



getSET

Office of Support for GAZETTE Effective Teaching

UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO

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The mission of the Office of Support for Effective Teaching is to engage and empower UNM instructors to develop effective, diverse learning opportunities to enhance the success of diverse learners.

How Do My Students Learn Best? How Does *Their* Learning Affect *My* Teaching?

"It dawned on me about two weeks into the first year that it was not teaching that was taking place in the classroom, but learning." Those words are attributed to the pop music star, Sting, when reflecting on his earlier career as a teacher. Instructors commonly describe themselves as teachers. They describe their responsibility in the classroom as teaching. We overhear students talking about good and bad teachers. We give awards to outstanding teachers. However, the institution does not exist as a place for instructors to teach, it is a place for students to learn. It is helpful, therefore, to define a teacher as a facilitator of learning in order to focus on what the learner is learning rather than on what the teacher is teaching.

Learners are responsible for learning, but teachers must provide the best possible learning environment. The relationship of teaching and learning brings to mind the proverb about leading the horse to water. Faculty can't make the student drink the "learning water" but we can be sure that the water is wholesome and the taste inviting. How can we know that we provide the best learning opportunities for students? A common response calls upon our own learning experiences. Each of us knows how we learn best, how we came to understand difficult concepts in our discipline, and which classes in our college experience are notable for deep learning that remains with us today. We tend to teach as we were taught. And, why shouldn't we? We turned out just fine! We are highly successful scholars in our fields and hired in a competitive process; some use these facts to justify teaching in ways that worked best for them.

How certain are we, however, that our students learn as we do? Is it possible that at least some of the unsuccessful students in our classes are not explained away as unprepared and unmotivated, as is commonly heard? Is it possible instead that they are intelligent, capable, and striving hard to succeed but do not connect with the instruction? Do our students potentially learn best in ways that differ from the way we are teaching?

Research establishes, and your own experiences likely confirm, that people learn in different ways. Our learning-style preferences, or learning strengths, determine the strategies we use to acquire new information and conceptual understanding along with our motivation for learning in the first place. There are thousands of publications concerning learning styles and several dozen surveys to self-describe learning preferences in terms of three dozen descriptors. Some of these preferences are familiar: visual versus auditory stimuli, actively doing things with others or reflecting alone to solve a problem, written directions versus a drawn map, and so forth. Researchers vary in their assessment of what learning styles actually mean. Some workers feel that learning styles are innate and unchanging. Others conclude that learning styles change through time, especially if progressive learning includes experience with different ways of acquiring knowledge, skills, and understanding.

The take-home point is that learning preferences vary considerably among the students in our classes. This has important implications for our teaching because if we teach using only strategies that we self-identify with, we may unconsciously limit the success of our students (see "Learning" on page 2)

Success in the Classroom Conference Has New Look in 2009

Success in the Classroom: Sharing Practices that Work is an annual conference by instructors for instructors that provides a forum to share insights into successful teaching and learning. "The conference provides an opportunity to broaden a teaching commons of UNM instructors desiring to aid one another in developing effective learning pedagogies and teaching practices," according to co-organizer and OSET Director, Gary Smith.

The fourth annual event is scheduled for Wednesday, February 18, 2009, and will run all day in meeting rooms on the top floor of the Student Union Building. Mark your calendars now to attend, and also consider being a presenter. The conference is free for everyone in the UNM community. Reservations will be required to attend the hosted conference luncheon but no pre-registration is required for the conference itself. The conference website (<http://www.unm.edu/~oset/SuccessintheClassroom.html>) has information about the upcoming conference and programs from previous events. The website will be updated with titles as presentations are volunteered.

"The upcoming conference will be slightly different from the first three," explains co-organizer Jim Burbank from the English Department. "There will be two concurrent sessions through the day, rather than three. In addition, preference in oral presentations will be given to specific areas that were identified by surveys completed by past conference participants." If there are more oral presentations proposed than can be accommodated in the program, preference will be (See "Success Conference" on p. 3)

IDEA—What You Need to Do

IDEA has replaced ICES as UNM's instrument for students to evaluate teaching. IDEA is ideal for both evaluating teaching effectiveness and providing guidance to instructors for improving student success:

IDEA ratings include students' self-assessment of progress on learning objectives chosen by the instructor and the effectiveness of the course pedagogy to accomplish those objectives.

IDEA adjusts scores on items to take into account extraneous factors that are known to bias ratings, including class size, student motivation to enroll in a course, students' work habits, disciplinary difficulty, and student effort.

