Developing Faculty Through a Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Project

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PITA TEACHING ADVANCEMENT BOARD

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DEVELOPING FACULTY THROUGH A SCHOLARSHIP OF TEACHING AND LEARNING PROJECT
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Element Addressed: Teaching Development and Assessment Programs & the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

Project Overview and Justification: In a 2002-2003 PITA project entitled, “Engaging College of ACES Faculty to Reflect on the Practice of Teaching,” we identified excellent teachers in the College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences and interviewed them in order to better understand the practice of exemplars. This process then served as a vehicle for faculty in the college to become reflective practitioners around the problems of practice. While one might interpret the process of reflecting upon “problems” as counterproductive to the development of effective teaching, Randy Bass, in his article, the Scholarship of Teaching, What’s the Problem (1999), notes that problems in teaching are, in fact, not problems as we traditionally conceptualize them, but opportunities for further study and advancement in the scholarship of teaching and learning.

Thus, the “problem” became our opportunity as the 2002-2003 PITA project progressed. We discovered a group of faculty in the college who were seeking to engage in the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL). Generally speaking, these faculty were highly engaged in becoming scholars of their teaching, attending campus and college wide teaching development workshops, and interestingly most had attended campus seminars on SoTL or were familiar with the SoTL literature. The problem herein emerged. As self-proclaimed “hard scientists,” these faculty indicated a lack of time, knowledge structures, and self-efficacy as significant barriers to engaging in the SoTL projects themselves. That year, a few brave faculty members who came to know us as “the teaching and learning researchers” in the college asked us to begin conversations about SoTL. As a result, the ACES Teaching Circle emerged. Further, several faculty approached us to be engaged with them as partners in SoTL projects (e.g., Tony Endress, Walter Hurley, & Kelly Tappenden).

A second “problem” (i.e., opportunity) emerged from the 2002-2003 PITA project. As faculty college-wide became engaged in reflecting upon the problems of practice that were centered around the specific practice of the exemplars in our project, several noted that teaching practice is not fully described from the standpoint of the teacher. Rather, one must obtain the student perspectives in order to capture a richer description of the wisdom of exemplary practice. This finding from our project is also supported in the teaching and learning literature (Hativa, Barak, & Simhi, 2001; Weimer, 2001).

With this context in mind, the purpose of this project is twofold. Our first goal is for the development of professors who are interested in engaging in SoTL projects, and our second goal is to describe exemplary practice from the perspective of the students. While this purpose sounds lofty, we plan to accomplish both goals through this project proposal. We propose to engage in a SoTL project that examines the practice of exemplary professors through the perspectives of the students in their classes, while conducting workshops and seminars on our research that will make our methods and perspectives transparent to college faculty who are interested in pursuing future SoTL projects.

Methods and Participants: This project will be a participatory action research project (Kemmis & McTaggert, 2000) involving six tenured exemplary teaching professors and the students enrolled in one of their fall semester courses. These professors were identified through the PITA project conducted in 2003 using Kreber’s (2002) definition of exemplary teachers. The exemplary teaching professors will be asked to identify one course they will be teaching in the Fall Semester of 2004,
wherein their teaching practices will be examined and assessed from the perspectives of the students enrolled in their course.

Data from the students will be collected in three layers. First, early informal feedback sessions will be conducted during one class session of each of the respected courses. This process is likened to a whole-class focus group session to gather information regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the instructor, and the students likes and dislikes of specific instructional practices or aspects of the course. While this information will be valuable to gaining insights of student satisfaction from the group perspective, the individual perspective must be examined as well. Therefore, a random sample of 10% of the students in each class will be identified to participate in one-to-one interviews. The purpose of the interview process is to gain a more in-depth perspective of teaching practice from individual students enrolled in the courses. Information from the individual student interviews will be coded and utilized to construct a reflective questionnaire that will be administered to all students enrolled in the 6 courses in our sample. This data will serve as the third leg of triangulation in this rich data collection process.

In order to enhance faculty development in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning and to extend the process of this project as participatory action research, we propose to engage the 6 exemplary professors in monthly ACES Teaching Circle Seminars. By discussing and informing the research process, the research project becomes more authentic as informed by the practitioners and in turn the practitioners learn the research process of a SoTL project. Finally, faculty members college-wide will be extended an open invitation to a luncheon seminar to discuss the results of this project and to make the methods and procedures of a SoTL project transparent to all faculty who might be interested in engaging in further projects.

**Intended Outcomes:** The specific intended outcomes of the project are to:
1. Engage exemplary teaching professors to experience a participatory action research project and understand the process of conducting a SoTL project;
2. Develop a community of scholars through the monthly Teaching Circle discussions;
3. Create a more in-depth codification of the wisdom of effective teaching practice through the lens of the student experience;
4. Engage faculty in the College of ACES in a professional development seminar regarding the student perspectives of effective practice as well as ways to conduct individual SoTL projects.

**References:**


