

B E S T
T E A C H I N G
P R A C T I C E S
A FACULTY COMMITTEE REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

Southern at 150: Building Excellence Through Commitment, SIUC's strategic plan, states, "Our teaching must be excellent." The collective bargaining agreement approved by the SIU Board of Trustees and the Illinois Education Association states, "Students are central to the mission and very existence of the university." The faculty of the College of Applied Sciences and Arts (CASA) also places high value on students and good teaching.

But what constitutes good teaching? What are fair testing practices? What is a student-centered university? What is a legitimate class absence? How can the CASA faculty improve its teaching?

To address these and related questions in an effort to identify best teaching practices, a committee of CASA faculty members who were designated *master teachers* by their department chairs and school directors, was convened in the summer of 2005.

A draft committee report was distributed to the full CASA faculty for discussion and comment, which ultimately resulted in this final report.

The teaching guidelines recommended in the report will be especially helpful to new faculty members and undoubtedly will be appreciated by more experienced faculty members.

Guidelines cover the following topics:

- Student-Centered University
- The Syllabus
- Classroom Preparation and Currency in the Field
- Clear Delivery of Instruction
- Classroom Management
- Students Teaching Students
- Attendance
- Late Assignments and Tests
- Availability Outside Class
- Textbooks, Readings, and Technology
- Personal Research, Creative Activity and Scholarly Work in the Classroom
- Creating a Positive Atmosphere for Learning

Many thanks to the committee members for their work, which represents the CASA commitment to excellence in teaching at our college and university.

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STUDENT-CENTERED UNIVERSITY

A student-centered university. . .

- Has at its core the best interests of each and every student;
- Has a faculty and administration genuinely concerned with the welfare and success of students;
- Initiates policies and activities that benefit the student and the delivery of instruction;
- Integrates student views, comments and concerns in its policies and curriculum;
- Helps students recognize the university as their university;
- Recognizes that students justify the existence of the university; and
- Provides the best possible learning environment for its students.

THE SYLLABUS

The syllabus should be the first item distributed in class after, “hello, how are you, this is course 101, I am your instructor, etc.”

The syllabus should be as specific and comprehensive as possible. A good syllabus is dynamic and should be reviewed and updated each semester.

Since the syllabus represents a contract for learning, it should clearly define what is expected of the student and what the student can expect of the instructor and the instruction.

The course syllabus must match the master syllabus on file with the college, school and program. Faculty can propose revisions to the master syllabus using a Form-90 to help ensure the master syllabus is up to date. If an instructor proposes revisions to a course, the entire faculty should review such revisions, since all courses impact on other courses in a specific program. Revisions to the master syllabus must be approved consistent with established university policy.

The syllabus should be published online in WebCT or as a .pdf file, where it is readily available to students.

A good syllabus includes the following:

- Name of instructor, phone number and e-mail contacts;
- Office hours & office location;
- Course description and prerequisites;
- Estimated cost of required textbooks, materials, equipment and additional items that might represent a student expense for the course;
- Safety related information, such as emergency numbers, building numbers, building first-aid specialists, fire extinguisher locations, eye wash stations, etc.;
- Measurable course objectives;
- Detailed schedule of readings, assignments, and tests;
- Suggested milestones for large projects, e.g., for a final term paper, date for topic, date for references, date for outline, etc.;

- Outline of requirements for major projects, e.g., research paper must include abstract, introduction, methods, results, discussion, references, appendices, etc., and points for each;
- Clearly defined grading criteria (breakdown of points for quizzes, tests, attendance, assignments, etc.) and what is needed to attain each final letter grade, e.g., 100 to 90 = A, 89 to 80 = B, etc., and any policy for contesting grades;
- Classroom / studio / lab rules of conduct;
- Attendance policy;
- Any policy regarding a grade penalty system that may be in place for absence or tardiness, late projects and assignments;
- Classroom management practices including the *rules of engagement* for the classroom; and
- References to the *Student Conduct Code*, e.g. plagiarism policy.

CLASSROOM PREPARATION AND CURRENCY IN THE FIELD

Instructors should attend seminars and workshops to stay current in their fields. Professional development is vital to increase and maintain instructor credibility and effectiveness.

Instructors should practice what they teach in a professional setting to continue to gain experiences that they can share with students.

New faculty members should prepare two to five times as much material as they think will be needed for every lecture, just in case material is covered much faster than anticipated. Prepare, prepare, and prepare for class!

Instructors should participate in professional organizations and activities that provide information as well as a network of professional individuals who are potential assets and resources.

Instructors should remember that students view faculty as experts in their fields. It should be no surprise, for example, when instructors receive telephone calls from graduates seeking expert advice.

CLEAR DELIVERY OF INSTRUCTION

There should be an overall plan for the entire course as outlined in the syllabus, with each class session accomplishing a portion of the plan. Organization and preparation enhance learning for the student and provide the structure and efficiency that is necessary for effective teaching.