The supporting IDEA website (www.theideacenter.org) provides extensive documentation of all aspects of the evaluation system and, most importantly, provides guidance to instructors for adopting strategies to improve teaching effectiveness. The next issue of the getSET Gazette will feature the resources provided to assure that you get the most from your IDEA survey reports.

Since most readers will be using IDEA this semester and most of you have not used it before, it is very important that you fully appreciate actions you need to take that are different from administering ICES. These steps are also described as UNM's IDEA website (<http://idea.unm.edu>) and at question-and-answer brown bag forums (see listing at the IDEA website). (See "IDEA Process" on p.3)

Please Don't Throw me Away!!! Give to a TA, Adjunct, or other instructor

Learning (continued from page 1)

regardless of their abilities.

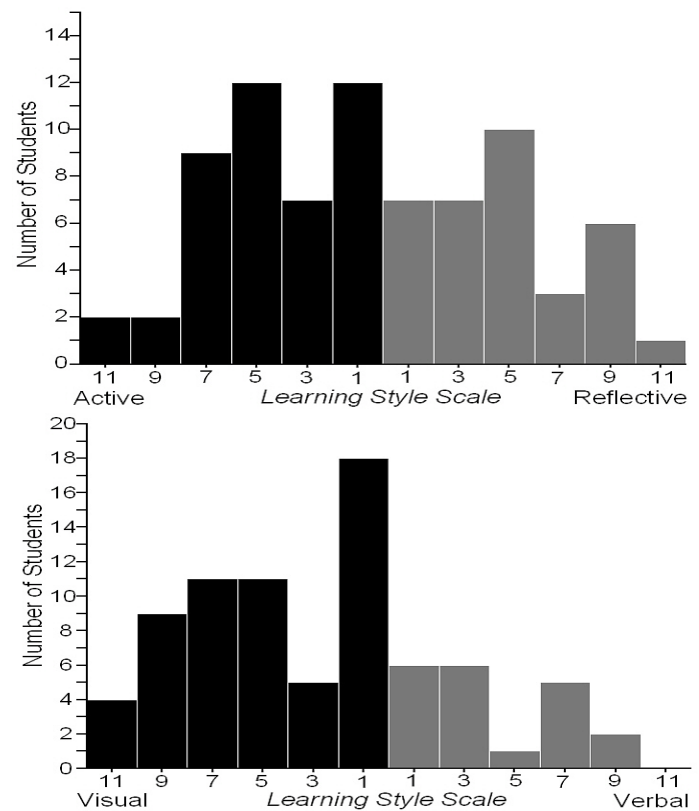
Additionally, preferred ways of learning and knowing are rooted in cultural experience; ways in which people learn from personal experiences and from others in their immediate family, extended family, and community before coming to college. While cultural experience is not uniquely linked to ethnicity, there are correlations between the two. The appropriate corollary, therefore, is that the larger the ethnic and socioeconomic diversity of students in your classroom, the larger the diversity in learning-style preferences.

UNM Education students Steven Aragon and Irene Sanchez designed their dissertation projects to test for distinctive learning style preferences among cohorts of Hispanic and Native American students in New Mexico colleges. The well-worn bindings on the multiple copies of their dissertations shelved in Zimmerman Library attest to the significance of their findings. Irene Sanchez published a succinct summary (Motivating and Maximizing Learning in Minority Classrooms, *New Directions for Community Colleges*, v. 112, Winter 2000, p. 35-44). The student cohorts were surveyed using multiple instruments and were interviewed. The results were compared to national norming data that dominantly represent White, non-Hispanic students. The bottom line is that although there are wide ranges within these two ethnic groups, they are distinct from the comparison group in many ways. Both groups show a greater preference for collaborative, group work and classroom atmospheres that are not purposely competitive (as automatically happens, for example, when students are ranked or grades are curved). Both groups prefer assignments linked to concrete tasks ahead of learning abstract theories and general principles. Hispanic and Native American students show a stronger preference for a cognitive tempo that permits thinking before acting, although at the same time Hispanic students in the study showed a strong preference toward active-learning experiences. Frequent feedback on learning is more highly regarded among both groups than with the comparative population and Native American students, in particular, are motivated by instructor-directed structure and support.

These results agree with national data compiled by George Kuh and colleagues at Indiana University. Using data from the National Survey of Student Engagement, which is periodically administered at UNM, they show that Hispanic freshmen obtain higher grades than Caucasian students with increasing use of learning through active, collaborative pedagogies with strong interaction between student peers and between students and instructors. The flip side is also true—when students experience fewer of these and other academically purposeful learning opportunities Hispanic students achieve lower grades than Caucasian students.

