
April 1998 University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

From the Office of Associate Dean

TEACHING AS ART

Teaching as art has recently been clarified in an excellent article by Deborah J. Bickford and James Van Vleck. They explore five characteristics of art and artists and then apply them to teaching. They begin by explaining that *artists are fully engaged and committed to purpose*. In the case of teachers, the engagement and commitment are to learning. “To facilitate student learning artistically you must be a student, fully engaged and committed to learning, actively seeking new ways to understand your discipline and how your students learn, gaining insights and nuances from the material, from the students’ interpretations, and from connecting students and material.” (p.456)

Artfulness embodies art and science. For teachers this means drawing on art and science to enhance learning outcomes. The authors make a distinction here between the facile way most of us move between the art and science of content development in our fields, and the more awkward way we move between the art and science of how we teaching and how students learn. Our tendency to think of art and science as separate entities impedes our ability to understand how intrinsically they are linked. They make the case by pointing to painters, sculptors, and printmakers whose very success depends on a full understanding of the chemical properties of the materials they use. Teaching becomes artistic when we understand in a detailed and scientific way how it affects learning.

Art requires creativity. Artful teachers are creative in the ways they expand learning. “Artful teaching is more than the skillful application of teaching techniques (craft). To enhance learning, it generates new and unresolved issues that become seeds for the next class or course. The artful teacher is always trying new materials and new approaches to fit the needs and interests of the specific learner at hand, never feeling that the ‘perfect material’ or the ‘perfect approach’ has been found. The teacher’s world is dynamic, filled with

uncertainty and challenge, and teaching strategies are guided by a compass, not a road map.” (p. 460) Also important here is the teacher’s ability to be spontaneous and to improvise: to seize the moment and make it into something larger and more compelling.

Artists grow and stay inspired through play, experimentation, and practice. This is so important for teachers, and it draws again on their ability to always remain learners. In serious and intense academic environments, it’s hard to be “playful,” but the notion of having fun is a way of taking ourselves less seriously, and from that perspective we often see and understand things more clearly. This orientation can give us the space we need to experiment and to fail. “When unexpected things occur, they are embraced by artists as valuable opportunities to learn, the specks of irritant or dust that lead to pearls.” (p. 454)

Finally, there is *between artists and their material a special relationship. With teachers, the materials are our students and the special relationship is the need we have to create communities of learners. We can develop these strong relationships with and between students in the content materials through which we seek to engage them, we can nurture it by setting and keeping a reasonable pace, and we can further promote it by setting the tone, which involves everything from the configuration of the classroom space to the way people are included in the unfolding action. Of course, little of this can occur if students remain unknown as individuals.*

“As its core, artful teaching focuses on learning--- learning for us, and learning for our students. It means being involved in a dance in which we may lead in the beginning but then we let our partners provide movement and energy and direction. The artful teaching is helping self and students become artful learners, and there are as many paths to do this as there are teachers who are trying. Artful teaching lies in liberating the gifts that students and professors bring to the classroom.” (p. 469)

Adapted from “Teaching As Art” in The Teaching Professor, Vol. 12, No.3.

Reference: Bickford, Deborah J., and Van Vleck, James (1997). Reflections on artful teaching. *Journal of Management Education*, 21 (4), 448-72.

Browsing Through Sections 371. and 378.

Computerized library searches are great. From my own desk I can search the library system here and literally around the world. I enjoy browsing through the system, trying different words and subjects that are related to the topic of

interest. I can look for authors, titles, keywords--from specific to general. I don't consider myself to be old, but this is clearly a case of "the good old days" when I was a student searching through the card catalog not really being all that good!

I also enjoy browsing through the hardware store, always amazed at all the gadgets that are there. Occasionally I see something that fills a need, but I didn't even know the item existed. The same is true at the grocery store, especially in the fresh fruits and vegetables section. I can go to the grocery or the hardware with a list (and in really old times a clerk would have filled my order), but I still enjoy browsing up and down the aisles when I have a little extra time.

And so it is at the library. I can do computer searches; I can even find out what else is on that shelf. But I still enjoy browsing. It seems like I always find a book in the general area that did not appear on the computerized search.

Next time you have a few minutes to browse, try the 371. and 378. sections of the Education Library (room 100 main library building). You'll find books on topics related to the general area of teaching practice, from curriculum development to student evaluation. Check them out; I'll bet you'll find useful information, just like at the hardware store.

Our own success, to be real, must contribute to the success of others.

**--Eleanor Roosevelt
Sounds of Silence**

The sounds of silence--so pleasant to our ears at times. The days following the distribution of student audits last fall and again last month were anxiously awaited by the admissions and records folks in Academic Programs.

Decentralization is a mainstay at UIUC, and the computerization of student audits is not an exception. The College of ACES has invested a tremendous amount of resources, including software, hardware, training and staff time, in converting from hand audits to computerized ones. The complications from having students completing "old" programs and "new" programs did little to help the situation. But we survived!

By and large, the conversion to the DARS audits has been a success. Very few of our 2,000 undergraduates received audits that were less than accurate. The major concerns have been important ones--the system catches up with students

who do not have an advisor, or who have not indicated an option with the major. Students cannot plan well without a declared option and the advice and counsel of an advisor!

There will always be a need for additional improvements, but the bulk of the work is done. Audits can also be transmitted via electronic mail. Continued improvements in printing capabilities will also improve the ability to respond to student and advisor needs.

