

# ACADEMIC PROGRAMS



College of Agricultural,  
Consumer and  
Environmental Sciences

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

From the Office of the Associate Dean

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## Some Propositions About Assessing Learning Responsibly

1. **Assess personal, social, and civic abilities as well as cognitive ones.** Policymakers, educators, and the public hold multiple goals for higher education. As important as cognitive goals on the list, stakeholders also value personal, social, and civic goals. Yet the sole focus of current learning assessment policy is on cognitive goals. The conceptualization of learning needs to be broadened to include these abilities in both assessment and in discussions of public policy for higher education.

2. **Encourage real dialogue and greater agreement on the content of assessments.** Current proposals for measuring cognitive aspects of student learning lack conceptual coherence. Some focus on learning as declarative knowledge and ignore the different types of knowledge that students should develop in an academic discipline.

Others propose the use of graduate admissions examinations like the GRE, which purport to measure broad general abilities like verbal and quantitative reasoning or analytic writing across disparate disciplines. Still others emphasize testing “higher-order” thinking in or across mid-range areas like the humanities, social sciences, and sciences.

3. **Recognize that what we test and make public will greatly influence what is taught and what is learned.** If what we test for does not closely tap what we value— that is, if the outputs we measure do not closely link to the outcomes we really want out of higher education— we run the risk of distorting what colleges do. In launching assessments of learning in higher education, we need to be careful. We may in fact get what we measure. And we might not like what we get.

4. **Achieve clarity in the debate about what to assess through use of conceptual framework.**

Let’s be conceptually clear about what we are assessing so that the learning we get through collegiate teaching and learning is what we want.

5. **Develop multiple and varied assessments.** At the college level, one size will not fit all. If they are to improve students’ learning, assessments most likely will need to be multi-level. They will need to tap into discipline-based knowledge and reasoning in the academic major but also look at closely related and taught abilities at the next-higher level. Once we recognize the need to assess personal, social, and civic learning, this caveat will apply even more. We need to develop multiple and varied— as well as sound— assessments of these valued abilities.

6. **Distribute meaningful feedback on assessment results to all stakeholders.** Learning assessments are powerful instruments for educational change, but they have great potential for mischief. For these assessments to have their intended consequences – the improvement of learning and public accountability for making progress toward improving learning— we must figure out how to provide useful feedback based on their results to all of the stakeholders in higher education, from policymakers through academic leaders, to teaching faculty.

From *Change*, January/February 2003.

Education has always been the key—the key for personal intellectual groups, the key for greater individual opportunity, the key for increasing economic productivity, the key for greater economic growth and human progress.

- Clifton Wharton, former President,  
Michigan State University

# The Seven Habits of Highly Successful Professors

Written especially for an accountability-minded reader, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (Covey, 1989) provides a practical foundation on which to build successful recruiting, retention, completion, and placement strategies. The following adaptation of Covey's work appeared on the Stanford University Center for Teaching and Learning web site.

## **HABIT 1: Be Proactive**

Traditionally, professors have built relationships with students slowly—often not until the students' senior year or entry into graduate school. One could logically surmise that in the meantime, many other students had left school because of poor academic performance, family or other personal reasons, or the need or desire to accept full-time employment. Proponents of the accountability movement believe that the retention of students through graduation is in the best interests of students, the employment market, and our larger society. Professors need to play a more active role in students' success.

To be proactive, professors should:

- Anticipate challenges students are likely to face and plan for their solution.
- Initiate a dialogue with as many students as possible, early in the term.
- Gather sufficient information from students in order to meet their needs.
- Orchestrate a rich initial class meeting that achieves multiple objectives.
- Follow up promptly on student inquiries for information and on absenteeism.

## **HABIT 2: Begin with the End in Mind**

Today's college and university students are far more likely than yesterday's to attend classes part-time while working full-time. They are also more likely to be older and to have family responsibilities. These factors have heralded a call for more measurable educational outcomes than were common during the height of traditional liberal art education.

To begin with the end in mind, professors should:

- Identify specific, up-to-date learning objectives for each course that reflect the consideration of multiple stakeholders.
- Develop richer assignments that lead to the achievement of these objectives that are relevant to students' lives.

- Provide detailed, eye-appealing syllabi that clearly explain course objectives, strategies, and guidelines.
- Develop exams and other assessment tools before course material is addressed.
- Clarify throughout the term the objectives communicated in the course syllabus.

## **HABIT 3: Put First Things First**

Commuting students and on-campus residents with wide access to support resources (e.g., computer access at home or in the dorm rooms) expect a highly focused and rich course experience. Effective professors manage their class meeting time not only to address the most critical concepts when students are physiologically receptive but also to regularly connect activities and assignments to the core content of the course.

To put things first, the most successful professors:

- Develop a detailed agenda for each class meeting that includes time parameters.
- Address critical learning objectives early in the class meeting while students are most fresh and receptive.
- Develop assignments and exams that foster students' mastery of the most critical content of the course.
- Dedicate class time to content on which students will be evaluated.
- Provide an overview of the following class meeting that enables students to organize their thinking in advance of new instruction.
- Communicate regularly with students via e-mail to provide reinforcement and clarification of upcoming classroom events.

## **HABIT 4: Think Win/Win**

Often professors are perceived by students to employ win and win/lose strategies in their interactions. Such interactions commonly lead to outcomes that are increasingly undesirable in today's higher education environment. Has any professor ever really won an argument with a student? Using a win/win approach will allow professors and students to achieve shared instructional success. Students who see the professor as a caring human being truly invested in their well-being will not only extend themselves to meet higher expectations but also internalize high standards for subsequent performance.