Organized classroom sessions are productive and greatly appreciated by the student. An organized classroom session promotes structure, efficiency and productivity. Some class schedule deviations may be unavoidable, but should be kept to a minimum and cleared with your school or department.

Prior to any lecture or demonstration period, students need to be informed of the pertinent objectives/goals of that activity and the relevance of the activity to their major. Again, a good syllabus provides the topic and readings for the day and serves as an advanced organizer for the student.

Students should be allowed to actively participate in *hands on* instructional activities, as well as discussions, to the greatest extent possible. Students learn from doing and talking about the topic.

Although every teacher develops his or her own blend of instructional methods, class sessions must be relevant and provide students with the knowledge and skills needed to be successful in the course and on the job.

Anticipating, preventing and combating student boredom are among the more difficult tasks facing the instructor. The means by which instructional materials are delivered should be as varied as possible. Videos, digital presentations, guest speakers, field trips and overhead projections should be used to the extent possible. Electronic media are popular methods of communicating instruction. However, clear communication of instruction can be achieved equally well using a chalkboard.

Instructors should develop their own style of teaching and become comfortable with it. Electronic delivery using a PowerPoint presentation, for example, is acceptable, but a properly delivered lecture with a chalkboard and a solid knowledge base can be just as effective.

Students of the MTV generation should understand that all subjects and tasks are not necessarily enjoyable. Learning is hard work and requires dedication and commitment from the student and instructor. Make the learning experience as pleasant as possible, but know that some subjects remain difficult and tedious challenges for all parties involved.

Regardless of delivery method, focus on clarity and relevance of instruction.

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

Instructors should be on time for class; early if possible. Class should begin on time and instructors should be direct, honest and passionate about their roles as educators. Instructors should never fake it because students can see through the façade. Instructors should not ask anything of the students they are not prepared to effectively and efficiently demonstrate or explain. Instructors should have a sense of humor and enjoy the challenges of teaching.

Through sincere actions, conduct and interpersonal communication skills, instructors should strive to convince students that they are genuinely happy and excited to be in an educational partnership with the students. This means, among other things, making a genuine effort to learn student's names and understand any apprehensions they may have about the course and the material to be covered.

Instructors should be fair, objective and consistent in administering class policies and evaluating student performance, and do for any single student only what they are willing to do for all students.

There are so many things in every field to talk about, to show and to discuss with students that allotted class time is never sufficient.

Instructors must be teachers, preachers, showmen, policemen and friends to students. They should remember those terrible, boring lecturers they hated in college and grad school, and make certain their lectures are not among them.

Faculty are allowed a great deal of flexibility, which can be considered a gift or a curse. Many faculty take advantage of this flexibility to develop exciting and intriguing classroom activities and lectures. Other faculty members unfortunately will try to get through classes as quickly as possible. The best professors will use the complete class time and cover relevant material in an organized fashion. They will cover the material in a manner that will help students retain the information.

Instructors should appreciate humor in the classroom and enjoy working with students, but must maintain firm and consistent control at all times.

STUDENTS TEACHING STUDENTS

The *Best Practices in Teaching Committee* does not support *students teaching students*. The instructor is and must remain the person solely responsible for teaching the material. Nothing should be undertaken which would diminish this responsibility.

Student delivered class presentations are appropriate as part of the grade / evaluation system for a course, but actual instruction is the responsibility of the teacher. Undergraduate students simply aren't qualified to provide instruction. Under some circumstances it is acceptable at the graduate level, but it has no place in the undergraduate program. It is important to remember that the faculty member has the in-depth knowledge of the subject matter and the practical experience to share. Students cannot be denied quality instruction by substituting student presentations for prepared, faculty-delivered lectures.

TESTS

Examinations and tests should be based on direct instruction and readings, or other forms of instruction, such as computer based instruction. Non-lecture forms of instruction should be clearly specified in the course syllabus. In general, it is best to test only material covered in class.

Without a doubt, a quality test is difficult to develop. A new test may be loaded with tricky questions that make sense to the author, but might lead students down the wrong path simply because of wording. On the other hand, a seasoned test might include questions that aren't addressed adequately in newer textbooks or that are dropped from classroom lectures.

There are a variety of ways by which faculty can adjust test results based on student scores. Some may drop high and low scores and then create a bell curve, where the top of the bell equates to a "c". Others throw out questions that a large percentage of students miss. If a large number of students miss an item, then one or more of the following has happened:

- The material was not covered properly in the lecture;
- The textbook did not cover the material properly;
- The test question or response options were poorly worded;
- The test key was incorrect;
- The students did not learn the material;
- The item was extremely difficult

Please note that the majority of the six problems are not related to students, so give them a break and throw the item out of the test.

