

Insights & Ideas

for Teaching and Learning

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Teaching and Learning Committee

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Issues & Ideas **Returns**

The Teaching and Learning Committee, with Howard Schwartz as chair, began meeting in September. EDF grant applications are in, and the faculty lunch series is under way. The committee, for a second year, also offers this newsletter to provide OU faculty with a broader forum for dissemination of ideas related to college teaching.

This *Issues & Ideas for Teaching and Learning* includes short articles by committee members. Some ideas will help many; others apply to fewer classes. Some are practical, and some are downright provocative (check out the piece by George Dahlgren on credit requirements for graduation!). The stimulating variety of our faculty and programs encourages such an eclectic approach.

--Walli Andersen, editor

The Syllabus: An Aid to Students and Faculty

A course syllabus can provide important information for students and, especially, reduce legal problems for faculty.

Basic principles in constructing a syllabus are to give each student an equal chance to succeed and to make each student aware of the consequences of classroom behaviors that can reasonably be expected.

As an instructor and an agent of the college, seek the safest possible legal position by having a complete syllabus as close to institutional policy as possible. Most institutional liability insurance will cover you if you are "carrying out your assigned duties within the constraints of College policy, labor contracts and civil law."

Your course syllabus and content should include:

- A. Course name, catalog number, meeting dates, etc.
- B. Major text name and cost if available.
- C. Your name, phone number(s), office hours, etc.
- D. Course objectives:
 - material to be covered
 - intended outcome for the student
 - how the course "fits" in the curriculum
- E. Course prerequisites.
- F. Specific material to be covered, with dates (if possible).

Lab courses should include a section on safety.

G. Test dates, the type of test given, the weight (related to final grade) of each test. All major assignments and their values should be highlighted.

H. Any and all criteria used to yield a final grade.

I. Attendance requirements (the only legally admissible attendance form is a dated sheet with students' own legal signatures).

J. Any rules for keeping exams and papers.

K. Any and all circumstances (which are not covered in other publications) under which a student could be dismissed or failed.

L. All books and other material or devices needed for a student to earn an "A" and meet the course objectives. NOTE: Students should not be required to purchase material or devices not specifically and substantially used in the course.

M. A statement estimating time required to reach specific proficiency for skill courses requiring practice beyond scheduled class or lab time, where applicable.

N. Available assistance: office hours, tutors, learning centers.

Editorial Information

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Going over your syllabus and course content during the initial class meeting(s) is also advisable.

Be explicit about: (1) your expectations of the students, (2) what may be expected of you, (3) what successful students should gain from your course, and (4) safety and other issues unique to the course.

Be consistent about (1) grading criteria, (2) enforcement of due dates and any other class rules, (3) standards of behavior, performance and attendance compared with other members of the department or college, and (4) disciplinary actions—"punishment should fit the crime."

Good academic practices are almost always legally defensible.

More sources of information: Perspective, The Campus Legal Monthly; Manager's Legal Bulletin; The School Law Newsletter.

—Helen Woodman

Learning Modules Work in Nursing

Nursing practice requires both theoretical knowledge and practical application of that knowledge in a clinical setting, i.e., a hospital. Certain nursing skills and techniques cannot be learned in the hospital on a live patient.

An effective way of teaching skills required for patient care is to teach technical skills in a laboratory setting. Learning modules are designed to help students learn practical skills. The modules unify written materials, audio-visual resources, and skills practice with lecture demonstration.

The module method of teaching-learning has been helpful in enabling students to acquire skills and apply their knowledge in a non-threatening laboratory setting.

—Anahid Kulwicki

CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

Undergraduate Distinguished Achievement Award

Do you know of extraordinary undergraduate performance beyond that required for good grades? You can nominate an undergraduate for such achievements as exceptional reports, creations, or performances. Successful nominees receive a citation and \$500 at Fall commencement.

Watch your mail for the complete announcement on eligibility and criteria or call Geoff Brieger.

The Syllabus and Course Objectives

After following the prescriptive syllabus format of NCATE, I have added a self-imposed requirement. Each time I revise or develop a course syllabus, I think about the relationship of the course objectives and the course assignments.

