teaching. Here are 10 ideas that can help:

1. Encourage departmental colleagues to view and analyze the activity on your course Web Site.
2. Require students to complete some final exam sessions questions by constructing a Web page or a Power-Point presentation.
3. Cite numbers demonstrating collaboration, Peer-to-Peer and Peer-to-Professor e-mails.
4. List the ways, both face-to-face and electronically, in which students interact with each other and with the professor.
5. Name the individuals (and their positions) with whom students interact.
6. Ask students, about every three weeks, to e-mail you comments about how the course is going, its strengths and weaknesses, and how it can be improved.
7. Invite colleagues to visit your class.
8. Seek and archive student comments on the effectiveness of the course for a particular session.
9. Seek and archive comments from practitioners and professional colleagues who collaborate with you for a particular course.
10. Maintain an electronic "teaching portfolio" for the purpose of self-evaluation and for sharing with P & T committees as well as prospective employers.

Using technology in the evaluation and marketing of good teaching makes good sense. As the measurement of teaching improves, we can expect that both the quality of teaching and the rewards for teaching will increase.

Adapted from an article by David Brown in *Syllabus*, February 2004.

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