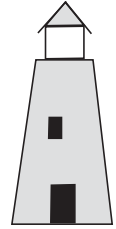


The Beacon

The Quarterly Newsletter of the Center for Teaching Excellence

Vol. 1 #1 March 2004



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Upcoming Events

The Center for Teaching Excellence would like to cordially invite you to the last two sessions of its *"Learning from the Best"* series.

The sessions are:

Tues. March 23, 2004 12:00-1:30p.m.

Tues. April 20, 2004 12:00-1:30p.m.

The sessions will be held in the Chancellor's Dining Room on the 5th floor of the Terry Building. Lunch will be provided.

If you have not already reserved a space, please contact:

Kathleen Hagen at 954-262-1525 or khagen@nsu.nova.edu

You must respond before:

March 19 for the March 23rd session

or April 16 for the April 20th session.

We look forward to seeing you there!

W E L C O M E

Welcome to the first edition of the newsletter from the Center for Teaching Excellence at HPD. Many of the ideas presented are to stimulate thinking and provide a trigger for future dialogue. We welcome your reactions and input. We hope you will also choose to attend our scheduled luncheon education workshops that deal with all issues pertaining to instructional methodology.

CHARACTERISTICS OF GOOD TEACHING

by Stan Cohen, Ed. D.

There are literally thousands of research studies that deal with effective teaching, and from these have evolved a set of principles that make for better learning outcomes. However, it is also necessary to develop a philosophy of education that promotes learning in a democratic society. For instance, if we could agree that human personal worth does not have to be earned. It is constant and steady and not measured by a score on an examination. All students need to be accepted as unique, worthy individuals, with different abilities, but also as able to achieve at varying levels. With such a philosophy the only real failures are those who do not try.

Having said this, principles from educational research deal with a variety of teaching styles that stimulate students to learn, the importance of clear communication, knowledge and passion for content areas, good planning for instruction, personal interest in students, interactive skills, using variable teaching methods, classroom management, and a general commitment that teaching is a first priority.

While including all of these principles as worthy objectives, it is possible to be effective when only a few of these are in place. A stimulating style helps students to want to know the content. Motivation is essential in the learning process. Some teachers do it by using humor, some relate the content to the experiences of students, some tell interesting personal stories, and some illustrate applications of content to the real world.

Essential to the success of these styles is the ability to communicate information in a manner clear to all students. When there is a high cognitive overload, as in all modern science fields, the teacher who can reduce content to the basic levels, tie information together into concepts, and then apply those concepts to the real world will be the most effective. In addition, such a teacher will allow time for student questions and either answer the questions or obtain the answers from

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The Beacon is a quarterly publication of The Center for Teaching Excellence. Contact information:

Stan Cohen, Ed.D.; Vice Provost, HPD; Director of Faculty Development; 954-262-1523; scohen@nsu.nova.edu.

Patrick Hardigan, Ph.D.; Co-Director of Faculty Development, 954-262-1204; patrick@nsu.nova.edu.

Kathleen Hagen, M.M.; Beacon Editor and Facilitator for Faculty Development, 954-262-1525; khagen@nsu.nova.edu.

FOCUS ON EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH: STUDENT EVALUATION OF TEACHING

by Patrick Hardigan, Ph. D.

There is a widespread belief that one way to receive good student-evaluations of teaching (SET) is to teach easy, slow-pace courses that require little work and do not challenge students. Recent research differentiated between "good" and "bad" workload and found that "good" workload, as perceived by learners to be more difficult and challenging courses that require more hours, are evaluated more favorably and are positively related to SETs. However, a point is reached where this relationship levels off and decreases. That is, it is possible to have too much of a good thing.¹



The "grading leniency hypothesis" proposes that instructors who give higher-than-deserved grades are rewarded with higher SETs, constituting a serious bias to SETs. Research shows us that overall course ratings are slightly more positively correlated with grades than overall teaching ratings; some SET factors are unrelated to grades; and that the overall SET-grade relation is nonlinear so that grades are unrelated to SETs.²



Forty-eight quantitative peer-assessment studies comparing peer and teacher marks were subjected to meta-analysis. Peer assessments were found to resemble more closely teacher assessment, when global judgments based on well-understood

criteria are used rather than when marking involves assessing several individual dimensions. Similarly, peer-assessments better resemble faculty assessments when academic products and processes, rather than profession practice, are being rated.

Specific recommendations for peer-assessment include the following:³

- Avoid using very large numbers of peers per assessment group
- Do not expect student assessors to rate many individual dimensions. It is better to use an overall global mark with well understood criteria
- Involve your students in discussions about criteria
- Peer assessment can be successful in any discipline area and at any level

¹ Marsh, H.W. (2001). Distinguishing between good (useful) and bad workloads on students' evaluations of teaching. *American Educational Research Journal*, 38, 183-212.

² Marsh, H.W., & Roche, L.A. (1992). The use of students' evaluations of university teaching in different settings: The applicability paradigm. *Australian Journal of Education*, 36, 278-300.

