

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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A First Day Activity that Promotes Interaction and Review

For many semesters I have struggled with the first day of class. I want the students to meet each other, get a feel for the interactive classroom atmosphere that I aspire to create, review some basic concepts that are prerequisite for the class, and begin new content. I found traditional icebreaker activities were somewhat helpful, but I often felt guilty doing them instead of getting to the content. This semester I found a solution.

Before the first day of my calculus class, I perused the review chapter and made a list of the important concepts. On the back of my business cards I listed one of the concepts and created a "matching" card that supported the concept. For example, on one card I listed "parallel lines" and the matching card indicated "equal slopes." As the students entered the classroom, I distributed the cards.

The personal information on the card served as my introduction and allowed me to provide an overview of the course. Students were then told to visit with others in the classroom and find their mathematical "match." Once students were paired, they were to prepare an introduction of their classmate for the class, and also they were to create an example to illustrate the mathematical concept on their cards. Students were given about 15 minutes for this activity.

After matches were finalized, each pair came to the front of the room, introduced each other, shared the mathematical concept, and provided an example on the board to illustrate it. The examples allowed me to expand on the concept, sometimes challenging the example provided, and also connecting the concept to the new material that would be covered during the semester.

The benefits of this activity were three-fold: 1) students were actively involved in trying to communicate mathematical concepts on the very first day of class, 2) the prerequisite skills were reviewed quickly and efficiently without lecturing, and 3) every student made a verbal contribution so that the first day ended with students having experienced a highly interactive classroom.

By Tena Long Golding. Adapted from *The Teaching Professor*, November 2001.

Academic Computing Facility – New Computers

Be sure to visit the Academic Computing Facility in the lower level of the Library, Information and Alumni Center. New computers are now in place in all four instructional labs and the general use area. Contact Jeana McAllister to arrange for teaching part or all of your course in the new facility.

ACES Convocation

May 12, 2002

Undergraduate - 9:30 a.m.

Krannert Center for the
Performing Arts

Graduate - 10:00 a.m.

Smith Music Hall

Academy of Teaching Excellence Room

The ACES Academy of Teaching Excellence room is open daily for faculty to use. From small group meetings related to teaching and learning, to viewing and analyzing a video tape of your teaching, to checking out resources on many topics, you are encouraged to utilize this excellent resource. Stop by 115 ACES Library, Information and Alumni Center soon! New acquisitions include the following materials on teaching and learning, donated by Academy members and the Academy for Teaching Excellence endowment.

<u>Author/Editor</u>	<u>Title</u>
Meyers, Steven A. and Prieto, Loreto, R.	<i>The Teaching Assistant Training Handbook: How to Prepare TAs for Their Responsibilities</i>
Tobias, Sheila	<i>Revitalizing Undergraduate Science: Why Some Things Work and Most Don't</i>

Videos

<u>Title</u>	<u>Author</u>
The Art of Discussion Leading	Harvard University
The Art of the Lecture: Justice A Harvard University Course in Moral Reasoning	Harvard University
How to Speak	Harvard University
Problem-Based Learning: A Reasonable Adventure	Knouse, Barbara Lohse
Teaching in America: A Guide for International Faculty	Harvard University
Thinking Together	Harvard University

Teaching Enhancement Grants

Seven ACES faculty were awarded teaching enhancement grants for Fall 2001. The recipients and the projects they are working on include: Art Spomer, NRES, CDROM for NRES 343; Darrel Kesler, ANSCI, enhancements for ANSCI 110 and 111; Robert Skirvin, NRES, CDROM for NRES 103 and 261; German Bollero, CRSCI, software for CPSC 340; Kris Lambert, CRSCI, WEBCT development for PLPA 301; Aaron Ebata, HCD, web enhancements for HDFS courses; and Dianne Noland, NRES, equipment for NRES courses.

Conceptions of Teaching: Dimensions of Learning

Students have different conceptions of learning. They orient to tasks differently. Teachers have different conceptions of teaching. We have also assumed that teaching practices are based on these conceptions, although we have recognized that teachers are unaware of their conceptions and the links that do or do not tie their conceptions to instructional practice. Researchers identified five conceptions which are highlighted below in descending order.

Level 1. Teaching as supporting student learning. Faculty see students as responsible for their own learning and in control of the content as well. The teaching generally occurs in an individual context when students ask for help. The teacher guides and directs them to answers.

Level 2. Teaching as an activity aimed at changing student conceptions or understanding of the world. The outcome of the teaching and learning process is different knowledge as opposed to increased knowledge. Subject matter is used to create a larger conceptual framework that can inform subsequent learning.

Level 3. Teaching as facilitating understanding. The goal is to help students to understand the content well enough to apply and use the knowledge to relate to other problems. Teachers who operate from this conception emphasize the need to explain, clarify, and interpret material for students.

Level 4. Teaching as transmission of knowledge and attitudes within the framework of an academic discipline. Teachers are concerned mainly with building a knowledge foundation. They assume that students will then use this knowledge in further studies or in professional contexts. These teachers want their students to know more and to competently handle what they do know.

Level 5. Teaching as imparting information. The teacher communicates subject material to students using his or her experience and enthusiasm to captivate student interest in that material.

