In spite of lip service to the contrary, it is scholarly activity that gets the strokes that count in academic life, not teaching. Our entire system is geared toward this end. For example, we evaluate research activity by counting publications. And it works, because there is a pervasive system of external reviews and evaluations connected with the research enterprise. Every paper in a refereed journal is read and approved by two external reviewers, and the same arrangement prevails for research grant applications. The scholarly aspect of faculty development is subject to extremely intensive and extensive expert scrutiny provided at virtually no cost.

While we may single out scholars as individuals when we award them promotion and tenure, they seldom work alone, particularly in the sciences. For example, the principal investigator on a grant often hires a small corps of assistants, technicians and colleagues to help her do the work. Credit for the work is reflected in the by-lines of publications, but the PI is in charge. She hires the technicians, selects the colleagues, directs the investigation, and distributes rewards as she sees fit.

It is surprising that the teaching that takes place side-by-side with this research is only marginally similar in its organization. Typically, one individual instructor is responsible for directing all the elements of teaching a course, including their delivery. One person gives the lectures, prepares and grades examinations, requires reading lists, provides tutorial assistance, and conducts recitation sections.

Does this mode of delivery make any difference, and if it did, how would we know? In fact, there is a well-paid, highly visible group of teachers on many college campuses who operate in much the same manner as respected, well-established researchers do. Members of this group enjoy significant autonomy, they command a staff of specialists, they are judged by external criteria, and they are held to strict outcome measures - often with very harsh consequences. They aren’t called professor; they are called coach. Technically, they are part of the academy, but they are held apart from (and usually above) the rest of us. They are teachers in many ways, but thirst for knowledge is not what drives them. Let us examine carefully how coaches are set apart from the rest of academe.

Many major college athletic programs, especially basketball and football, are subjected to harsh criticism. They achieve this ignoble distinction in many ways including recruiting violations, pathetically low graduation rates, and even outright cheating. The monumental inadequacy of the education of many star athletes is nowhere more obvious than the abominable butchery of the English language that they regularly commit when they become sports announcers. When a listener can comprehend enough of their savagely mispronounced words to detect the presence of a sentence in their utterances, it is unusual to observe two of them in a row which are, in fact, grammatically correct.

This is a bittersweet irony: the coaches who make great athletes of these individuals do so by the application of educational methods which are, demonstrably,
From the Director's Corner
Kaye Robertson  HPD Library Director

RESEARCH—That’s the buzzword you hear all around campus these days. Gary Margules, the Vice President for Research, is a storehouse of information about current biomedical research. A new research building will soon be under construction. Plans for NSU’s future are filled with plans for research. What is the HPD Library’s role in all this?

First and foremost is direct assistance to you, the researcher. Our librarians can help you complete a literature search on the focus of your research, collecting all relevant studies, trials, journal articles, etc., to get you started on your project. They are experts at searching the biomedical literature and can save you many hours of frustrated searching on your own. Contact them at the beginning of your project for maximum assistance and support.

College Teaching continued

Remarkably effective. It is tragic that the rest of academe does not, apparently, do a good job with the rest of their education. It may be instructive to examine the role of coaches as teachers - what do they do that the rest of us do not?

The perception that researchers, not teachers, reap the rewards in academe is probably correct (McKeachie, 1991; Cochran, 1992). Most schools utilize anonymous student ratings, exclusively, to assess the quality of teaching, and a few engage in the curious practice of identifying "outstanding" teachers in their midst, only to provide them with token rewards. Neither of these procedures tells moderately skilled teachers what they should do for self-improvement. Indeed, there appear to be no schools which enjoy a favorable reputation among the professorate of effectively evaluating quality teaching and structuring their reward system based on this outcome.

For an institution to be expected to provide substantial and meaningful rewards to good teachers, a reliable, widely accepted tool for measuring the quality of teaching in the first place is required. What properties would such instruments possess? We could not mimic the manner in which we evaluate research output by simply counting publications, because the fundamental unit is missing. There is no teaching analog to a research publication. As long as anonymous student evaluations are all that we do, it will remain difficult to convince the professorate to embrace it (Cashin, 1995).

