



getSET GAZETTE

UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO

Office of Support for
Effective Teaching
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Do I Need Support to Teach More Effectively?

As you examine this first issue of the getSET Gazette, are you wondering, "why do I need this?" Are you thinking that your teaching is already effective and that you do not need to learn about or pursue alternative teaching approaches? In an effort to persuade our readers to be open minded about their teaching, and inspired to consider different approaches, we composed this essay not in our words as UNM's center for faculty development but in the words of others.

"One of the ironies of higher education is that the faculty, as a matter of practice, are the only faculty in education from elementary school to college that are literally not trained to teach their own students. It is for this reason that faculty development is a critical part of any institutional strategy to promote students' success.¹"

"Most faculty have paid little if any attention to the studies that ask what methods of teaching are most effective either generally or for particular groups. Neither is the question of how well one's teaching is working typically seen as meriting much investigation. Rather, the tendency is to continue to teach as we were taught, resisting any suggestions that traditional approaches might be less than optimally effective or that they might be biased in favor of particular groups. Typically, any evidence of less than optimal learning is attributed to a lack of student effort or insufficient prior preparation, thereby letting the faculty member off the hook."²

"It now appears that all traditionally taught college courses are markedly (though unintentionally) biased against many non-traditional students. Thus, when we teach in traditional ways we probably discriminate strongly on grounds quite different from those we intend. Easily accessible changes in how we teach have been shown repeatedly to foster dramatic changes in student performance with no change in standards."³

"Good lecturing is a skill in which many of us take pride. There is no doubt that an outstanding presentation can be a formative experience for students, remembered for many years. However, such rare lectures generally have enduring effects not because of the faculty information they convey, but more likely because they inspire by example, or reveal unexpected new insights, or open up new worlds to their listeners. Few instructors can hope to deliver more than one or two such lectures during a semester. Thus, while lecturing in small doses remains a valuable teaching technique, lecturing for an entire period of 50 or 75 min is unlikely to be the best use of class time."⁵

"Most of the scholarship on teaching and learning indicates that the passive lecture format where faculty do most of the talking and students listen is contrary to almost every principle of an optimal learning environment. Rather, active and collaborative learning approaches **See Teaching Effectively on page 2**

Calling all Instructors for an Important Workshop: Responding to Diversity

When we look around our classrooms we see a heterogeneous group of learners. Our students range widely in age and life experience, come from diverse cultural backgrounds, experienced variably effective high-school learning opportunities, and may be spending more hours working away from campus and attending to family needs than they can devote to school work. Do we really know how to assure successful learning for these diverse students?

On Wednesday, November 7, Dr. Craig Nelson from Indiana University will conduct 3-hour workshops on "Responding to Diversity." The workshop theme is accentuated in the subtitle, "Alternatives to Blaming the Students: How to Make Real Differences in Achievement, Equity, and Retention in ANY University Classroom." Brenda Claiborne, Dean of Arts and Sciences, says "this is an important opportunity for UNM faculty and other instructors to gain insights from a national leader in the field that can immediately impact student success, especially in our large-enrollment core courses." **See Diversity on page 2**

Nationally Acclaimed Assessment and Retention Conference in Albuquerque

The New Mexico Higher Education Assessment and Retention Conference started as a regional gathering of faculty and administrators to share ideas about assessment and retention initiatives that promote student success. Now, the conference draws attendees from across North America. The 2008 conference, "Changing For Learning's Sake: A Focus on Assessment and Retention," will take place in the Hotel Albuquerque at Old Town on February 28 and 29. Workshops and interactive, discussion-oriented sessions will tackle a variety of topics related to student learning, methods of assessing learning, and strategies for guiding students successfully toward degree completion. The featured speaker will be Cliff Adelman, a senior associate at the Institute for Higher Education Policy. Adelman has authored a dozen research monographs, most notably the "Toolbox" and "Toolbox Revisited" studies that examine the factors that make a difference in degree completion.

Proposals for conference sessions will be accepted through the conference website (<http://www.nmsu.edu/~NMHEAC/>) until November 16, 2007. UNM faculty and staff are strongly encouraged to propose sessions. Even if not choosing to present, UNM faculty, instructors, teaching assistants, student-services staff and administrators should examine the schedule when it is posted on the conference website near the end of the year. Registration is only \$75 with an additional charge for pre-conference workshops.

