



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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Distinguished Teachers Receive Support for Special Projects

As the coordinator of faculty development at Columbus State Community College, I coordinate the Distinguished Teaching Award program. We annually honor as many as four distinguished teachers, primarily student-nominated. They are awarded \$1000, a framed certificate, and a medallion. They are offered the opportunity of attending a teaching excellence conference, such as NISOD or a Great Teacher Seminar. In return, we ask them to help select the next year's award recipients (by performing classroom observations) and to consult with other faculty upon request. And, unique to our college, these Distinguished Teachers may conduct a project that is of interest to them and serves the entire college.

In the past three years, Distinguished Teacher projects have included training and assistance in writing computer simulations; researching "questioning that promotes critical thinking" and conducting a faculty workshop; observing classes to determine factors affecting collaborative learning; developing and coordinating a voluntary faculty mentoring program; developing a faculty advising manual; and conducting classroom research.

In addition to the obvious benefits of such projects to the college, the faculty who complete them have been energized and revitalized. They have made collegial contacts that otherwise would not have been made and have gained many new perspectives from those teaching in different subject areas and divisions. One of our Distinguished Teachers describes her project.



Investigating Teaching Styles

Determining a focus for my Distinguished Teaching project proved to be easier than I had expected. For a long time, I had recognized a personal need to know more about other departments and divisions at Columbus State in the areas of teaching styles, effective learning settings, and both "old" and "new" ideas for working with students. The college encouraged me to develop this need (and curiosity) into a project which

allowed me to make classroom observations in every academic department on campus over a period of four months during the spring and summer quarters, 1989.

First, the purpose and rationale for the project was communicated to faculty and chairpersons within the 22 departments on campus. I included the following information in a memo:

1. The primary purpose of this project is to develop and facilitate cross-campus awareness of teaching techniques among faculty. It is my perception that faculty in different divisions (and, to some extent, within divisions) are not sharing their teaching expertise and experiences.
2. A second purpose is to generate a list of faculty and the teaching technique(s) they utilize which can be used as a resource guide by others. I know that we have excellent educators at Columbus State, but I think we fail to access the available in-house resources.
3. An additional purpose is to create a mechanism for "tooting the horn" of our faculty, who are actively trying new ways of challenging students, continually updating and refining existing skills and techniques. *Everyone* wants to be recognized. This project attempts to create an additional channel for such recognition and attention.

In addition, I felt it important that fellow faculty members be secure with my presence in their classrooms and not feel pressured by the observations. Therefore, the memo also specified the following:

1. I will consider the observations a privilege granted by one faculty member to another. There will be *no* attempt to evaluate or judge any of the faculty members observed.
2. My preference is that faculty members volunteer to be observed and choose the class session to be observed.
3. I am also willing to talk with other faculty about techniques and methods which cannot be observed directly. Although I would strongly prefer to see faculty in action, I am aware that this may not be possible in all cases.



I received responses from departments in each of the four divisions at Columbus State, and 16 volunteer faculty members were contacted to arrange observational visits. The opportunity proved as informative as I had hoped and identified a multitude of ideas for future use. As expected, faculty were teaching both traditionally and nontraditionally, with flexibility as well as with structure; and each brought his or her own unique characteristics to the delivery of material. Within each classroom I was able to identify an overall atmosphere which was created in part by the teacher and in part by the response and participation of the students.

In one session within the Basic Science Department, I was impressed with the instructor's immediate involvement of the students in the learning process. After asking them about their understanding of the concepts covered in the previous class, she followed with questions which allowed for positive responses and then praised them for their recall and completion of an informal homework experiment. Analogies and examples from her own life let students visualize difficult concepts, and I found the description comparing molecules of water to "a bucket of BB's" helpful. Study tricks and shortcuts, such as key word associations, were identified by this instructor and recommended to students on a regular basis. When asked what they liked about the instructor's teaching, students mentioned the study tricks and stated, "She's enthusiastic! She comes in and says, 'This is going to be fun!' She likes what she's doing." The student response mirrored the teacher's behavior.

It is a difficult task to teach students who, years ago, may have "turned off and tuned out" writing as an effective form of communication. Within the Communication Skills Department, students are given a variety of ways to learn and demonstrate their comprehension, refinement, and sometimes relearning of the subject. In addition to creating their own compositions in a clear and concise manner, students are asked to keep a journal. The journal topics are structured for the student by the instructor and relate to the student's feeling about writing. As the faculty member reads the journal, he or she is able to provide individualized instruction to the student, based on his or her own identification of need. Group work is utilized during brainstorming half-hours in class where students work together to pinpoint and clarify composition topics, and through the technique of reviewing first drafts in class and critiquing the work of fellow classmates. Once again, interest is piqued by the use of "grabbers"

on the board: How would *you* punctuate the sentence used by this instructor, "That that is is that that is not is not is it it is"?

Those of us who think that the teaching technique of asking "What's wrong with this picture?" is only for elementary children should take another look. I visited one classroom where using this technique brought the student participation to life and the discussion and interaction between teacher and students to a higher level. As the Electronics Engineering Technology faculty member drew on the board an example of a series-parallel circuit, he failed to design the circuit correctly and stepped back for a long moment to study his diagram. The instructor indicated to me later that this mistake was not intentional and that his hesitancy was real as he processed the correct response. The unplanned reaction from students (who had been previously silent, listening to a lecture) was the exciting part. Students became actively involved in working together to solve the problem. They suggested possibilities, gave critical feedback to one another, and clearly indicated to the teacher by their comments what they were knowledgeable about and what content areas still needed work. The atmosphere created by this event was one of respect for both student and teacher, and the partnership which is possible was very apparent.

I have incorporated many of these ideas into my own teaching in the field of Mental Health and Mental Retardation. Though our subject matter is diverse, we have much to teach each other. The opportunity and privilege of exploring this subject continues to be invaluable to me.

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