The diversity of learning-style preferences in a UNM classroom is illustrated by the histograms in the next column. The graphs plot preferences on two out of four dichotomous scales within the Felder-Silverman Learning Styles Inventory. A detailed description of each learning-style preference is explained at a website mentioned below. The sample is 79 students in a 100-level science class taken by many nonscience students to satisfy core-curriculum requirements. The graphs demonstrate a broad range of learning-style preferences and many students plot away from the center line, which means that their preferences are strongly rooted.

Does this mean that instructors must teach every concept in multiple ways in order to reach every student? Clearly, this is not practical. Instead, the significance for teaching is appreciating the need to provide diverse learning opportunities including single tasks that can either be approached in multiple ways or require multiple approaches for an effective solution. These tasks are even more effective when completed by small, diverse groups of students. These approaches not only better engage students compared to a single approach or limited number of teaching methods, but it also broadens learning-style abilities. Some studies, including here at UNM, show that even those students who do not have strong learning-style preferences are more highly motivated to learn in classes that utilize multiple learning methods simply because the variety makes learning more interesting.



Glance back at the title for this essay and you'll see written above it the OSET Mission. All OSET programs focus on acquainting instructors with potentially unfamiliar learning approaches and assist them to move beyond their personal ways of learning to address the diverse learning preferences and abilities of their students.

How can I find out my and my students' learning preferences?

Listed below is a quick guide to three learning-style surveys that can be implemented online without paying a fee. One use of these surveys is to compile a graphical summary of your students' responses and use it as a basis for discussion. Most students will not have thought about different learning styles, how they learn, or that they learn differently from someone else. What does it mean to learn in different ways? Given a diversity of learning styles, what are the implications for how a course is taught?

Felder-Silverman Index of Learning Styles. A validated 44-item survey that places respondents into four dichotomous categories; active/reflective, sequential/global, visual/verbal, sensing/intuitive. <http://www.engr.ncsu.edu/learningstyles/ilsweb.html>.

Learning Style Assessment. A 27-item survey that shows strengths in visual, auditory (verbal), and kinesthetic learning. http://www.ulc.arizona.edu/learning_style.php.

VAR-K-A Guide to Learning Styles. A 16-item survey that ranks learning style preferences in the visual, aural, read/write, and kinesthetic categories. <http://www.vark-learn.com/english/index.asp>.

How can I learn more?

The literature is deep but OSET endorses these two sources as the most informative:

"Student learning styles and their implications for teaching," S. M. Montgomery and L.N. Groat, University of Michigan, Center for Research on Learning and Teaching, *Occasional Papers*, no. 10, 8 p. http://www.crlt.umich.edu/publinks/CRLT_no10.pdf.

"Understanding Student Differences," R.M. Felder and R. Brent, *Journal of Engineering Education*, 94 (1), 57-72 (2005). http://www4.ncsu.edu/university/users/fifelder/public/Papers/Understanding_Differences.pdf. This article is written for everyone, not just engineering faculty!

IDEA Process (continued from p. 1)

Here are the two critical steps:

Step 1. Complete the Faculty Information Form

Approximately four weeks before the end of your course, a staff member in your department (IDEA coordinator) will give you a Faculty Information Form ("blue form") to complete. Your coordinator should be the same person who administered the ICES system in your department. You can also request the form from Information Technology Services at any time by calling 7-2029 or 7-9784.

There are two sections of the blue form that are particularly important, the Objectives and the Department/Discipline code.

The blue form lists twelve student-learning objectives that you mark as *Essential*, *Important*, or *Minor*. In practice, you should select no more than three to five objectives as Essential or Important. Objectives marked as Essential are weighted double in your IDEA summary report, whereas objectives marked as Minor are ignored in your summary report. When selecting Essential or Important objectives, the IDEA Center recommends that you ask yourself three questions: (1) Is this a significant part of the course? (2) Do I do something specific to help the students accomplish this objective? and (3) Does the student's progress on this objective affect his or her grade? If your answer to all three questions is "yes," mark the objective as Essential or Important. Otherwise mark the objective as Minor. If you are not the only instructor of this course, it is worthwhile for all instructors to select the same objectives or at least have a common group of commonly weighted objectives. Further descriptions of the objectives that may influence your choices are provided by a link at idea.unm.edu, or email idea@unm.edu to receive this information.

Entering a proper Department/Discipline Code on the blue form assures that your results are compared to the proper normative data set, and are incorporated in your department's summary report. The back of the form shows an abbreviated list of department / discipline codes, along with a web link to a more comprehensive list.