³ Falchikov, N., & Goldfinch, J. (2000). Student assessment in higher education: A meta-analysis comparing peer and teacher marks. *Review of Educational Research*, 70, 287-322.

ASK THE EXPERTS: "IS THIS A GOOD TEST QUESTION?"

by Kathleen Hagen

Instructors frequently come to the Testing Center and ask for help to decide if a particular test question is good or not. There is no single litmus test to answer that question. However, the Testing Center does have a few statistical tools that can provide the instructor with a sense of the difficulty level of a question and how well it discriminates between the better and poorer students. Combining that information with the instructor's knowledge of the subject matter will enable the instructor to form an opinion as to the value of a question.

The statistical tools available on each question scored by the Testing Center are the *p* value, the point biserial, and the test average of a respondent group.

The *p* value is an indication of how difficult a question is. It is based on the percentage of students who answer the question correctly. Values range from 1.0 to 0 with numbers approaching 1 indicating an easier question (more students answered the question correctly). A *p* value of 1 would indicate every student answered correctly, a *p* value of 0 would indicate every student answered incorrectly. However, an instructor must balance this information with what he/she knows about his/her class. Was it truly an easy question or did students finally get the point you stressed for the past three lectures? Was it a truly difficult question or did students get their just desserts for skipping the class that covered that topic?

The point biserial is an indication of how well a question discriminates between the better and worse students. A question that is a good discriminator will be answered correctly by the better students and

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Reminder:

The last two sessions of the "*Learning from the Best*" series.

The sessions are:

Tues. March 23, 2004 12:00-1:30p.m.

Tues. April 20, 2004 12:00-1:30p.m.



Stan's Soap Box

No one can make changes in your classroom behavior but you. You need to recognize what you do that maximizes or reduces learning. This requires looking into the mirror and really observing what is happening. This is a difficult task. None of us has an easy time objectively examining our own behavior and then making necessary changes to improve.

If you are not achieving what you want to achieve, start thinking about your options:

1. Visit another teacher in the classroom
2. Check out some of the suggestions in our faculty handbook
3. Ask your department chair to visit your class and give you some feedback
4. Have a conference with someone in our Center for Teaching Excellence
5. Invite me in to do a Flanders Interaction Analysis
6. Get some informal feedback from your students and really listen to what they are saying
7. Take the time to try to perfect at least one teaching skill that you may have heard in our methodology workshops.

You might consider some of the following ideas to add spice to a steady diet of lecture, lecture, lecture.

1. Ask a group of students to submit test questions based on their assigned reading.
2. Offer students some active alternative ways to learn material, like computer assisted instruction.
3. Ask several capable students to report on research from literature.

Organization of information makes learning easier. These ideas can help your students structure your material.

1. Simplify your handouts and make them clear and uncluttered. Bold type important concepts.
2. Give specific home assignments that include important questions to help your students focus.
3. Make sure to summarize content when class is nearly over.
4. Announce the subject matter for the next learning session and encourage students to come prepared by reading specific material.

Students respond best to instructors who seem to care about them.

1. Provide office hours for those who need individual help.
2. If you are not often on campus, encourage the e-mail approach.
3. Offer special review sessions for difficult content areas.

If you try something that doesn't fly, try something else and don't beat yourself up. Thomas Edison did not see failure as a negative - he wasn't threatened by it. When he tried 9,900 different metals before he found tungsten, he was asked what he learned from each failure, and he replied, "I learned what not to use." Keep trying! Keep trying! **Keep trying!**

Quotes to Brighten Your Day

If we did the things we are capable of, we would astound ourselves. - *Thomas Edison*

A love affair with knowledge will never end in heartbreak. - *Michael Garrett Marino*

I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work. - *Thomas Edison* (response to interviewer inquiring of his failure to find a workable filament for the light bulb)

Keep away from people who try to belittle your ambitions. Small people always do that, but the really great make you feel that you, too, can become great. - *Mark Twain*

Teachers open the door... You enter by yourself. - Chinese proverb

What we have to learn to do, we learn by doing. - *Aristotle*

Tell me and I forget. Show me and I remember. Involve me and I understand. - *Confucius*

Setting an example is not the main means of influencing another, it is the only means. - *Albert Einstein*

A mind is a fire to be kindled, not a vessel to be filled. - *Plutarch*

Thought flows in terms of stories - stories about events, stories about people, and stories about intentions and achievements. The best teachers are the best story tellers. We learn in the form of stories. - *Frank Smith*

CHARACTERISTICS OF GOOD TEACHING

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other students. Communicating feedback to students in a positive way enhances learning and reduces the long term effect of negative criticism that can affect self worth.

Also essential to effective style is current knowledge in the content field. Students are quick to recognize out-of-date material. Effective teachers read journals that focus on their subject matter. They also attend lectures, talk to colleagues in their field and know how to connect the new knowledge to the older standard material and can explain the implications to students.

