

September 1986

The University Teaching and Learning Committee Newsletter #1

Faculty Seminars

During the 1985-86 academic year, the Teaching and Learning Committee sponsored six luncheon seminars to address issues of interest to the faculty. Seventy-nine faculty members attended and four topics were discussed:

1. Developing Critical Thinking in Students
2. Gender-Balancing the Class Syllabus
3. Educational Uses of the MERIT Computer System
4. Using the Latest Technologies: Computers and VCRs in the Classroom

1. Developing Critical Thinking in Students

Those who attended the seminar felt that the development of critical thinking is the *sine qua non* of a college education, just as literacy is the minimum requirement of secondary education. However, the absence of critical thinking is more difficult to detect than illiteracy, and a procedure best suited to achieve critical thinking in students resists easy identification. Perhaps for the reason that critical thinking involves questioning traditional assumptions, standard didactic approaches to its development may be doomed to fail.

Suggestions that arose from the seminar focussed on the responsibility of the faculty member to model critical thinking for students. This would involve risk-taking on the part of the instructor because he or she must be open to dealing with novel questions in class and thinking aloud through the problem. Obviously such an approach is not appropriate for all classes but the members of the seminar felt the faculty should feel free to take the chances of being wrong and engaging in self correcting. Such an approach can provide students a chance to follow the critical thinking process and, perhaps, to follow the instructor's lead. When an issue engages the students' interest, they might enter into the discussion and hopefully practice their critical thinking in an accepting atmosphere that respects and overlooks their errors.

It was felt that written assignments could contribute to the development of critical thinking because the very act of writing requires clarity of thought. For interested faculty, the Department of Rhetoric has offered a faculty workshop, "Writing Across the Curriculum," which helps faculty members increase the amount of writing students do. Contact Ron Sudol, 4137, for more information on this workshop.

2. Gender-Balancing the Class Syllabus

In this seminar, the discussion focussed on the 6 stages of curriculum transformation described in Women's Place in the Academy by Schuster and VanDyne. It is their contention the sixth stage, characterized by a gender balanced curriculum, can only be achieved when the conditions of the fifth stage have been fulfilled. It was agreed that Oakland University had attained the fourth stage when women are studied on their own terms, as marked by the establishment of a Women's Studies Program (begun in 1978). Such a focus on women brings a measure of legitimacy to the experiences of women as expressed in their literature, art, and perspectives on the social and natural sciences.

The fifth stage, which involves toleration of intellectual diversity, finds women

challenging the assumption that objectivity pervades the academy. During this stage current definitions of greatness are challenged as well as the validity of current conceptions of gender differences. Indeed, any assumption that ignores the experiences of women are brought forward for review. During this intellectually stimulating stage, gender-balancing starts as faculty members acknowledge the need to reassess the criteria formerly used to decide what material would be included on the syllabus. Faculty also grapple with how the products of women will be afforded the status and respect they deserve. Only then can the sixth stage, characterized by a balanced curriculum, be achieved. Gender-balancing the class syllabus, changing the required reading list to include women writers, for example, is the sort of action faculty can take to begin the transforming of the curriculum and moving into the sixth stage. Whether or not Oakland University faculty are ready to enter the sixth stage remained an unanswered question.

3. Educational Uses of the MERIT Computer System

Gerard Joswiak and Paul Amaranth introduced interested faculty members to MERIT, a computer system linking Oakland University's computer with academic computers at the University of Michigan, Western Michigan, Michigan State, and Wayne State University. Information was provided about how to apply for a computing account on the MERIT system, along with a list of educational packages available at these four universities. A program called EQUATIONS, for example, developed by Leyman Allen at the University of Michigan, is an "interactive, instructional game to teach mathematics," and ELIZA, available on the computer at WSU "simulates the response of a psychotherapist to the user's comments." Contact Gerard Joswiak at 3163 for more information about MERIT.

4. Using the Latest Technologies: Computers and VCR's in the Classroom

The Instructional Technology Center (ITC), managed by George Preisinger, provides guidelines for the recording of broadcast programming for educational use in the classroom. Whether you record a program at home on your VCR for use in class or have it recorded by the ITC, it can be retained by the University for a period not to exceed 45 days from the date of transmission. The recording may be used once in class and repeated once for review. Many of the Public Broadcasting System (PBS) programs, such as NOVA, are available for purchase if several faculty members expect to be using the program repeatedly. Arrangements for purchase must be made between the department and the ITC.

The use of computers in the classroom is currently limited by the availability of equipment. The departments are responsible for providing computers for classroom use. ITC is not currently able to provide support in this area. For special large group presentations, ITC can make arrangements for rental of a large screen. Call George Preisinger at 2134 for more information. You should be warned, however, that this equipment is very expensive.

Reference

Schuster, M.R. & Van Dyne, S.R. (1985). Women's Place in the Academy: Transforming the Liberal Arts Curriculum. Totowa, N.J.: Rowman & Allanheld Publishers.

Prepared by Virginia Blankenship, Department of Psychology.