Sensitized professors who think win/win will:

- Provide positive feedback to students in front of their peers.

- Encourage flexibility on assignments to enhance students' mastery of course learning objectives.
- Prepare students thoroughly for exams-especially the first one in the course.
- Foster students' performance by providing and reviewing the scoring rubric for each assignment as it is being made.
- Provide prompt, individualized feedback on scored exams and assignments.
- Talk regularly with students-before and after class meetings and via e-mail between classes-about their progress toward their personal learning goals.

### **HABIT 5: Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood**

Students seldom grasp complex ideas by just hearing a professor talk at them. Most of us would admit that those who have had the greatest impact on our lives first listened to us unconditionally or empathically. They took the initiative to truly understand us, before expecting us to embrace their view of the world. Effective professors have learned that they do not "teach a discipline" so much as they teach students. Such professors will say that the most rewarding aspect of their profession is to see the lights come out on in the eyes of their students.

Seeking first to understand and then to be understood, professors will:

- Use a student profile form to gather useful information on each student.
- Employ the form throughout the term to note key points that surface in conferences with students and related critical events.
- View students' various characteristics, experiences, and attitudes as potential enriching elements of the classroom environment.
- Use vocabulary and examples to which your students can relate.
- Solicit "informal" feedback from students throughout the term.

### **HABIT 6: Synergize**

Synergy is typically defined as "an interaction or situation in which the whole is more than the sum of its individual parts." A professor who works toward synergy believes that a particular course should be more than the sum of its assignments, exam results, and classroom dynamics. Each course should truly enrich the lives of students by giving them a foundation on which to build an understanding of subsequent classes, life experiences, and personal insights.

To synergize, professors can:

- Draw out students' experiences that relate to

classroom topics

- Link assignments and discussions to students' real-world lives.
- Employ small groups of students to focus on learning goals.
- Encourage out-of-class study groups.
- Create a community that celebrates the unique nature of learning.

### **HABIT 7: Sharpen the Saw**

Covey relays a number of parables, including one about watching a man working to saw down a tree. The man admits to being at the task for more than five hours. When asked why he didn't stop to sharpen the saw, he exhaustedly exclaims, "I don't have time. I'm too busy sawing." Many professors become frustrated when their once-successful techniques fail with a particular group of students or, even worse, with all of their students. But, like the sawing man, they do not take the time to sharpen their tools. They do not realize that their results will not change until they change the way they approach the work. As professionals, we should invest the time to become familiar with at least some of the research on human learning and assess its ramifications on teaching and learning methodologies.

Continuously developing educators can employ the following tactics to "sharpen the saw":

- Establish mentoring relationships with effective veteran instructors.
- Mentor a novice professor, regularly discussing effective teaching strategies.
- Annually extend beyond a single discipline to read a well-received book on teaching and learning practices.
- Make use of on-campus workshops, discussion groups, and related resources-which are often sponsored by one of the growing number of teaching and learning centers.
- Access online resources

Student Awards Banquet  
Sunday, April 27, 2003  
Park Inn Conference Center

**FALL ACES Teaching Symposium**  
Friday, August 22, 2003  
Mark your calendars!

**ACES Direct Connect** - A gateway to ACES Courses

<http://dc.aces.uiuc.edu>

Why does ACES need a college-level portal for its courses? Answer: Our students need it.

Students enrolled in ACES courses need to easily find the home page for their course. Because of the distributed nature of web servers, course pages are stored on a variety of web servers in the college and across campus. A centralized portal insures they can find course information easily.

Our prospective students also need Direct Connect to choose their courses. This is true for ACES students but even more so for students from other colleges who are less familiar with ACES offerings. The portal helps market ACES courses to such students and will even help market our distance learning offerings to off-campus students.

Standard timetable and course description are available on Direct Connect but also links to department information on a course. Direct Connect complements the lists of courses ACES departments maintain by linking to those links. Links to course web sites are of key importance too. Primary web sites change as different instructors teach courses; Direct Connects allows this information to be updated in a central location for student use. Another value the portal adds is that its keyword searchable. There is also the capability to post generic syllabi that go beyond the official course descriptions.

To insure that Direct Connect provides up-to-date information, we need help in maintaining it. The system was designed to allow administrative access to departments (and even individual faculty) to control and maintain their information.

Individuals in each department were contacted and asked to review the current course pages listed for their department. We ask departments to make longer-term plans for handling this task.

**ACES WebCT** - Accounts ready for all SP 03 courses <http://webct.aces.uiuc.edu/>

All Spring ACES courses have WebCT accounts created and up-to-date rosters are pre-loaded. Faculty may use the system for only one or two features such a syllabus and calendar. Others may want to go further by using online quizzing, discussion boards, and other features. WebCT tutorials are available online. Training sessions can be requested by departments and are available for individuals from campus:

[http://www.cites.uiuc.edu/edtech/calendar/12\\_2002/index.html](http://www.cites.uiuc.edu/edtech/calendar/12_2002/index.html)

**Campus Decision Update** - Blackboard vs. WebCT <http://www.cites.uiuc.edu/edtech/projects/enterprise/learn.html>

A decision on adoption of a Campus Enterprise Learning System is expected by the end of February. Whatever the decision, users will enjoy systems that are much easier to use and much more powerful. Regardless of which system you now use, your content can be easily imported into the new systems. The new system comes on line next Spring.

Thanks to John Schmitz for sharing these updates.

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