

ACADEMIC PROGRAMS



College of Agricultural,
Consumer and
Environmental Sciences

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

From the Office of the Associate Dean

Vol. 8 No. 3

Five Key Changes to Practice

In *Learner-Centered Teaching: Five Key Changes to Practice*, Mary Weimer identified five aspects of current instructional practice that adversely affect learning, recommended and illustrated alternative approaches, and documented the positive impact of the approaches. Even a brief exploration of each illustrates how much changes when learning is the focus of all aspects of instruction. This is the fifth and final “Key Change.”

The Purpose and Processes of Evaluation

The problem: Evaluation activities are grade oriented and completed exclusively by teachers. Too often faculty equate learning, grades, and the evaluation process, even though students know that it’s possible to get grades with little or no understanding of the course material. Grades and learning are related, but the relationship is more oblique than straightforward. For example, grades may do a good job of measuring some kinds of learning, like memorization or rote recall. But skills like analysis, synthesis, and evaluation are much more difficult to assess reliably. And while grades may successfully promote encounters with content, questions arise as to the kind and quality of learning that results. Finally, most students leave college without any experience of evaluating their own or others’ work. Because teachers evaluate students almost entirely and exclusively, students graduate without important self- and peer-assessment skills.

The solution: Evaluation activities should be used to promote learning and to develop assessment skills.

Students are motivated to get grades. Learner-centered teachers work to harness that motivation so that students leave evaluative experiences with a grade and a deeper understanding of both the material and their performance.

But doesn’t the need for good grades compromise

students’ abilities to be objective when they engage in self- and peer assessment? Learner-centered teachers do not abdicate legitimate grading and feedback responsibilities. Students do not assign their own grades, but they do participate in activities that teach them how to accurately assess themselves and their peers.

An example: I incorporate self- and peer assessment in my evaluation of class participation. Students set for themselves a participation goal consistent with our class-generated policy. An assigned partner provides feedback the students use to prepare a mid-semester progress report. I respond to that self-assessment with my own feedback.

At the end of the course, students submit well-documented descriptions of their participation and assessments of how many of the 50 points possible they believe they have earned. I make my evaluations before reading theirs. If the assessments are within three points, I record whichever one is higher. To my amazement, about 85 percent of the time we are within the three points, and when we are not, the problem is more often under- rather than over-evaluation.

The results: Short term, fewer arguments over grades. Long term, more successful self-monitoring of learning.

Learner-centered approaches do not diminish the importance of grades, but they do put grades in a larger context. The more experience students have at self- and peer-assessment the better they become at it. The most immediate benefit? They are less surprised by their grades and more likely to believe that the grades reflect what and how well they have learned.

ACES Student Awards Banquet
Sunday, April 25, 2004
12:00 noon
Hawthorne Suites

Intrinsic Motivation

Some days it feels as though the entire educational enterprise is driven by extrinsic motivation – students doing what they do because they “have” to. They take the course because it’s “required.” They read the text because if they don’t, they’ll be quizzed. They participate in class because it’s worth points.

But any effort to learn runs so much faster and smoother when the energy comes from inside, when the student learns because they want to. The learning still takes effort, but it is expended without noticing or caring that hard work is involved. But how can we increase student intrinsic motivation?

- **Challenge** – Students are intrinsically motivated if they believe that academic experiences challenge their skills. Nobody finds much interest in learning what they already know. Now the level of the challenge students perceive is definitely relevant. If, for example, they don’t have very good self-esteem, any sort of challenge that looks difficult may not motivate them because they don’t believe they have what it takes to successfully accomplish the task.

- **Control** – Intrinsic motivation is related to control. For example, students are more motivated if they believe their efforts will pay off. Choice and power are also strongly associated with intrinsic motivation. This helps to explain why motivation is so often missing when students enroll in “required” courses.

- **Curiosity** – A learner must want to acquire new knowledge. It also helps to have had satisfying previous learning experiences – to have mastered something and felt the sense of satisfaction and accomplishment that brings. Curiosity is often what makes faculty such master learners.

- **Career Outlook** – This aspect of intrinsic motivation has to do with how future-oriented the student is. If students see themselves with a college degree, gainfully employed and happy with their chosen work, that future goal can be a source of motivation for the tasks at hand.

Adapted from an article in *The Teaching Professor*, February 2004, based on work by B. F. French and W. Oakes.

ACES Convocation

Undergraduate Ceremony

Sunday, May 16th 9:30 a.m. Krannert
Center for the Performing Arts

Senior Seminar Benefits

Adapted from an article by R. Dieter in the June 2003, *NACTA Journal*.

Seniors in an agri-business program at Iowa State are required to take a course that has four goals: 1) to help prepare students for graduation and job placement; 2) to collect information from students about their experiences in the program; 3) to introduce students to their role as alumni; and 4) to enhance relations with students. The course is required but does not carry credit. Students meet for five hour-long sessions during the semester: once during the first week and once a week during the last four weeks.

During the first session, graduation requirements are reviewed and upcoming deadlines discussed. Students also provide the department with information on the status of their job search.

During sessions two and three students complete seven different surveys that solicit assessment data: 1) they evaluate the program, offering suggestions for changes and identifying the best courses they took; 2) they evaluate the program by completing a 30-statement closed- question survey; 3) they evaluate those instructors from whom they have taken at least one course; 4) they offer feedback on the quality of advising they have received; 5) they complete a self-assessment to rate their own ability to perform certain tasks and skills; 6) they take a short multiple-choice test that covers basic economic principles and concepts; and 7) they complete a survey that solicits information on job choice and job-related criteria.