Teaching Effectively continued

[where students do something and think about what they are doing] feature three elements that matter to student learning: Involving students, increasing their time on task, and taking advantage of peer influence.”⁴

“Widespread use of effective pedagogical practices must be at the core of any agenda to promote student success. The greater the repertoire of teaching methods, the more effective the learning experience, especially when teaching approaches are aligned with student abilities, and preferred learning styles and learning aims.”⁴

At this point, are you thinking that your students would have greater success in your classes if they came to UNM better prepared and if admission standards were less generous? If so, then consider these words:

“The surest way to increase the number of ‘successful’ students—those who persist, benefit in desired ways from their college experiences, are satisfied with college, and graduate—is to admit only well-prepared, academically talented students. The problem with this approach is obvious. More people, from a wider, deeper, and more diverse pool of undergraduates are going to college. Moreover, in the coming decade, four-fifths of high school graduates will need some form of postsecondary education to acquire the knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary to address the complex social, economic, and political issues they will face. Admitting only the most talented and well-prepared students is neither a solution nor an option.”⁶

“A model of institutional action, whatever its final dimension, must therefore treat student learning as part and parcel of the process of student success, and that success, however it is defined and measured, must have at its core success in individual classes. Though student success is indeed everyone’s business, it is the business of faculty in particular.”¹

For more than 20 years, research has shown the positive outcomes of changing instruction from teacher centered to learner centered. Changing instruction requires changes in the instructor.

“Engaging students in learning is principally the responsibility of the teacher, who becomes less an imparter of knowledge and more a designer and facilitator of learning experiences and opportunities. In other words, the real challenge in college teaching is not covering the material for the students; it’s uncovering the material for the students”⁷

“It could well be that faculty members of the twenty-first century college or university will find it necessary to set aside their roles as teachers and instead become designers of learning experiences, processes, and environments.”⁸

“Teaching should be scholarly. Every instructor's teaching should reflect what is currently known about teaching and learning. There are many successful methods of teaching described in the literature. There is a constantly growing body of research on teaching and learning. To ignore this in one's teaching is no more acceptable than ignoring the advances in the content areas we teach. Furthermore, every instructor should be able to articulate and provide evidence for why he or she teaches in a particular way. It should not be based on vague general impres-

sions about what constitutes good or effective teaching.”⁹

“Like the students who bring prior knowledge to our courses in the form of misconceptions, we as instructors must face up to the common pedagogical misconception that students will learn effectively only what we tell them in class. Like our students, we must allow ourselves to undergo conceptual change, based on evidence for the greater learning effectiveness of active engagement over passive listening in lectures.”⁵

And – if you have read this far and think that all of these sage comments, largely backed up with quantitative research, somehow are wrong... contemplate for a moment the insight of Mark Twain. "It ain't what you don't know that gets you into trouble. It's what you know for sure that just ain't so."

Your response is invited. Please write to us at OSET, oset@unm.edu or MSC05 3400. Or—consider responding by attending one of our many events that are described in the *Gazette* or on the OSET website (www.unm.edu/~oset). We are here to inform, and more importantly to support, efforts to improve the learning outcomes and graduation success of our students.

¹ Tinto, V., and Pusser, B., 2006, Moving from theory to action: Building a model of institutional action for student success: National Postsecondary Education Cooperative, 51 p.

² B. Alters and C.E. Nelson, 2002, *Evolution*, 56, p. 1891

³ C.E. Nelson, 1996, *American Behavioral Scientist*, 40(2), p. 165

⁴ Kuh, G.D., Kinzie, J., Buckley, J.A., Bridges, B.K., and Hayek, J.C., 2006, What matters to student success: A review of the literature: National Postsecondary Education Cooperative, 61 p.

⁵ J. Knight and W. Wood, 2005, *Cell Biology Education*, 4, p. 298-310

⁶ Kuh, G.D., Kinzie, J., Schuh, J.H., Whitt, E.J. and Associates, 2005, Student success in college: Creating conditions that matter: San Francisco, Jossey Bass, 370 p.

⁷ Smith, K.A., Sheppard, S.D., Johnson, D.W., and Johnson, R.T., 2005, *Journal of Engineering Education*, 94, p. 1-15.

⁸ James Duderstadt, past-President, University of Michigan

⁹ D. P. French, Professor of Zoology, *J. Coll. Sci. Teach.*, 35, p. 61

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Office of Support for Effective Teaching

Diversity continued

“When I began teaching at IU I prepared good (occasionally great) lectures,” says Nelson, an evolutionary biologist and renowned researcher in higher-education learning. “When the students didn’t really get the material I assumed that there was something wrong with the students (under-prepared, not really studying much, etc.). Serendipitously, I was introduced to key findings from the scholarship of teaching and learning that show that (and why) standard university teaching is often ineffective even when the students are working reasonably hard. Moreover, alternative approaches can lead to large increases in student success.”