The researchers tackle the assumptions of others who have looked at conceptions of teaching and described them hierarchically. Their results indicate that teaching conceptions are "ordered" but not hierarchical. If conceptions are hierarchical, then characteristics present in lower levels should also be

present in higher levels. The research indicated that was not true.

Whether conceptions are hierarchical or ordered may seem like a trivial point, but it has important developmental implications. Those working in this area have assumed that most faculty move away from content-centered orientations and toward more learner-centered conceptions as they gain experience and instructional maturity. This work raises questions about that assumption.

Individual faculty members can use this information to prompt their own thinking and analysis as to why they do what they do when they teach. Instructional policies and practices derive from a larger conceptual framework. And as these researchers note, trying to relate the two can go a long way to resolve one of the mysteries in higher education: how faculty can espouse one set of goals (like aiming to promote critical thinking) and yet use educational practices (like testing for recall) that actually work against those goals.

Reference: Samuelowicz, Katherine and Bain, John D., (1992). Conceptions of teaching held by academic teachers. *Higher Education*, 24, 93-111. From *The Teaching Professor*, November 2001.

Assessing Faculty Performance: Decision-making Process

During the 2000-01 academic year, faculty in ACES participated in a comprehensive survey addressing faculty performance assessment. This is the sixth article intended to provide discussion and thought on how faculty in each of the seven ACES departments might consider improvements in the annual performance systems currently utilized. This article is based only on aggregate data of the College, not individual department ratings.

Faculty responded to four statements regarding the how the four components (teaching, research, outreach/Extension, and service) should be measured in the aggregate. On the seven-point scale from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree, respondents rated three of the four scenarios above the mid-point of the scale. Respondents preferred that teaching, research, outreach/Extension and service performance be measured against goals that were set (5.4). There was also some preference for performance measured against the percent of appointment for

each component (4.9) and for performance measured against percent of time allocated to each component (4.8). Respondents clearly do not want performance measured against an equal allotment of 25 percent for each component (1.6).

Faculty also responded to 10 other statements regarding how performance assessment decisions should be made, again on the seven-point scale. Six items were rated at or above 4.0, and they were: performance should be evaluated by a group of faculty and the department head (5.5); faculty should be rated within their academic rank group (5.0); performance should be evaluated without a set formula or rating system (4.4); and performance should be measured by a committee of faculty in the department (4.0). Further, faculty indicated that the current process in the department is equitable (4.6) and clear (4.6).

Faculty indicated lower ratings for the remaining items: faculty should be rated across the entire faculty group (3.9); performance should be measured only by the department head (3.6); performance should be measured by a set formula and rating system (3.3); and performance should be measured by a knowledgeable person from outside the department (3.2).

What suggestions can be derived from these results? First, faculty prefer a performance assessment system that is based on set goals. Although there was also some preference for assessment against appointment or allocated time, setting goals could take into consideration the faculty's assignment, percent of appointment and amount of time to be allocated to teaching, research, outreach/Extension, and service.

Faculty also indicate a clear preference for performance decisions to be made by a group of faculty in the department and the department head. That is not the current mode of operation in all departments.

While the ratings were above the scale midpoint, there should be some thought given to the equitableness and clarity of the faculty performance assessment system used, regardless of the parameters. There is probably some association between having assessment procedures that are clear to the faculty and the feeling that the process is equitable. Departments should address both aspects.

New Minors Approved

Three new minors in ACES have been approved by the Senate and will be offered following approval by the Board of Trustees. The minors in Animal Sciences, in Fiber Science, and in Quantitative Methods in Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences bring the total of ACES minors to six. Information regarding all minors can be located at the Minors website:
<http://www.provost.uiuc.edu/students/advising/minorspecific.html>

Teaching Enhancement Seminars

Three “Spice Box” seminars are scheduled for the Spring semester on the topic “Integrating Leadership Into the Curriculum.” Watch for reservation information.

February - What is happening with leadership on our campus? Vice Chancellor Pat Askew and Assistant Dean Charles Olson

March - What’s happening with leadership in our college? Faculty panel – Del Dahl, Mike Mazzocco and Beth Reutter

April - What’s happening with leadership in other colleges? Faculty panel – Ray Price, ENG, Peter Kuchinke, EDU, Greg Northcraft, CBA.

The Muddiest Point – Electronically

This semester I’m requiring each of my students to e-mail me a sentence or two about the section of the required textbook reading that they understand least well, their “muddiest point,” at least two hours prior to class.

My use of the “muddiest point” responses varies. If half the students focus upon one particular page, the whole class period might be devoted to clarifying that problem. If a passage is mentioned by only one student, I may prepare a response specifically for that student. If many students are struggling with the entire assignment, I might send a document that includes all submitted “muddiest points” with my responses to each to the entire class.

The “muddies point” exercise encourages students to read the text prior to class. When comments are shared among classmates, there is a new level of accountability. Feedback is provided “just in time” prior to the lecture. Classroom time is devoted to topics that students regard as the most difficult. Discussion can start from “where the students are.” Students who raise difficult questions can feel that they are contributing to the learning process. The topics can also be archived for review and repetition.

Adapted from an article by David G. Brown in *Syllabus*, November 2001.

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