



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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Dumping the Plump

The 1989 "Dump Your Plump" contest, sponsored by Lake Michigan College, featured teachers and students exercising to low-impact aerobic videotapes, teachers doing daily 30-minute walks with their students, teams walking the school hallways, teams doing aqua exercises or aerobic dance, teachers bringing healthy food treats to the teachers' lounge, teams posting their exercise and weight loss progress, teams sending donuts or chocolates to other teams before their weekly weigh-ins, and team members sending their secret pals notes of support or bouquets of flowers.

"Dump Your Plump," developed by the physical education department in 1986, is both a weight loss program and a wellness contest. Participants have their blood chemistry analyzed, take a Health Risk Appraisal, have their body fat tested, have their diet analyzed by computer, attend a nutrition and cooking demonstration, attend a lecture on exercise, and participate in a walking clinic.

In the 1989 contest (January 13-March 23), participants included 455 teachers, administrators, secretaries, and bus drivers, on 54 teams from 17 school districts. Of the 455 participants, 453 completed, and 263 (58%) exercised at least 45 out of the 50 days. All participants weighed in on a weekly basis and attempted to incorporate exercise into their lifestyles.

Participants receive an 80-page manual that provides information on the contest rules, weight goal guidelines, nutrition information, and exercise guidelines. It helps participants chart their weight loss and aerobic activity, learn how to set realistic weight goals, eat nutritiously, and set up an exercise program.

A weekly newsletter is sent to each participant; seven to eight pages in length, it provides information on nutrition and exercise (information from newspapers and health letters) and displays the current team standings. Captains conduct their weigh-ins on Fridays and then prepare the newsletter for distribution.

This contest differs from most workplace weight loss contests: (1) because the contest is based upon promoting safe and gradual weight loss of one to two pounds per week, the individual can select a 0-20 pound goal (for 10 weeks) but cannot receive credit for losing more

than the weight goal; (2) because exercise is an essential component of weight loss, each individual must exercise aerobically for 30 minutes, five times per week—a critical component of the weight loss plan.

In the 1989 contest, the nine members of the *Health Hounds* and the seven members of the *Fat Wienies* combined to lose 313.5 pounds, each achieving a perfect score of 6500 points (3,000 for exercise, 3,000 for weight loss, and 500 for submission of weekly weigh-ins); it was the second year they tied for the championship. They were closely followed by the *Central Slenderettes*, *Waist Management I* and *Waist Management II*, *Slender Gender B*, *Gutless Gages*, and the *Skinny Dippers*. The captain of the *Fat Wienies* attributed his team's success to the "team support and peer pressure" that developed during the contest. The team held frequent meetings and met on Fridays to remind each other to "be good over the weekend." The *Fat Wienies* are coaches or former coaches, and are, admittedly, goal-oriented.

In addition to the satisfaction of losing weight and getting in shape, the members of the two winning teams in the 1989 contest received a two-month membership at a local health club. Certificates of Accomplishment and t-shirts were also awarded to all who achieved their weight and exercise goals.

Asked what they liked best about the program, contestants made some of the following comments: "... (the program) brought together co-workers, helping one another with their goals." "This was the first time that our staff really pulled together and worked hard to encourage each other daily." "The support and encouragement that the team members provided for each other, along with the exercise, provided us time to get to know each other." "I liked the idea that 'we' as a school worked together." "A group contest provides the discipline and the desire to exercise and lose pounds."

As a result of the "Dump Your Plump" program, Lake Michigan College is earning a reputation for leadership in the promotion of wellness.

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How Are Things Going?

When do we learn about how things are going for our students during the academic year? Usually we learn when we see the results of exams, homework, papers, and quizzes. We have discussions in class, and we visit with students in the halls and in our offices—gathering additional information about how things are going. At the end of the year, we learn about how things *went* when we read the student evaluations of our courses.

While all this is very useful information, I decided that I wanted more student reactions and wanted them *on a regular basis*. I was encouraged to try a new method of gathering this information when I heard a teacher say that she never knew how many of her students felt about the course until the final student evaluations were submitted.

My first try at getting more information was very simple: *I asked*. After the students had completed one full week of classes, I asked each student to write two or three sentences on how things had gone during the first week of classes at Piedmont Virginia Community College (PVCC) and to sign his/her name to the comments. This task was to be completed in a maximum of five minutes, papers folded and passed to the front of the room.

The directions given, I waited nervously for the first "Why are we doing this?" The question never came in any of my classes that day. The fact that I seemed interested in knowing about their first week was enough at this point.

Immediately after each class, I read the notes, which totaled about 100 by the end of the day and another 50 by the time all classes had met. I was very happy to read the reactions to PVCC teachers and the college. Students were very positive about their first week of experiences. They talked about how they felt about their classes and their teachers. They were eager to share their experiences in writing, and several added "Thank you for asking" to their comments.

I asked again a week later, "How did your second week go at PVCC?" Again they wrote positively, and many added an occasional question for me concerning the class. I answered the general questions at the beginning of the next class and answered some for individual students as I saw them outside of class. This procedure was repeated with, "How did your third week go at PVCC?" and then about every three or four weeks with the general question, "How are things

going?" Sometime later I did get the "Why are you doing this?" question (response: "I am interested") and the "Do you read all those notes?" question (response: "I always read the notes").

What did I learn? Most students did have *questions* about the school, the lecture, the tests, and so on that they felt freer to ask in the privacy of a note. Most students had *opinions* about the school, the lecture, the tests, themselves, and so on that they felt freer to express in this way. Most students were willing to share both the good news and bad news of college life.

At the end of the term on the evaluation form, I asked the students to comment on this writing activity—the "How are things going?" notes that they wrote during the academic year. Again, they were willing to comment. Some comments were:

"The notes were one of the nicest things about the course. They allowed me to express frustration and share accomplishments with an instructor who truly cares about his students."

"The notes helped me because he (the instructor) was aware of where I was in my life."

"I like the notes. They make me think about my emotional outlook and even let me vent some frustration."

"The notes were a new experience. I guess he read them all. I like the idea very much."

"The notes are nice; they show you care and are interested."

In summary, the "How Are Things Going?" notes, requested on a regular basis, have provided the additional information I was seeking concerning student reactions to their college experiences. I encourage you to give this method a try; then *write me* about "How Things Are Going."

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