Step 2. Decide Between the Long or the Short Form

You decide whether your students fill out a Long Form or a Short Form. The Long Form has 47 items, space for 19 custom questions, and a small section for student write-in comments. The Short Form has 18 items, space for up to 20 custom questions, and a larger section for comments.

The Long Form is recommended when instructors want maximum diagnostic feedback for improving their teaching and student mastery of selected objectives. It is generally preferred, especially for new faculty and when teaching a new course or making major revisions to a course. The Short Form is best when you want to ask additional questions that more completely evaluate (a) laboratory sections, (b) discussion sections for large lecture classes, and (c) hybrid (online + face to face) classes. Adding questions to the long form may cause survey fatigue and disinterest from students, so that responses may be incomplete or unreliable. Example long and short forms can be viewed at idea.unm.edu. If you choose to add questions, then consider lists of validated reliable questions that are also accessible at idea.unm.edu rather than writing your own. Additional questions are *not* printed on the student survey form. You must either distribute your added items on paper with the student surveys, or project your custom items onto a class room screen.

To select the long or short form, check the appropriate box on the blue faculty information form. Important note: an earlier version of the blue form did not have the option for selecting long versus short forms. If you have an earlier version of the blue form, visit idea.unm.edu and click on the menu link labeled "Specify Short / Long" to make your selection online.

Success Conference (continued from page 1)

given to those presentations that fit into these four themes:

How We Know that Students are Learning: Assessment in Courses
How We Know that Students are Learning: Assessment at the Program Level
Teaching for the Success of Underpowered Students
Teaching and Learning with Technology.

A poster session, also new this year, will be open to all topics of teaching and learning.

All UNM instructors at all ranks (including teaching assistants and adjuncts) are invited to present at the conference. "Presenters should not feel limited to the traditional classroom experience," says conference co-organizer Deana Richer, Director of Teacher and Educational Development in the School of Medicine. "The conference title refers to classrooms as learning environments—including virtual, laboratory, online, field, and experiential." Oral presentations will be 20 minutes long and followed by a ten-minute discussion period. Interested presenters should go to the conference web page for more information about the conference themes and an online form for volunteering a presentation.

The 2009 conference luncheon address speaker is Dr. Janice Denton. Dr. Denton is Professor of Chemistry at the University of Cincinnati, Raymond Walters College and has chaired the Academic Assessment Committee for more than 20 years. Her talk on teaching and learning brings her long experience to offer important perspectives on the importance of assessing and improving student-learning opportunities. Professor Denton will also present a workshop on February 19, examining methodology for describing scholarly teaching. More information on this workshop opportunity will be described in the Winter issue of the *Gazette*, which will be delivered in late November.

Designing Courses for Effective Student Learning Faculty and Instructors Institute January 13-14, 2009

Sign up and obtain more information at:
<http://www.unm.edu/~oset/DesigningCoursesPage.html>
For ALL instructors at all levels and ranks. Instructors of large-enrollment classes are especially encouraged to participate.

UNM Instructors Have Access to the National Teaching and Learning Forum

But, We Didn't Mean To Teach Porn
Learning To Talk About Art
Can Technology Keep an Old Academic in the Game?
When Does Enough Feedback Become Too Much?
Engaging Faculty in Discussion of the Affective Domain

These are recent titles of short articles from the *National Teaching and Learning Forum*. Published six times a year, the 12-page installments of the Forum provide refreshing looks at challenges and triumphs in college teaching. The September issue has just been released and the feature article, "First Day Questions for the Learner-Centered Classroom" is by OSET Director Gary Smith.

OSET maintains a site-license subscription that permits access to new issues and an archive of all 17 published volumes of the Forum. To access the Forum simply point your browser to www.nlfo.com. Near the top of the web page you will see a link for "NLF Login," which you can click to access the journal. The only catch is that the site license subscription is based on the IP address of your computer. You should be able to access the Forum from any on-campus computer but you will not be successful from off campus.

Check it out. And, if you find this resource useful, please let us know!

OSET Events

Go to www.unm.edu/~oset for more information, or email oset@unm.edu or call 277-2229

Strategies for Effectively Enhancing Your Course Using WebCT Vista, Tuesday, September 30, 2008, 2:00-4:00 pm.

Assessing Student Work w/Rubrics, Thursday, October 9, 2008, 1:00-3:00 pm.

Designing Assessment Measures, Tuesday, October 28, 2008, 2:00-4:00 pm.

Teaching with Clickers, Wednesday, November 5, 2008, 2:00-4:00 pm.