Once again, what properties must our metric have? Teaching does not take place unless somebody learns, so we would be well advised to cease to evaluate only the perception of teaching quality and begin to evaluate outcomes. Let’s examine coaches not as athletes or trainers of athletes, but as teachers, and compare their role with that played out by other teachers in academe.

There can be little doubt that coaches teach; they teach young people with various levels of talent to play a game - to perform a specific task as part of a team. They are also expected to lead and inspire their charges, although it is frequently not clear what, exactly, they are inspired to do.

Coaches are evaluated - ruthlessly - by the quality of performance of their players. Particular players may have so much innate talent that their performance has little to do with a coach’s teaching skill, but few people are willing to accept that argument for an entire team. If a team performs poorly, it must have been badly coached.

The most magnificent thing about the evaluation of a coach’s performance is the elegance of the grading instrument, viz., his won/lost record. It is only an indirect measure of a coach’s teaching skill, that may occasionally be misleading, but it is strikingly simple to determine, it is a matter of public record, and even a Dean can figure out what it means without a factor analysis. More importantly, the coach knows what it means, too, and he knows exactly what he has to do to get a favorable rating.

Coaches live a very precarious existence. Their professional careers are judged entirely by the current season. They cannot bank their previous won/lost records. To the extent that there is a point in their careers that is analogous to a tenure decision, it occurs at the end of every season. We treat them rather harshly. Yet, it is a rare event for a coaching vacancy to go unfilled for a lack of candidates. How does this come about?

Coaches are the only group of people in academe that are evaluated on the basis of their teaching. If coaches teach well, their players become winners. Such coaches receive rewards; others get fired (without a whisper of protest from the AAUP). The stakes are high, and we evaluate the efficiency of this teaching based on the performance of the students (players). Only a
Regarding Statistical Seminars . .  

Kathleen Hagen

In December 2008 Dr. Gabriel Suciu of the Statistical Consulting Center concluded a series of six lectures on statistical considerations for clinical trials. The lectures were hosted by the Office of Educational Development in conjunction with the Statistical Consulting Center, and were offered free of charge to any interested HPD faculty member. The evaluation sheets for those presentations showed a wide range of feelings toward the subject matter. For some faculty members, the material presented was so familiar it seemed basic, and they were bored. For other faculty members, the statistical material was too advanced, and they were able to get little from it. For many faculty members, it was just right.

Both on evaluation sheets and impromptu hallway and elevator meetings, many HPD faculty have expressed a hope that members of the Statistical Consulting Center will one day provide a series of lectures on basic statistical concepts. After a long conversation with the Chair of the Statistical Consulting Center, I understand why that hope will not be fulfilled.

1.) The lunch/presentation format which is used for our faculty development sessions is not conducive to a sustained course of study. Faculty are not obligated to attend all sessions and HPD faculty have a wide range of statistical skills. Some faculty who need the beginning steps might not be able to attend the earlier sessions and would be lost at the later sessions. Faculty who might not need the earlier sessions would be bored and impatient until the sessions became more advanced.

2.) The study of statistics, similar to the study of any great academic discipline, is the work of a lifetime. Even the rudiments cannot be mastered in a few 45-minute sessions.

3.) Faculty who wish to achieve a better statistical foundation for their research would be better served taking a class in statistics. NSU offers several and will pay for the class.

4.) The members of the Statistical Consulting Center already teach or have taught beginning statistics courses. Adding another one for no additional compensation would be a strain on already packed schedules.

Recommended Readings continued

(Received from Kathleen Hagen, who describes the merits of well-programmed avatars in virtual classrooms, pointing to several of the advantages that avatars enjoy over flesh and blood instructors.

