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## ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

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From the Office of Associate Dean

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# Peer Review as "Habits of the Heart"

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In a brand new sourcebook on peer review, Nancy Van Note Chism, a well known and widely respected faculty developer, summarizes the motivational principles that ought to ground any peer review process. Often when developing the policies and procedures that determine how peer review will function in our departments, colleges, and universities, we get fixated on the details and forget that in the lofty reasons we find the rationale. The eight principles were reviewed in the March 1999 issue of *The Teaching Professor*.

1. Peer review of teaching must be perceived as a valuable activity, even though it is not directed to one's own specific interest and purposes. In other words, this is a professional responsibility that fundamentally involves service devoted to the development of others. It must be conducted with that purpose in mind.
2. Peer review of teaching must be seen as both compassionate and principled. There are high standards of performance to uphold, but teaching is complex and variable. The development of skill takes times, persistence, and patience. We must uphold high standards but recognize that progress toward them will occur slowly, over time.
3. Peer review of teaching requires generosity of spirit. It's not about using an observation to get even for an old grievance. It's not about petty likes and dislikes. It's about being open-minded to alternative approaches, styles and strategies.
4. Peer review of teaching requires patience and attention to detail. Examining the artifacts of teaching, like graded papers, exams, and syllabi, takes time. It may seem like obvious work, but in the details, the evidence of teaching philosophy, assumptions, and approaches will be found.
5. Peer review of teaching requires an attitude of intellectual and professional curiosity. Getting into the details of somebody else's teaching opens the door to

interesting and often perplexing questions, such as the meaning of grades, what it is students and/or should be learning, and how knowledge is advanced and understood in this discipline as opposed to my own.

**6. Peer review of teaching requires creativity. It is an opportunity to present colleagues with new insights and/or ways of understanding the impact of instructional policies, practices, and behaviors on student learning.**

**7. Peer review requires courage. Personal investment is an inherent part of teaching. To comment on it, particularly in judgmental terms, requires a kind of honesty and openness that is often uncomfortable.**

**8. Peer review requires that reviewers be willing to grow themselves. If the mind is kept open, peer review of others can provide powerful impetus for personal analysis and resulting improvement.**

**Reference: Chism, Nancy Van Note (1999). Peer Review of Teaching: A Sourcebook. Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing, pp. 124-126.**

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## **Participate in ACES Convocations**

**May 16 is a special day---a time for all of us to see the results of our "labors." We need all of you to participate in either the ACES Undergraduate or Graduate Convocations. Contact Carol Johnson in 111 Mumford to make arrangements to participate and order a cap and gown.**

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# **LEARNING-CENTERED ENVIRONMENTS: Curriculum, Pedagogy, Experience**

**With the advent of the recent interest in learning, there is a move to make classrooms, departments, and colleges learning-centered. A number of attempts to characterize those environments have already been published, but efforts to make clearer what is still implicit, ambiguous, and abstract need to continue. Into the hopper we toss the following way of delineating what is meant by making a class, department, or college "learning centered."**

**1. Being learning centered can be characterized curricularly.**

**A college offers degrees in areas relevant to workforce needs, so that learners see the relevance of what is being proposed for study.**

**The curriculum seeks to redress the content- process imbalance with more attention being paid in all courses to teaching students how to learn so that learning after college may continue.**

**The curriculum is designed so that it focuses on learning, embedded in the**

**content of discipline through which students track both what they are learning and how they are learning it.**

**The curriculum is better integrated. What fits together and how it's related is better understood, and those connections are made clearly and explicitly to learners.**

**The curriculum is designed taking into account developmental premises. Learners begin individual courses and curricula at one level and need to be moved to other levels, and so what happens in a first course in terms of assignments, expectations, responsibilities and challenges is not at all the same as what happens in an ending course. Faculty tackle developmental issues explicitly, no longer assuming that they occur naturally or inevitably as students progress through the college experience.**

**The curriculum better bridges the theory-practice divide. Field work, observations, internships, co-ops, and service-learning opportunities become valid curricular components.**

**2. Being learning centered can be characterized pedagogically.**

**The methods of instruction are collaborative and cooperative, so that students begin to understand that learning can and does occur in collective contexts.**

**The methods of instruction are discovery based, with much less teaching by telling and much more learning by doing.**

**The methods of teaching and learning are infused with technology, not PowerPoint as an electronic overhead projector and transparencies, but as the media through which students learn the lessons of information access, management, organization, and evaluation.**

**The methods of instruction recognize the central role of the learner in the learning process. There is an attempt to involve and engage the learner in decisions that can legitimately be shared.**

**The methods of instruction are more rigorously assessed against these criteria: How much and how well did students learn as a consequence of these methods?**

**3. Being learning centered can be characterized experientially.**

**It's no longer about what happens in class versus what happens outside of class. It's about the totality and integration of a set of learning experiences that occur in different venues.**

**It's not about academic affairs and student affairs as organizationally separate and distinct operations. It's about blending functions to the end of creating holistic, seamless learning environments where what happens in class is reinforced, elaborated, and applied by out of class activities and vice versa.**

**It's no longer just about the content requirements of the major. It's about larger, more integrated, whole-person educational experiences.**

**The fine-sounding rhetoric may still get in the way, but concrete examples to illustrate each of these descriptions abound in the higher educational literature today. You want to know how learning-centered your course or your college is? Start by looking at the curriculum, at the pedagogy, and at the relationship between academic affairs and student affairs. If movement in the directions**

described above happens in each of those three domains, your will be a more learning-centered classroom and college.