Designing Courses for Effective Student Learning: Faculty & Instructors Institute, Tuesday and Wednesday, January 13-14, 2009, 8:30 am to 3:30 pm both days

Success in the Classroom, Wednesday, February 18, 2009, 8:00 am to 4:00 pm.

Using Assessment to Improve Courses & Curricula: Closing the Assessment Loop, Tuesday, March 24, 2009, 2:00-4:00 pm.

getSET Brown Bags: Informal facilitated discussions over lunch. See OSET website for more information. No reservation required (bring your own lunch please!).

Simple Collaborative/Cooperative Learning Strategies: Bringing Active Learning into Your Classroom, Monday, September 22, 2008, 12:00 to 1:00 pm, 108 Mitchell Hall.

Update on Assessment @ UNM, Thursday, September 25, 2008, 12:30 to 1:30 pm, in 108 Mitchell Hall.

Teaching with Newspapers: Enhancing Relevancy by Bringing Current Events and Commentary into the Classroom Friday, October 24, 2008, 12:00 to 1:00 pm, in 108 Mitchell Hall.

Using Wikis to Promote Collaboration and Construct Knowledge, Wednesday, November 12, 2008, 12:00 to 1:00 pm, 108 Mitchell Hall.

UNM Hosts National Conference on Mentoring

A faculty member is a mentor as well as a teacher and scholar in their field. Faculty members are mentors to their advisees, their student researchers, their student learners, and to faculty peers. While we all have benefited from mentors and we frequently provide advice to others, can all of us say that we really know what is required to be an effective mentor?

OSET encourages readers to participate in the upcoming national conference hosted by UNM's Mentoring Institute. Fostering a Mentoring Culture in the 21st Century: Bringing Best Practices and Research to Higher Education will be convened on October 22-24, 2008, in the SUB. Institute Director Nora Dominguez explains that "the intent of the conference is to provide a professional development opportunity to faculty, students, and professionals involved in mentoring within higher education. Attendees will share ideas in scholarly, yet practice-oriented, sessions." The conference sessions include presentations, workshops, and roundtable discussions. The keynote presenter is W. Brad Johnson, Associate Professor of Psychology in the Department of Leadership, Ethics, and Law at the United States Naval Academy, and Faculty Associate in the Graduate School of Business and Education at Johns Hopkins University. Dr. Johnson has authored more than 80 articles and book chapters, as well as nine books, in the areas of ethical behavior, mentor relationships, and counseling, including *On Being a Mentor: A Guide for Higher Education Faculty* (Lawrence Erlbaum, 2006).

For more information about the conference, point your browser to <http://mentor.unm.edu/conference.html>. When registering online, add the word "OSET" at the end of your organization entry to be eligible for a special registration cost of \$100 (tuition remission applicable), which is a 50% discount for faculty and staff.

Faculty Associates Enhance OSET

The Office of Support for Effective Teaching (OSET) has initiated a Faculty Associates Program that brings faculty members into OSET for a year to assist faculty peers. Faculty Associates help facilitate OSET events, including those that the Associates develop, and consult with faculty members who request advice and classroom visits to acquire feedback on their teaching and the effectiveness of student learning. The Associate's own teaching will also be enhanced through engagement with many faculty members in diverse disciplinary areas.

Following an application process in May 2008, Mark Childs was selected as the first OSET Faculty Associate. Childs is Associate Professor and Director of the Town Design Certificate Program in the School of Architecture and Planning. "I was drawn to the Faculty Associates opportunity out of an interest to pursue methods of assessment in service learning and design courses," explained Childs. "During my year of working with OSET I hope to share my expertise in community-based, project-oriented teaching while simultaneously learning from others who are pursuing service learning in their disciplines." Watch the OSET website in coming months for postings of events related to best practices and assessment in service learning including information about how to engage your students in service learning. If you have a particular interest in participating in these events, please contact OSET now (oset@unm.edu) so that we can be sure to include you.

Applications are now open to fill two Faculty Associate positions for the 2009-2010 academic year. A link to the application form, and additional information about the Associates Program is located on the OSET website home page. Each Faculty Associate receives \$3000 special compensation. Associates and their department chairs must assure OSET that time is available for this commitment and some funds for release-time instruction are available to expedite Associates' work with OSET. All tenured faculty members employed primarily at UNM's Albuquerque campuses are automatically eligible to apply. Nontenured faculty should discuss this opportunity with OSET Director Gary Smith before applying.

 **getSET**
Office of Support for Effective Teaching

- ✦ Workshops
- ✦ Conferences
- ✦ Institutes

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