

ACADEMIC PROGRAMS



College of Agricultural,
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UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

From the Office of the Associate Dean

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Five Key Changes to Practice

In *Learner-Centered Teaching: Five Key Changes to Practice*, Maryellen Weimer identifies five aspects of current instructional practice that adversely affect learning, recommends and illustrates alternative approaches, and documents the positive impact of the approaches. The first, "Balance of Power," was described in the November 2003 issue.

The Role of the Teacher

The problem: Classroom action still features teachers.

If the goal is learning, then students must do the hard, hands-on work it requires—at home and in the class. However, when it comes to who's working hardest, especially in class, most teachers win hands down. They deliver the content; lead the discussion; and preview, review, and provide examples of the content. They solve the problems, construct the diagrams, ask and often answer the questions.

Solution: Teaching should support student agency.

The necessary role change for teachers is well known; it has been described metaphorically for years. Guides and coaches more effectively promote learning than do sages. But most faculty are not able to translate those analogies into concrete instructional behaviors. What do guides and coaches *do* when they teach?

Guides provide leadership and they do work hard, but their job is to show others how to do something, not to do it for them. In the classroom, then, guides don't always organize the content, summarize the discussion, solve the problems, or construct the matrices. They curb their propensity to tell students everything and motivate students by letting them do the legitimate work of the discipline.

Based on performance in previous games and who's next on the schedule, athletics coaches figure

out what players need to do during practice. Teacher coaches design learning experiences that take student's current knowledge to the next level. They sequence learning activities so that they connect and build synergistically.

An example: Most faculty feel they must "go over" the syllabus because students don't read it. In contrast, learner-centered teachers might distribute the syllabus and then let students read it during a period of silence. After asking for questions and hearing none, they might test knowledge of the syllabus with a short, ungraded quiz. After inviting students to confer with one another, they might query students as to the correct responses. Introducing new assignments with their description in the syllabus, referring student to it when they ask questions answered there, and other similar actions reinforce the importance of the syllabus and give students real reasons to read it.

The result: Students build knowledge for themselves, and teachers confront the messiness of learning.

Students need to make meaning for themselves; they need to connect new knowledge to what they already know and organize and apply information in ways that make sense to them. This not only results in deeper understanding - it creates autonomous, independent learners. Students often ask poorly framed questions, answer off the mark, can't think of an example, and circle around the point. A learner-centered teacher must be able to step into that mess and provide the kind of direction and leadership students need in order to take what they do know to the next level. These teachers relinquish control only to reassume it at a point when learners understand that they need help.

Sports Coaches Model Good Instruction

Coaches establish a connection between each practice session and the whole season. We start our season by announcing a set of goals for our players-some general and some lofty. To achieve these goals, we set up a progressive series of practices.

For each course we teach we also start by handing out a set of goals, and each period we offer hints and tips that help students achieve these lofty goals. During one class we might workshop a student story, assess the writer's handling of the elements of characterization, and conclude with a creative exercise in which students begin a fictional bio on that story's main character. It's a practice session that moves students forward in their development as writers.

Coaches break down large areas of instruction into manageable skill points. To teach a player to be an effective pitcher, for instance, we don't just send him out to the mound with a ball. Wind-up pitching consists of five units. So we start by showing the player how to take a rocker step, and we make him practice it over and over until his balance is perfect, his arms and legs moving in precision. Perfect practice makes perfect.

Likewise, in teaching composition we don't place a student in front of a computer and say, "Give me 500 words on something you learned last summer." Instead, we break down all essays into a process of invention, writing, and revision. We emphasize that most essays have an introduction, body, and conclusion. And those introductions have three or four parts: a hook, a thesis, sometimes a key definition, and a purpose. Besides breaking down the writing process, we work with them on dividing the subject into manageable pieces-not the entire summer but when the family visited Hartland Pond.

Coaches adjust to game conditions, changing strategies mid-game, if need be. In basketball, for instance, if the other team is scoring against our man-to-man defense, we may switch to a 1-3-1 zone or employ a box and chaser to dog a hot scorer.

Teachers must be just as flexible, and willing to change their "game plan" when conditions dictate. Rather than being tied to the lecture or changing at precisely 15 past the hour to learning groups, the effective instructor recognizes when a student makes a salient and interesting point that will take the class into a lively, but unplanned discussion. That teacher adjusts, not sacrificing the overall goal of the session, but responding whenever curiosity is suddenly piqued.

Coaches personalize goals and instruction, intervening one-on-one when they notice players with problems. If our point guard suddenly develops "brick-itis"-her balls clang from the rim rather than swishing through the net-we don't write her off. We watch tape

with her, note that her guiding hand is rolling over the top of the basketball, and then devise a repetitive drill that develops positive muscle memory.

In creative writing we also notice bad habits-a writer who falls into the narrative rut of telling rather than showing character-and we switch to a tutorial, going over the story with the student so as to highlight their less-than-effective method. After showing the student five or six other ways to develop character, then we have the student try them out.

Coaches not only create, but model good learning behaviors. They realize that they can have great influence on their team not only through their instructive words on techniques, conditioning, and strategy, but also through their actions. They serve as role models.