My students cannot meet course objectives through test taking alone; therefore, they have a variety of assignments in a semester.

For each of the six or seven assignments, I write three parts: (1) a short narrative describing the "whole" of the assignment, (2) detailed criteria listing the "parts" of the assignment, and (3) a list of the course objectives that the process and product of the assignment help students to meet.

Each course objective (CO) is lettered (a, b, c). After each assignment a notation (e.g., CO b, d, e) helps students understand its importance and purpose. The notations also help me justify the continuance or deletion of assignments as I reflect on the course as a whole.

-Dyanne M. Tracy

Graduate Assistants in the Classroom

Most college professors received their initial teaching experience by serving as graduate assistants while they pursued their graduate studies. In many instances, during their first exposure to teaching, they were left to their own devices and asked to teach their first undergraduate course with little guidance or assistance. They were unaware of what is entailed in preparing and presenting an effective lecture, and they acquired bad teaching habits that have stayed with them throughout their academic careers.

It is essential that graduate departments at universities provide some sort of training in teaching for their graduate assistants to ensure that they are adequately prepared to enter the classroom. This will ensure that graduate assistants provide more effective instruction to undergraduates. At the same time, it will lay the proper foundation for developing more effective teachers among the future generation of college professors.

Thus, the Mathematics Department at Oakland University has initiated a training program for its graduate teaching associates.

All teaching associates are required to attend a one-week training session prior to the start of the fall semester. The mornings of the first two days are mainly devoted to informing the teaching assistants of the necessary house-keeping chores connected with teaching an undergraduate course, such as preparing a syllabus, setting clear grading standards, main-

taining grade books. In the after-
noons, faculty present fifteen to
twenty-minute lectures in which
they highlight effective as well as
ineffective and poor teaching tech-
niques. During the last two days,
the teaching assistants are re-
quired to present lectures with five
or six faculty members playing the
role of undergraduate students.

On the last day, the faculty
members involved with the training
session decide which of the new
graduate students are prepared to
enter the classroom and what type of
course they are allowed to teach.

Teaching associates are moni-
tored closely by the Committee on
Supervision of Teaching. Their
classes are visited by a committee
member at least twice each semester.
At the semester's end, the commit-
tee reports to the department chair
about each teaching associate.

Graduate students who were
judged not prepared are assigned a
faculty member whose classes they
must attend. During the semester
these students are asked to give a
couple of lectures to the faculty
member's class with the faculty
member in attendance.

So far the system has worked
effectively. In fact, as chair of
the department I have received no
complaints from undergraduate stu-
dents on the teaching of our teach-
ing associates.

-Al Baartmans

Thoughts on Graduation Credits

While the subject I am about to
comment on is not a teaching or
learning technique, *per se*, it does
impact behavior of students and
faculty in the classroom, and thus
I offer it for your consideration.

I have been intrigued by the
various grading systems used
throughout academe, i.e., A, B; 95,
90; EXCELLENT, GOOD, and their
relationship to graduation require-
ments. In particular, I am con-
cerned that we put the A student
through the same gpa/number-of-
credits scheme that we do the
student who earns the "gentleman's/
woman's" C. This does not appear to
me to make much sense. Shouldn't the
more able student earn a degree in
less class time than the less able?
I suspect you have all known stu-
dents who you felt were wasting
their time in lower level courses or
undergraduate seniors who should be
in graduate school.

From this premise, I offer a
different graduation criterion: I
submit that the appropriate gradu-
ation requirement is the *number of
honor points* which the student earns
and not the number of credits
accumulated at some minimum gpa. It
makes some sense for the A student
to finish a baccalaureate in three
years and the C student in five.
Just what these times are is con-
trolled by setting the honor points
to achieve the desired result.

While many of our colleagues
might find the system too demanding
on them as issuers of grades whose
economic value is even more evident
than under the current system, I
would still like to see our future
physicians, lawyers, and philoso-
phers complete their formal educa-
tions before one-half or more of
their lives is gone.

-George Dahlgren

Is there a topic you'd like to see
addressed in *Issues & Ideas*? Call
or write Walli Andersen, RCJ, 317
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