Congratulations and thanks to the Advising Coordinators and the Admissions and Records people in the departments and college for helping make the new system work.

Course Development Awards

Congratulations to:

Darin Eastburn, Crop Sciences, Cleo D'Arcy,

Crop Sciences , Bertram Bruce, Dept. of Curriculum & Instruction, College of Education

General Education Course Development and Undergraduate Course Development Awards

Plant Path 100 Web Site Development

Shelly Schmidt, Food Science and Human Nutrition

General Education Course Development Award

FSHN 101-revise to fulfill Natural Science and

Technology Gen Ed requirements

Assessing Teaching Performance When No One Is There To Observe

Robert C. Wilson described various approaches to helping faculty members improve their teaching as a part of a three-year program at the University of

California, Berkeley. One approach was to help instructors assess their own teaching through a Self-Description of Teaching Questionnaire. Instructors can indicate to what extent each of the items is descriptive of their teaching.

SELF-DESCRIPTION OF TEACHING

**In teaching this course, I: Not at all descriptive, Very descriptive, Doesn't apply/
don't know**

- 1. Discuss points of view other than my own 1 2 3 4 5 ()**
- 2. Contrast implications of various theories 1 2 3 4 5 ()**
- 3. Discuss recent developments in the field 1 2 3 4 5 ()**
- 4. Give references for more interesting and involved points 1 2 3 4 5 ()**
- 5. Emphasize conceptual understanding 1 2 3 4 5 ()**
- 6. Explain clearly 1 2 3 4 5 ()**
- 7. Am well prepared 1 2 3 4 5 ()**
- 8. Give lectures that are easy to outline 1 2 3 4 5 ()**
- 9. Summarize major points 1 2 3 4 5 ()**
- 10. State objectives for each class section 1 2 3 4 5 ()**
- 11. Identify what I consider important 1 2 3 4 5 ()**
- 12. Encourage class discussion 1 2 3 4 5 ()**
- 13. Invite students to share their knowledge and experience 1 2 3 4 5 ()**
- 14. Invite criticism of my own ideas 1 2 3 4 5 ()**
- 15. Know if the class is understanding me or not 1 2 3 4 5 ()**
- 16. Have students apply concepts to demonstrate understanding 1 2 3 4 5 ()**
- 17. Know when students are bored or confused 1 2 3 4 5 ()**
- 18. Have genuine interest in students 1 2 3 4 5 ()**
- 19. Give personal help to students having difficulties in course 1 2 3 4 5 ()**
- 20. Relate to students as individuals 1 2 3 4 5 ()**
- 21. Am accessible to students out of class 1 2 3 4 5 ()**
- 22. Have an interesting style of presentation 1 2 3 4 5 ()**
- 23. Am enthusiastic about my subject 1 2 3 4 5 ()**
- 24. Vary the speed and tone of my voice 1 2 3 4 5 ()**
- 25. Have interest in and concern for the quality of my teaching 1 2 3 4 5 ()**
- 26. Motivate students to do their best work 1 2 3 4 5 ()**
- 27. Give interesting and stimulating assignments 1 2 3 4 5 ()**
- 28. Give examinations requiring synthesis of parts of the course 1 2 3 4 5 ()**
- 29. Give examinations permitting students to show understanding 1 2 3 4 5 ()**
- 30. Keep students informed of their progress. 1 2 3 4 5 ()**

Once the questionnaire is completed, the instructor has more guidance in deciding what area or areas to address to improve the teaching performance.

Using the same questionnaire at the end of the following semester, and making comparisons with ICES scores and peer assessments of teaching, will allow the instructor to make continuous improvements so that, in the end, students learn more and perform better in the course.

From “Toward Excellence in Teaching” by Robert C. Wilson, in Aleamoni, L. M. (Ed) Techniques for Evaluating and Improving Instruction. San Francisco: Josey-Bass, 1987.

ADEC--A Resource for Teaching

ADEC is a national consortium of state colleges and land grant universities providing distance education programs and services via technology. ACES is a member of the consortium, and, while there are not many courses with the consortium that emanate from UIUC, there are many services available through the ADEC web site <<http://www.adec.edu>>

“What’s New” includes announcements of conferences and grants, plus includes articles and papers related to teaching and learning and distance education. “In the News” provides a synopsis of recent news stories about distance education.

“On-Line Resources” provides links to various resources that may be helpful to ACES faculty. Currently this page includes information on intellectual property rights and fair use, links to several national and international professional associations, and recent papers on education.

The most extensive page, “Educational Links Collection,” includes a list of educational links on topics from ACTV to “Writing for the World.” More than 150 education sites are available through the links on this page.

Be sure to bookmark the site, since information is updated continuously.

**ACADEMIC PROGRAMS
College of Agricultural, Consumer and
Environmental Sciences
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign**

We value:

opportunities for student growth and development

quality teaching and advising

educational programs that are responsive to the needs of the students

diversity, multiculturalism and global awareness

fairness, integrity and honesty

cooperation and teamwork

education as a lifelong process

the role of Academic Programs in fulfilling the mission of ACES

The mission of ACES Academic Programs is to facilitate the delivery of quality educational experiences to students studying the agricultural, consumer and environmental sciences that will guide their personal, academic, social and professional growth and development as they become contributing members of the global society.

Student Awards Banquet

May 3, 1998, Illini Union Ballroom, 12:00 noon

Tickets on Sale in 104 Mumford April 16-April 27

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