



Center for Teaching and Learning Newsletter

April-May 2017

Message from the Director



The conclusion of a course often brings a sense of relief, even euphoria, for instructors and students alike. There is a tendency to not want to think any further about the class immediately and in some cases, the instructor might not be teaching the same course the following semester or year so there is no perceived need to do so. Nevertheless, the end of the semester is the ideal time to consider what went right and what went wrong in the course. While memories of the course are fresh, look back and ask yourself which lectures went over well, and which did not. Which assignments proved problematic and what PowerPoint slides need to be tweaked? With which concepts and resulting exam questions did the students have the most difficulties? It is not necessary to make all the desired changes right away, but it is useful to make notes or lists of prospective changes – and even for the things you don't want to change – so that when that course rolls around again, you have a plan for what should be done.

Upcoming Events

Faculty, Staff, and Graduate TA Workshops

June 21, 12-1 Ethical Dilemmas in Teaching: Analysis of Case Examples, in MC 2.410

July 12, 12-1 Strategies for Promoting a Sense of Belonging for International Students, in GR 2.302

Research Into Practice

When faculty meet face to face each other and talk about how they are teaching and how their students are learning, they create an invaluable opportunity to identify possible gaps or redundancies in the curriculum. The *National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment* Charrette Model provides an explicit plan that faculty members in a program can use to share and provide feedback on each other's course assignments. Because assignments are specifically what students *do* in order to learn and to demonstrate their learning, improving assignments—by being sure that their guidelines are clear, that the rationale is aligned with the objectives, and that grading is meaningful—is the most obvious way to improve teaching and learning.

For more on this topic, see:

http://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org/documents/Assignment_report_Nov.pdf

Teaching Tip

Consider creating a teaching portfolio (a record of your accomplishments in teaching) or a course portfolio (a record of intended learning outcomes, teaching approaches, and evidence of learning) to keep track of what has been going well in your courses. Given that the ultimate indicator of teaching effectiveness is the extent to which students learn, one important purpose of documenting students'

learning is to seek ways to improve teaching. Compiling a portfolio will provide you with opportunities for self-evaluation as you consider what to continue and what to change in your teaching. What do you ask students to do and why? What is the evidence that your students are learning? Answering these questions for yourself will reveal your teaching philosophy, an essential element of a teaching portfolio. Do your intentions match your outcomes? As part of your portfolio, consider keeping a teaching journal in which you make notes about your teaching, your students, and your classes. As patterns of successes and challenges emerge, you will likely identify areas that you can improve.

For more on this, see:

Svinicki, M. D., & McKeachie, W. J. (2013). *McKeachie's Teaching Tips: Strategies, research, and theory for college and university teachers*, 14th ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

http://www.crlt.umich.edu/sites/default/files/resource_files/CRLT_no11.pdf.

What the Students Say

When students fill out evaluation forms, they have the option of providing comments about the course. It is easy to ignore these, in part because it requires some extra effort to see them. Furthermore, only a fraction of students that fill out the evaluations give comments; thus, problems with a poor response rate and unrepresentative sample are magnified with respect to the written comments. Nevertheless, there are some observations from which instructors can benefit. The key is to look for multiple responses that convey the same point and on elements of the course about which students are qualified to judge. Students might offer feedback that can give the instructor insights regarding the clarity of the lectures, the (mis)match between exams and what was covered in class, the (in)ability to understand the assigned readings, and the quality of feedback provided on assignments, among others. Student comments, and these can be positive as well as negative, offer an opportunity for reflection on the past semester and an opportunity to consider changes (or not) for future classes.

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