Teachers also function as role models for the students they teach, and here they should perform exactly as good coaches do: arrive on time, well prepared and ready to teach, and always mindful that they are "coaching" human beings.

Adopted from an article by Hall Blythe and Charlie Sweet, Eastern Kentucky University in The Teaching Professor, November 2003.

New Rules for Minors

The ACES Undergraduate Educational Policy Committee approved two operating rules regarding minors. First, students in the College of ACES may not complete more than two minors. This new rule is actually a sort of "truth in advertising" statement, since no ACES major includes sufficient room to complete more than two minors, and campus does not allow students to enroll for additional semesters just to complete a minor.

Secondly, no courses in an approved ACES minor may be taken Credit/No Credit. Since a minor is a "small major" and includes required courses, the minor should be treated similarly to the major requirements. Only open electives, by campus rule, may be taken Credit/No Credit.

A Helpful Handout for Students

Sometimes as instructors we don't always deliver material in ways that expedite note-taking. We may not be able to take class time for a session on note-taking but all of us can probably find time to distribute a handout that students might find helpful.

The Dos and Don'ts of Taking Notes

Should I recopy my notes after class?

No, because recopying requires little or no thinking. Your time could be better spent writing questions and answers about the material in your notes.

Should I tape record the lecture?

Generally, no. Re-listening takes a lot of time and in most cases, other, less time consuming, ways of reviewing and organizing the material are just as effective.

Should I try to listen and not write when the instructor is discussing something I don't understand?

No, the best advice is to keep taking notes. Leave blank spaces if you are missing content and question marks to indicate that you are just copying something down but don't really understand what it means. Most instructors would happily entertain a question whenever something is unclear or see if another student can help you understand this material or ask your instructor to re-explain it to you.

What should I do if the professor talks so fast, I can't get everything written down?

Paraphrase, listen for the most important things the professor says, and leave blank spaces to indicate that you have missed some material you thought was important. Check the notes of a classmate to add the missing information.

What should I do if my mind is always wandering while the professor is talking?

Sit in the front of the room. Ask a question. If your mind wanders. Make it short side trip. Get back to what's happening in class quickly. Try paying really close attention to those parts of the lecture that are most important. When does the instructor convey the most important material?

How do I deal with an instructor who constantly wanders off the topic?

If the instructor is not well organized, see if the textbook can help. Does it structure the material

so that it makes sense and logically hangs together? Form a small study group and spend time organizing notes from class. What does everyone think the most important ideas were? How does one idea relate to another?

Sometimes the instructor uses words I don't know how to spell. What should I do?

Write the words as they sound. Follow the word with the notation "sp?" which should signal you when reviewing that you need to find out from a fellow classmate, the text or a dictionary how to spell a word.

Adapted from: Dembo, M.H.

Motivation and Learning Strategies for College Success: A Self-Management Approach. In *The Teaching Professor*, November 2003.

From UI Direct to Banner

In order to ease the transition to the new SCT Banner Student system, the university will for the first time in recent years have separate early registration periods for summer and fall. Early registration for Summer 2004 will be managed by the UI Direct system and early registration for Fall 2004 will be managed by the Banner system. As in other years, registration will be continuous for each term after the initial early registration period when students have an earliest registration appointment time.

The dates for early registration for Summer 2004 and Fall 2004 are listed below:

March 15-19 Summer 2004 Registration in UI Direct

March 22-26 Spring Break

April 5-23 Fall 2004 Registration in Banner (summer registration in UI Direct remains open)

Teaching Enhancement Grants

Sunday, April 25, 2004

Eleven new ACES Teaching enhancement Grants were awarded during Fall 2003 for a total

of \$19,066. Funding for the grants, designed to enhance undergraduate teaching and learning, is made possible through three permanent endowments. The recipients and the courses being enhanced are as follows.

Karen Plawecki	FSHN 322
Ani Katchova	ACE 261
F. William Simmons Robert Darmody	NRES 101 and NRES 199
Joost Pennings	ACE 328
Cleora D'Arcy and Darin Eastburn	Plant Path 100
Daniel Warnock	HORT 241
Walt Hurley	ANSCI 308
Ann Reisner	AGCOM 273
Anton Endress	NRES 399 and 320
Neil Knobloch	AG ED 285
Manabu Nakamura	FSHN 327

Scholar-Athlete

Erin Frakes, a junior in Food Science and Human Nutrition, was recognized as one of the six UIUC Outstanding Scholar-Athletes for 2003. Erin is a member of the track and cross country teams.

Student Field Trips

The ACES Undergraduate Educational Policy Committee recently approved the disbursement of annual funds from ACES Advancement to support undergraduate student field trips associated with ACES courses. Allocations are made to the department, and funds are transferred upon completion of the field trips. Faculty should contact their departmental office to learn how to access these funds. A total of \$22,200 has been budgeted for this program.

New Minor in ACES

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://www.aces.uiuc.edu/academics/faculty/teaching.html>
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The UIUC Senate has approved the minor in Environmental Economics and Law. The new minor is administered in the department of Agricultural and Consumer Economics. There are now nine approved minors in ACES.