



# INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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## *The Joys of Being a Club Advisor*

In April 1993, morale at our college was terrible. The semester teaching load had been increased from five to six classes, and raises were a distant memory. I had recently applied for two national grants and had been rejected. My mood was grim; my attitude toward my career depressed.

Then one day an administrator came to my office to ask if I would take on a new responsibility—serving as advisor of Phi Theta Kappa, an international honor society for two-year colleges. She was brave, and she was also lucky that I did not verbalize my first thought: "You must be kidding!" I knew next to nothing about the group, but I did know that I did not want to do any more work without compensation. Yet I really liked this person, and my instincts pushed me to say yes. I guess I thought a new experience might be good for me and for my work, and I could always back out.

Now, one year later, I look back at my ignorance and am amazed. I had no idea how much extra work I was taking on. Phi Theta Kappa is an intensely active international group. The enthusiasm of advisors is infectious. Before I knew it, I was squeezing in teaching and grading around my Phi Theta Kappa activities.

A lifelong wallflower, I suddenly found myself in a leadership role. I have led membership drives and hosted inductions each semester; networked across campus to search for funding and to seek out service opportunities for members; set up shop in my office to sell T-shirts, sweatshirts, M&M's, and first aid kits; and completed extraordinary amounts of paperwork. Because of the demands on my time, my anxiety level often has skyrocketed. Even my dreams at night have been taken over by planning activities. And this summer I will make the hour-long drive to campus twice a month just for Phi Theta Kappa activities, even though I will not be teaching.

Perhaps I sound like a person obsessed. I am! I have found a wonderful new outlet for my talents. Despite the extra work, there is no question that I would do it all over again.

I have found new energy that affects everything I do. I have made a wonderful new friend in my co-advisor. I have become involved with my school in a new way; I feel a real sense of spirit and commitment that was lacking before. I have gotten to know more students and to know them in a more personal way through meetings, fundraisers, get-togethers, and out-of-town trips. One of my students, who was also a PTK member, said after taking her final exam that she would have cried if she thought she would not see me again. Such an experience is not unusual; I have met advisors from all over the United States who say: "Kappans are your friends for life" and "Being a PTK advisor is the best thing I've ever done."

I also have gained some technical skills. I learned how to "mail merge" mass mailings, for example, as well as how to get things done on campus, from reserving a room to scrounging for available funds.

There also have been some unanticipated professional rewards. I entered an international competition to lead a seminar at PTK's 1994 summertime Honors Institute in Ypsilanti, Michigan—and I was one of the winners! Because of that honor, my school paid my way to the international convention in Anaheim, California. And those experiences led to a personal regional award.

Taking on additional responsibilities as a club advisor can help an instructor grow. That is what has happened to me, and I look forward to leading my organization and its members to greater heights next year.

*Evelyn Beck, Instructor, English*

For further information, contact the author at Piedmont Technical College, Box 1467, Greenwood, SC 29648-1467.



THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR STAFF AND ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT (NISOD)  
Community College Leadership Program, Department of Educational Administration  
College of Education, The University of Texas at Austin, SZB 348, Austin, Texas 78712

## Reconsidering Reading Quizzes

The reading quiz offers advantages to teachers struggling to get their students to class on time and prepared to discuss the assigned reading. Starting the class period with students composing well-developed paragraphs in response to a quiz question gives them writing practice relevant to course objectives, focuses their attention on the text they will be discussing during the hour, and encourages preparation for class.

The course syllabus advises the students to expect a reading quiz on most reading assignments. While these writing assignments could be given as homework, the advantage of having the students think through this material immediately before class begins would be lost, and the students would miss the practice of writing under some pressure.

Reading quizzes in my classes are all open-book, so questions involve some analysis and are unanswerable for the student who has not read the text. Students use their books because I require them to incorporate at least one direct quotation into their responses, which is a technique they will be required to master when composing their essays. They gain practice early with searching the text for evidence and bringing that evidence to bear on some problem. If I have assigned a short story with the intention of ultimately requiring an essay on character analysis, then my quiz question might be: "Select one of the major characters in Alice Walker's 'Everyday Use' and discuss in a well-developed paragraph that character's most notable trait." If preparing for an essay analyzing setting in a story, the assignment might be: "Discuss in a well-developed paragraph the two or three adjectives that best describe the physical setting of James Joyce's 'Araby.'" When time is up, I always begin discussion with the quiz question; sometimes I begin the class by reading one or two of the responses aloud and asking the class to react.

Students do surprisingly well when responding to a question on a story they have not yet discussed. These paragraph responses are mini-themes and are excellent preparation for the essays the students will write later. If students can gather and present evidence from their reading to develop responses to these quiz questions, then they will be prepared to compose other essays (or responses to essay examination questions). The best way for students to learn to write is by writing, regardless of discipline. Requir-

ing students to write almost every class period affords them critical practice they must have to master analytical writing. These quizzes are excellent opportunities for instructors of all disciplines to practice writing across the curriculum.

My students look forward to showing me they have read the text with some care. They gain writing practice appropriate to the requirements of their essay assignments; and I am able to identify obstacles to writing about literature before the first essay is assigned, focus the students' attention on the text under discussion, and encourage timely class attendance in a positive manner.

**Philip N. Cooksey**, *Dean, Humanities Division*

For further information, contact the author at Rose State College, 6420 Southeast Fifteenth, Midwest City, OK 73110-2799.