The instructor should return graded tests and other assigned material to students as quickly as possible, preferably at the next class session. Students should have a good idea of how many points they have in a class and to what letter grades that equates throughout the semester.

Testing should reflect course objectives and instruction provided in class. Otherwise, testing undermines the effectiveness of the class and leaves students feeling frustrated and confused regarding instructors' expectations.

ATTENDANCE

The Committee places a premium on classroom attendance and punctuality, and recommends that every syllabus includes an attendance policy that clearly outlines attendance expectations, specifies percentage of grade related to attendance and details penalties for unexcused absence and tardiness.

Missing class because of a death in the family, personal illness or injury, the illness or injury of a child and military drill or unit activation are examples of excused absences. Instructors should exercise common sense and good judgment with respect to student attendance and should be flexible when possible. For example, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) regulates the college's aviation technologies program with 10 minute blocks of student attendance time, and has various ways students can make-up time for absences. If the FAA can accommodate legitimate student absences, so should faculty members.

LATE ASSIGNMENTS AND TESTS

Unless there are extenuating circumstances, the Committee supports point penalties for late assignments, projects and exams.

AVAILABILITY OUTSIDE CLASS

Since SIUC is a student-centered university, faculty members should schedule office hours at different times on different days to accommodate students' fixed schedules.

Students who have difficulty visiting a faculty member during scheduled office hours should be permitted to schedule appointments at other times. Students who are quiet in class for whatever reason often find office visits highly productive and enjoy the individualized attention. Students must be able to consult with faculty to clarify lecture points, ask about lab projects or just get to know faculty better.

Faculty should provide email addresses and phone numbers to students, and should return all the phone calls and answer emails as quickly as possible. Faculty should take calls if in their offices and not permit calls to be routed to answering machines or voice mail.

TEXTBOOKS, READINGS AND TECHNOLOGY

If instructors require students to purchase textbooks – which always should reflect current theory, knowledge and practices – the books should be used thoroughly; preferably cover to cover.

Three-hole punched handouts which students collate in a binder are very effective, but their use and distribution must not violate copyright statutes.

Students have different learning styles. Some students are auditory learners and can learn by simply listening to a lecture. Some are visual learners and need to see it to understand it. Also, many students are *hands-on* learners and learn best by doing. Try to accommodate as many learning styles as possible. Newer technologies for teaching provide students with different media from which to learn and study. PowerPoint presentations can be uploaded to the web for students to review, for example.

WebCT is free for students and faculty, and allows the instructor to:

- Develop online quizzes;
- Display digital videos, PowerPoint presentations and images;
- Provide a virtual calendar;
- Create a forum related to the course; and
- Provide the students with their grades and progress in the course.

Technology is a tool which can be used in the classroom to complement learning but it should not take the place of the teacher.

PERSONAL RESEARCH, CREATIVE ACTIVITY AND SCHOLARLY WORK IN THE CLASSROOM

The credibility of instructional content and respect for the instructor in the classroom are paramount in maintaining students' confidence. Preparation in the field is an essential factor in establishing this credibility. Preparation, however, does not necessarily mean formal work experience within the subject field.

Research for publication and personal growth within the subject area can be very effective in enhancing instruction in the classroom. For example, if a faculty member is presenting a new course or a significant addition to an existing course, the faculty member should collect data on student performance, perceptions, learning styles, etc., as related to the new material.

Professional research projects showing the relationship between research and instruction should be integrated in the classroom to the greatest extent possible. Such integration adds to faculty credibility. Many students enjoy reading journal articles written by their professors.

Research is an important component of teaching, and faculty may wish to consider involving students in research projects.

CREATING A POSITIVE ATMOSPHERE FOR LEARNING

There are several other components of effective teaching that are extremely important. One is to create a positive atmosphere that encourages learning. Learning can be fun. The joy of learning for the teacher can be contagious for students. Every student has worth and value and, with assistance, will achieve some degree of success. All instructors should be listeners and provide assistance when necessary. Teachers should be flexible and keep in mind that what works for one student may not work for another.

Instructors need to laugh in certain situations; even if it means laughing at themselves occasionally. Even instructors make mistakes and do not know everything. Instructors should be the first to admit this to their students and they should understand that imperfection makes them human.

Teachers should be cheerleaders, coaches and, sometimes, disciplinarians. Teachers can develop a relationship with students fostering mutual admiration and respect. Instructors should applaud students for their achievements and challenge them when they seem to be slacking off.

Instructors should be flexible — ready to alter the way something is taught — with the understanding that there may be a better way.

Faculty should encourage students to become members of professional organizations and to maintain membership after graduation. This is the only way to remain current with respect to trends in practice and education.

Instructors should encourage students to get involved by fostering a spirit of volunteerism within their associations, affiliations and communities.

The best part of an instructor's job is working with students!

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