The fourth session of the class includes a 10-minute presentation by someone from the alumni office. For the remainder of the session, a certified financial planner discusses topics like savings and retirement plans, paying off loans, buying houses and cars, and managing credit cards, among other topics.

The final session gets students set with all graduation procedures. Information about plans after graduation is solicited as well as a copy of each student’s resume. The session ends with a reception during which each student is recognized and presented with a small gift. Students leave this course and program knowing that the department values their opinions, and cares about their experiences, and future successes.

Classroom Culture that Inspires Student Learning

Adapted from an article by S. E. Quay and R. J. Quaglia in *The Teaching Professor*, February 2004.

Higher education seems reluctant to admit that classroom culture plays a critical role in student satisfaction, retention, and learning. Yet students tell us that if they do not feel comfortable in a particular class, or with a particular professor, they are less likely to attend or participate in the course, less willing to seek out extra help, and less apt to rise to intellectual challenges.

Research has identified a number of conditions that help increase students' motivation to set and meet learning goals. These conditions cost nothing, require no additional degrees, make a significant difference in teaching and learning, and best of all, they can be cultivated in our classrooms. Consider this set of eight.

Create a sense of belonging in your classroom.

The more your students feel that they are part of the classroom community, the more likely they are to become connected to the course, the subject, and even the school. At the same time, it is critical to recognize your student as individuals who have their own skills, talents, and interests. *What percentage of my students do I know by name?*

Recognize that your students look up to and admire their professors.

Like it or not, you are a hero to your students. Your position makes you a role model. What you say to them – either positive or negative – has an impact. Take your role seriously. *What do I model for my students?*

Recognize your students' accomplishments, not just their grades. Today's students have grown up in a world of highstakes testing, and they place enormous significance on the grades that they achieve. Take time to acknowledge and celebrate the growth not measured by grades but by perseverance. *Do I talk with students about growth and learning as often as I talk about grades?*

Build moments of fun and excitement into the course. There is nothing wrong with having a good time in class! Don't forget to laugh and have a sense of humor. In doing so, you show students that learning can be fun and that it is not disconnected from the real

world around them. *When was the last time laughter filled my classroom?*

Encourage your students to be creative and curious about the subject matter. Students need to be able to explore and ask the "why/why not" questions. Those kinds of questions encourage them to make their own connections to the subject matter and to be more engaged in the class. *How do I make time and space in my classroom for creativity and curiosity?*

Encourage healthy risk-taking by making it safe for students to both fail and succeed. Students' innate spirit of adventure so often gets checked at the classroom door. Yet that spirit is what helps students take academic risks, whether speaking up in class, debating an idea, or writing a difficult paper. *How often do I see students taking risks in my classroom?*

Provide opportunities for students to be leaders in the classroom and to take responsibility for their choices. When students feel that they are an important part of the classroom, that their opinions matter, that they have the chance to lead, and that they are held accountable for their decisions, increased enthusiasm for learning results. *Are leadership and responsibility regularly shared with students in my classroom?*

Celebrate when students act on their beliefs. When your students believe in something, recognize their commitment. Cultivate their self-confidence so that they take action – whether in the classroom, the college community, or in their own lives. *Do student regularly express their views in my classroom? How do I respond when they do?*

Contributions of African Americans to Illinois Agriculture

Dr. Blannie Bowen, Professor and Head of the Department of Agricultural and Extension Education at Penn State, presented two seminars in November as part of the campus commemoration of the Brown v. Board of Education decision. Both of Dr. Bowen's papers are now available on the ACES Academic Programs web site. From the ACES main page, click on Academics and then Diversity Programs to access the papers.

Freshman Opinions, Activities and Goals

The January 30, 2004, issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education* included the results of the annual national survey of college freshmen, conducted each year by the American Council on Education and UCLA. Here are some excerpts.

Freshmen rated themselves above average or in the highest ten percent in cooperativeness (73% of students), drive to achieve (72%), academic ability (70%), understanding of others (66%), and persistence (63%). Attributes at the lower end of the list included popularity (38%), public speaking ability (36%), religiousness (31%), and artistic ability (30%).

Students also estimated the chances were very good that they would do the following: get a bachelor's degree (80%), develop close friendships with other students (71%), socialize with someone of another race/ethnic group (66%), and make at least a B average (60%). At the lower end of the list: transfer to another college (7%), participate in student protests or demonstrations (6%), work full time (6%), and drop out (1%).

The top reasons noted as very important in deciding to go to college included: to learn more about things that interest me (77%), to be able to get a better job (70%), to get training for a specific career (70%), to be able to make more money (69%), and to gain a general education and appreciation of ideas (65%).

Nearly a fourth of the freshmen expected to need special tutoring or remedial work in mathematics!

Meet the ACES Freshmen

Here are some data bits about our current freshmen class in ACES, which included 554 new students.

Females – 60.6%
Males – 39.4%
Illinois residents – 96.8%
Non-Illinois – 3.2%
Cook County residents – 28.5%
Lake County residents – 11.7%
DuPage County residents – 9.9%
Champaign County residents – 4.9%
Will County residents – 4.7%
All others – 40.3%
Interested in studying abroad – 59.6%
Average high school percentile rank in class – 79.3
Average ACT Composite score – 25.9
Hispanic – 2.9%
Asian/Pacific Islander – 7.9%
Black – 2.2%
Other minority – 3.3%
White – 83.7%

The Last Five Minutes

A note received from a senior faculty member and endowed chair holder in the College referenced the front-page article of the February 2004 issue that shared an example of how to utilize the last five minutes of class. "I also tried out the review idea for the last five minutes of class. It worked great! My last five minutes will never be the same."

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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 professorial 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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