Participants in Nelson’s workshop will examine key pedagogical changes that are known to make real differences in achievement and retention in almost any college or university classroom without lowering the standards for achievement. Specific topics will include:

- How can I radically reduce or eliminate low grades in lecture courses without lowering standards?
- How can I make my students brighter and harder working using only 1 hour of class time (in ways that level the playing field for all groups)?
- Does my assessment system unfairly and unnecessarily favor particular groups?

Mini-lectures will alternate with writing and small- and whole-group discussions of examples and implementation. Participants will be asked to consider and discuss how these approaches might apply in their own teaching.

“When diversity issues are cast in content-centered ways,” says Nelson, “many faculty may view them as irrelevant to their own teaching or, even, as implicitly threatening academic standards. What faculty need to ask is how do many traditional teaching techniques unnecessarily disadvantage many non-traditional students (first-generation, rural, inner-city, etc.) and how can we make our courses fairer *without* lowering standards?”

Nelson’s visit is cosponsored by three UNM programs; Title V: Building Community through Engagement, Alliance for Faculty Diversity (NSF-PAID), and OSET. Those desiring to attend a free workshop should visit the OSET website and follow directions for registering.

Clicker Use on the Rise

More than 4200 students in at least 40 class sections are using iClicker classroom response systems this semester. “Clicker” use has grown following efforts initiated by OSET to standardize on iClicker as a preferred, supported vendor. There are many ways to use clickers in the classroom but they are particularly effective to initiate meaningful small-group discussion of key concepts, even in large lecture halls, and provide instantaneous feedback to instructors on how well their students are learning.



“I initially thought that clickers were just a gimmick -- a "cheap" way to get the attention of students raised on video games,” says Professor Jane Selverstone from Earth and Planetary Sciences and 2007 Teacher of the Year Award recipient. “However, I was frustrated that so many students were having trouble succeeding in my 100-level class. I finally reached the point where I was

willing to try anything. Clickers seemed to offer something new to the in-class experience: a chance for students to talk with their neighbors in an otherwise intimidatingly large lecture hall, a break from my droning voice, and in some cases, the joy of thinking through a challenging question and coming to the right conclusion. By including clicker use in a student's grade, there was also some extra motivation to come to class. Perhaps the most important change, though, is that I can now tell in real time whether or not my class is "getting it" during a lecture. The best clicker experiences of all have been when more than half the class has gotten the "wrong" answer on a question. When this happens, it is very clear that the fault lies with me and not with them. I have an opportunity to publicly admit that I screwed up, and I can immediately back up and present the material again in a different way.”

Selverstone, who began using clickers two years ago, goes on to say that “since I started using clickers, I have noticed several dramatic changes in my class. First is that there is a noticeable "buzz" when I post a clicker question; I look around the room and see students discussing the question and trying to convince each other why a given answer can or cannot be correct. Second is that once students begin talking in pairs and small groups, they no longer seem so intimidated about asking me questions in front of the whole class. So, there is more back-and-forth between students and me, as well as between students and their peers.”

Gordon Hodge, Associate Professor of Psychology and Presidential Teaching Fellow started using clickers this fall. “With 400-750 students in my sections, it's always been a challenge to keep students' attention for 50--let alone 75--minutes. Over the last couple of years, I've heard uniformly good things about clickers, both from workshops OSET has put on and from faculty across the country. I like the idea of peer teaching and it seems to me that the use of clickers, as OSET has presented it, would fit into my lectures. Although I've been thinking about using clickers for several years, the price of the units and their potential one-use catch for the students has kept me from adopting the technology. With UNM's adoption of a preferred standard, that problem was solved and I was quick to adopt them.”

The College of Pharmacy has adopted clickers for the current first- and second-year student cohorts and use will expand to the third-year students in 2008. Karen Dominguez, Associate Professor, found it easy to encourage the dozen or so faculty members instructing these first two cohorts to adopt iClicker. Dominguez points out that faculty are also making innovations to their teaching, “One interesting use of the iClickers is in a class that incorporates student presentations. The student presenters are required to write iClicker questions for their fellow students.

You can learn more about teaching with clickers at the OSET website. OSET also offers frequent “Teaching with Clickers” workshops and training to use iClicker. The next workshop will be on November 1.