Giving all students good eye contact is not possible in a large classroom; having all students sit in the “sweet spot” (usually near the front and center of the room) is physically impossible in a real class, but both can be done in a virtual classroom. Recent advances in computing are allowing instructor avatars to mimic nonverbal behavior of students, which has been shown to improve students’ attention and compliance with instructions. The full article can be found online through the NSU library’s subscription to The Chronicle of Higher Education*.

Coaches operate within a dramatically different organizational pattern than the rest of academe. Within a particular discipline *i.e.* a specific sport, there is one **head coach**, who exerts an astonishing degree of autonomy over his operation.

First, he gets to pick his assistants who are selected because they possess certain specific coaching skills, and they apply these at the direction of the head coach. Their promotions do not depend upon the judgment of a group of peers; instead, they depend upon the judgment of the head coach, and he typically applies the same harsh standards that will, in turn, be brought to bear upon him at the end of the season.

Second, the coach not only gets to pick his players, he can discard them for non-performance, and, when he does this, they remain discarded. There is no endless line of administrative appeals culminating with the threat of legal action. The parent institution supports this arrangement by providing generous financial allowance to subsidize recruitment activities. Nobody else in academia is treated this way. And the stunning climax: the institution actually pays these recruits a salary. Oh, they may call it a grant-in-aid to get around NCAA regulations, but it is a salary by any other name.

Third, and it is not clear how, when or why this happens, student athletes actually seem to have an interest in pleasing their coaches by mastering what they are taught. The rest of us are much more likely to hear complaints about the relevance of our discipline than we are to encounter students who wish to please us - no matter how well we teach. If a player fails to master the skills that make him a part of the team, it is typically the player who gets the major burden of the blame. The rest of us are commonly taken to task for the poor performance of our students; it is our fault, somehow, that they did not master the material. Once again, if we examine how coaches operate, the reason for this discrepancy becomes clear.

Coaches spend an inordinate amount of time, assisted by an array of technology that dwarfs anything else in academia, on the diagnosis of their players’ skills. Players are meticulously examined at an extraordinary level of resolution. They are then given one-on-one instruction at the hands of an individual assistant coach who specializes in the very skills that players need to hone. They are not passed along until their skills reach an acceptable level, and, if they don’t do so in a reasonable period of time, they are sacked.

There is a very interesting, but rather subtle, distinction between good coaches and the others. When a player is subjected to a diagnosis of his skills, somebody tells him what he does wrong, but, for good coaches, that is a singular event. After that initial confrontation, the best coaches spend all their time telling their players what they should be doing, rather than what they should not be doing. Watch any mediocre little league baseball coach. They all have one characteristic in common; they can be heard shouting out to specific players things like “don’t drop it, don’t drop it...” and what happens? Yep! The kid drops it. Sometimes it is the coach’s fault!

Coaches consult continuously with their cadre of assistant coaches. A player is moved along to the next level at the earliest possible moment. Players constantly hone the cutting edge of their repertoire of skills. Everybody involved, coaches, players and the emergent team, engage in a constant exchange of diagnostic and reinforcing information - and it works! What is amazing is that these players apparently do not demand the same kind of teaching/learning performance elsewhere in their academic careers. Perhaps that is just as well; we couldn’t deliver if they did.

Increasingly, and absurdly, college students are viewed less as “learners” and more as “consumers”, and society as a whole is less inclined to demand that individuals accept responsibility for their own actions. It is only a matter of time before the professorate winds up being judged in the same manner as coaches - by the performance of our students - but without the administrative tools that coaches possess.

**References**


**Director’s Corner continued**

**Florida Expertnet** is a similar type of resource, with emphasis on what scientists are doing throughout Florida. At [www.expertnet.org](http://www.expertnet.org), you will find a statewide portal of applied research expertise in Florida’s universities. It is designed to provide quick and easy access to university-based resources and expertise to assist in practical solutions for business, industry and government. This is a fairly recent offering from the Florida Board of Governors in conjunction with The Clearinghouse for Applied Research and Public Service.

If you have questions about anything in this article, please contact a librarian at HPD Library. Call x23106 and ask to be connected to a librarian. We are at your service.