From *The Teaching Professor*, March 1999

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I must say that I find television very educational. The minute somebody turns it on, I go to the library and read a good book.

--Groucho Marx

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## Active Learning Campus Workshop

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Thirty-two of the 205 participants in the February 1999 campus faculty retreat were from the College of ACES. All seven departments and college administration were represented. Keynote speaker was Dr. Tom Angelo of DePaul University. In addition, group discussions and workshops were conducted on related topics.

This was the sixth campus retreat on teaching. Be sure to watch for an announcement next fall about the 2000 retreat.

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## Conceptualizations of Teaching

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David Kember qualitatively analyzed 13 studies (all but one conducted between 1990 and 1994) that explore faculty conceptions of teaching. These conceptions are described in *Learning and Instruction*.

Out of the synthesis of these studies (all based on lengthy interviews with faculty) emerge two familiar orientations to teaching: a teacher-centered/content orientation. What makes this research noteworthy is a further delineation of conceptualizations within each orientation and an additional mark of transition between the two. These five conceptualizations may be viewed "as well-defined points within a continuum, and there is evidence of lecturers shifting beliefs across the spectrum over time." This further delineation of what it means to be teacher- or student-centered is helpful as we work with colleagues and as we monitor the moves and shifts in our own thinking about teaching.

**Teacher-Centered/Content-Oriented**

**Imparting Information**

In this most teacher-centered conceptualizations, the instructor views teaching as the pure presentation of information. If the student is present at all in the conceptualizations, it is as a passive receptacle of information. The focus is on presentation, lecturing, and the preparation of notes and materials. The definition of good teaching relates exclusively to the soundness of the teacher's academic knowledge

**Teacher-Centered/Content-Oriented**

### **Transmitting Structured Knowledge**

Still focused on content, the shift here involves a recognition that information needs to be structured and arranged so that students are more likely to receive what is being disseminated. The content "ball" needs to be thrown carefully and accurately so that the receiver has a good chance of catching it. Teaching is still about presenting, but now notions of excellence couple sound academic knowledge with polished performance skills.

### **Student-Teacher Interaction**

At this point on the continuum, there is the realization that interaction between students and teachers matters — and that it is also important for students to interact with the content. Metaphors used to describe teaching in this conceptualization focus on how teachers "model" roles for students and how students are there to be shaped in the ways and values of the discipline.

Concern also starts being expressed about what students need to be able to do: experiments, problem solving, or performing.

### **Student-Centered/Learning Oriented Facilitating Understanding**

The focus now is on the student, and the emphasis is on learning outcomes rather than content definition. Teachers have responsibility to move students in the direction of learning. Students are now recognized as individuals, not an audience to which one lectures. Good teaching becomes a measure of how well students understand and the extent to which they can apply what has been learned.

### **Student-Centered/Learning-Oriented**

#### **Conceptual Change/Intellectual Development**

The goal at this point is to change the way students think, to get them to confront what they believe in light of facts and evidence. The idea is to move individual students along their own continuum of intellectual development. Many of the teachers interviewed felt this conceptualization applied only to their teaching efforts with graduate students. The metaphor used to describe this role is most often that of nurturing, the gardener who tends plants with different potential and at different stages of development.

"There is... a need for further investigation of the relationship between categories. Are they adequately described as several discrete categories, or does a continuum with well-defined positions provide a better model? Insights into these questions are most likely to come from investigations of the way in which conceptions of teaching change over time."

From *The Teaching Professor*, April 1998

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## **When to Administer ICES**

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**When should the instructor distribute the ICES forms to gather student feedback concerning the course?**

**There is not one answer to that question. Katherine Ryan, Head of the OIR**

**Division of Measurement and Evaluation, suggests giving out the forms sometime during the last two weeks of the course. Dr. Ryan also shared that at least one study suggests that administering student rating forms during the final exam period tends to lower the ratings for the course and instructor. A study by Kenneth Feldman indicated that administering student rating forms anytime during the second half of the course seems to yield similar ratings. Obviously, administering the forms too early would decrease the information that is generated, even though the actual ratings may not change. The important keys to student rating forms are consistency (asking the same questions several times), analyzing student ratings over time (a one-shot look may not be representative), and collecting other information about instructor and course quality (such as peer observation, alumni feedback, review of course materials, self assessment).**

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## **January 1999 Graduates**

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**The U of I certifies graduates three times a year, even though commencement is held just once each year. In January 1999, 98 undergraduate degrees were awarded in ACES. Of those graduates, three received Highest Honors, 14 earned High Honors, and 15 received Honors for their academic achievement. January graduates are invited to participate in the May 1999 ACES convocation and U of I commencement programs.**

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**The whole art of teaching is the art of awakening the natural curiosity of young minds for the purpose of satisfying it afterwards.  
--Anatole France**

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