OSET Events

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

Writing Measurable Learning Outcomes Workshop, Tuesday September 25, 2007, 2:00-4:00 pm and Monday, February 4, 2008, 1:00-3:00 pm

Assessing Student Work with Rubrics, Tuesday October 16, 2007, 2:00-4:00 pm

Teaching with Clickers Workshop, Thursday November 1, 2007, 1:30 - 3:30 pm

Responding to Diversity-Alternatives to Blaming the Students: How to Make Real Differences in Achievement, Equity, and Retention in ANY University Classroom, Wednesday November 7, 2007, 9:00 am - 12:00 pm , repeating at 2:00 pm - 5:00 pm

Designing Courses for Effective Student Learning: Faculty and Instructors Institute, January 15-16, 2008, 9:00 am to 3:00 pm both days

Success in the Classroom: Sharing Practices that Work, Thursday, February 21, 9:00 am – 4:00 pm. Volunteer a presentation at the OSET website

getSET Brown Bags

Informal facilitated discussions over lunch. See OSET website for more information.

No reservation required (bring your own lunch please!)

WebCT Online Instructor Brown Bag-Tips and Tricks II, Wednesday, September 26, Noon-1:00 pm, SUB Spirit

Simple Collaborative/Cooperative Learning Strategies: Bringing Active Learning into Your Classroom, Thursday, Sept. 27, 12:30-1:30 pm, SUB Spirit.

Using Scoring Guides/Rubrics for Writing Assignments: Improve Student Writing, Reduce Grading Time, and Increase Consistency across Graders, Thursday, Oct. 4, 12:30-1:30 pm, SUB Spirit.

Handling the Paper Load: Minimal- And Zero-Grading-Time Writing Activities, Tuesday, Oct. 9, 12:30-1:30 pm, SUB Spirit.

Assessing the Student Learning Outcomes in UNM's Core Courses: A Peer Discussion, Friday, Oct. 26, Noon-1:00 pm, SUB Spirit.

Peer Review of Teaching: A Component of Teaching Evaluation, Tuesday, Oct. 30, 12:30-1:30 pm, SUB Spirit.

WebCT Online Instructor Brown Bag-What Makes A Great Online Course? Sharing Successes, Tuesday, November 13, 12:30-1:30 pm, SUB Spirit.

Getting Students to Read: The Strategies for Assigning Reading, Friday, Nov. 16, Noon-1:00 pm, SUB Alumni.

Course Design Institute Gets High Marks

Have you ever asked questions like these?

"I've been teaching the same course, the same way, for years. Wouldn't it be more interesting for me if I found a fresh way of teaching it the next time around?"

"I'm teaching a course for the first time... where do I start?"

"Every semester I start out with this stack of notes and articles that I want to include in my course, but it's just too much stuff to cover. How can I decide what to include?"

"Each semester I start out to teach a subject that I really love and that I feel is important for students to learn. But, they look bored, they don't come to class, they do poorly on exams. Is there something that I can do to help motivate my students to be more engaged with the subject?"

"My class has such a mixture of students. Some are really well prepared but others just don't seem to know how to

succeed in my course. However, when I talk to these lower achieving students I usually find that they really desire to succeed and they express more interest in the course topic than I would have guessed from their grades and attendance. Is there something I can be doing to increase the success of my students without lowering my standards?"

OSET offers the Faculty and Instructors Institute, Designing Courses for Effective Student Learning to help answer these questions. Almost 50 faculty, part-time instructors, and teaching assistants participated in two, one-day pilot offerings of the institute in May and August. Starting in 2008, OSET will offer more relaxed, two-day versions of the Institute every January and May. Initial support for the institutes is provided by the UNM Title V program (Building Community through Engagement) and the College of Arts and Sciences.

Institute participants design one of their courses by working through a series of worksheets, guided by discussion and short

background presentations. Course design focuses on three questions: What should students learn? How should they learn it? How will we know that they're learning? Drawing on the research that guides best practices in pedagogy and assessment, instructors build their courses backwards from defined outcomes, examine how to actively engage students in learning, and learn how to implement frequent formative assessment that guides teaching and learning in the classroom. An enveloping theme is the importance of designing diverse learning opportunities for diverse learners. Besides meals and refreshments during the two days, participants take away two reference books and a workbook.

All of the participants in the two pilot workshops agreed, in anonymous evaluations, that they would change how they design and teach their class based on the institute, and all recommend the institute for their colleagues.

For more information, visit the OSET website where you can also register for the January 15-16, 2008 Institute.

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