A stimulating style, the ability to communicate, and be current in basic knowledge are all dependent on thorough planning and organization of content and methodology to be employed. When such planning is evident, objectives are clear to students, class time is used efficiently, and all kinds of visual aids are prepared and ready to use. Students are secure when they know what is expected on tests, lab reports, and how they will be graded. The effective teacher will take a personal interest in students and convey a helping attitude. The most effective teachers know their students by name and interact with them in and out of class. Even though our students are adults, they still need positive rewards when they do well. A verbal stroke, a written comment, direct eye contact, or even a simple smile can motivate students for future learning.

Since our students are all individuals and are wired differently for learning, there is another teacher challenge. Changing presentation styles, breaking a one or two hour session into several different activities can overcome the 28 minute learning curve drop in adult learning when the same method is being used. Questioning periods, small group dialogue, a ten minute video, student-to-student discussion, and real case

presentations can all be utilized.

The bottom line for incorporating some of these skills is the willingness and commitment of the teacher to keep growing, keep learning, and keep trying new approaches. Evaluate - throw out what does not work, keep what does, and instruction keeps getting better. This is your challenge!

According to Milton Hildebrand and Ken Feldman at Kansas State University:

Obviously, it helps any teacher to have been born with charisma, wit, warmth, sparkle, and dynamic enthusiasm. But these aren't the only important qualities for superior teaching, and we can capitalize upon these areas where we already have our greatest strengths.

Students are not only motivated by enthusiasm, they are also motivated by organization, clarity, scholarship, and good techniques of classroom conduct. These are in the grasp of any instructor who really cares and truly wants to be good at teaching!

It is also encouraging to note that, even small differences are often enough to hold attention a little better or put an idea across more clearly. We simply must believe in ourselves and work at becoming the best instructor possible, considering our individual characteristics.

"Few teachers are great; probably none is great at all times. Yet, many teachers are great occasionally." (Milton Hildebrand, 1973) We need to do everything we can to make these occasional times of greatness occur more often!

Source: Center for Advancement of Teaching and Learning, Kansas State University, Hildebrand & Feldman, www.ksu.edu/catl/effectv.htm

ASK THE EXPERTS:

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answered incorrectly by the poorer students. A good point biserial value is 0.35 or higher. Negative point biserials indicate that poorer students answered correctly and better students answered incorrectly. The statistics provided by the Testing Center are a point biserial for the correct answer and separate calculations for each of the other possible responses. On those responses, a favorable point biserial would be a small negative number.

The test average of a respondent group is an average of the test scores for the group of students who chose a particular response on a question. Like the point biserial, it can give the instructor an indication of how well a question discriminated between better and worse students. For instance, suppose the correct answer for a question is E. The test average for students who chose E might be 72.5. The test average for students who chose B might be 97.6. That question would merit further examination by the instructor. Did the better students read something more into the question that lead them to answer the question incorrectly? Was there a mistake in the question that the worse students ignored and were therefore able to answer correctly?

Armed with these statistics and knowledge of subject material and their classes, instructors can feel confident in determining whether or not they have crafted a good question.

Ask the Experts would like to be a resource for any teaching or research questions you might have. Please submit any questions you would like answered to:

Patrick Hardigan, Ph.D.
patrick@nsu.nova.edu



AVAILABLE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

- Angelo, Thomas A. & Cross, K. Patricia (1993). *Classroom Assessment Techniques: A handbook for college teachers*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Bean, John C. (2001). *Engaging Ideas: The professor's guide to integrating writing, critical thinking, and active learning in the classroom*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Brinkley, Alan, Dessants, Betty, Flamm, Michael, Fleming, Cynthia, Forcey, Charles, & Rothschild, Eric (1999). *The Chicago handbook for teachers: A practical guide to the college classroom*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Davis, Barbara Gross (2001). *Tools for Teaching*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
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- Fairhurst, Alice M. & Fairhurt, Lisa L. Fairhurt (1995). *Effective Teaching, Effective Learning: Making the personality connection in your classroom*. Palo Alto, CA: Davies-Black Publishing.
- Forte, Imogene & Schurr, Sandra Schurr (1996). *180 icebreakers to strengthen critical thinking and problem-solving skills*. Nashville, TN: Incentive Publications.
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- Timpson, William M. & Burgoyne, Suzanne (2002). *Teaching and Performing: Ideas for energizing your classes*. Madison, WI: Atwood Publishing.
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- Wiggins, Grant (1998). *Educative Assessment: Designing Assessments to Inform and Improve Student Performance*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc., Publishers.
- Wilkerson, LuAnn & Gijsselaers, Wim H., eds. (1996). Bringing Problem-Based Learning to Higher Education: Theory and Practice. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning* (Number 68, Winter 1996).

LENDING POLICIES

The Center for Teaching Excellence is happy to loan any of its books to interested NSU instructors for a period of two weeks. At the end of that period, the loan may be renewed provided no one else is waiting for the book(s). An instructor should check out no more than two books at a time. If books are not returned on time or are returned in an unusable condition, the borrower will be charged for the replacement cost of the book. The Center for Teaching Excellence will maintain a waiting list for popular books. Borrowers will be notified on a first come, first served basis.