



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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ON THE LOOKOUT: EVALUATION FORMS

Change is a strange concept. For the last several semesters, I've been on the verge of revamping my tried (tired?) and true critique forms used to evaluate student presentations in principles of public speaking classes.

On the verge. Does that sound familiar? Time is a precious commodity: classes, committees, conferences, advisorships, meetings, my dean asking me to look into developing a video class in public speaking.

Wait. Develop a new class? On video? So much change required with so little time. To try to accommodate this new request, I spent the summer developing a new video class (VC), and one of the positive outcomes—and there were many—is I now have some creative, sound, usable, and rather “cool” public speaking evaluation forms for all of my classes. Let me share how change has benefited me and my students unexpectedly.

Needs and High Standards

A VC requires approaches to pedagogy that differ somewhat from the traditional classroom setting. Our students work at times inconvenient for traditional classes, or they have family/school conflicts, or they live so far away that meeting class five times a semester to deliver speeches instead of meeting weekly for 16 weeks just fits better into their schedules.

When midterm approached, my VC students had given one demonstration speech, presented one informative with outline speech, and were in the process of researching their upcoming persuasive speech. They had read their text for content and spent time in the library looking at the required videos covering speech communication material. They had evaluated two student/peer presentations (informative and persuasive), and they had allowed me to evaluate their presentations.

One of the key components in these assignments was the evaluation form, and since students were familiar

with it, I decided to use the evaluation idea as the basis for their take-home midterm exam. I asked them to show me what they had learned about the importance of speechmaking and speechmakers. They had to create and design an evaluation form that I could use in my classes to evaluate student speeches. I gave them the freedom to play with ideas and to look over all the forms we had used in class.

However, I did add a few restrictions. First, they could not copy my evaluation sheets; theirs had to be creative and designed according to their own personal style. Second, the form had to be completed on one page with at least 15 elements of good speechmaking included in its framework. And third, in order to make the forms valid, I required students to write a brief paragraph for each element they chose to include on their form; a line for name/date, a heading, the use of directions, and the explanation of scale could not be justified as elements of good speechmaking. As a further validation, I required them to tie text material to each element. Students then had to attach their rationales to the created evaluation sheets, slip all into a folder, and submit the hard copy to me within two days.

Surprising Outcomes

I was amazed. In two days my students exceeded my expectations, and I had the best results of any exam I've ever given. The rationales for their choices were excellent. Reading them, I sensed an honest exploration of what was important to the students. Because each element required text support, students' exploration remained within the communication discipline. And the most significant aspect concerning the rationales was student learning. The evaluation form was not just a form with little or no thought behind it nor just a piece of paper designed to generate a grade. Students gained a perspective on grading that they did not possess when they began this class. By using criteria specific to speech communication, they came to understand better their own communication strengths and weaknesses.

Equally impressive were the creative evaluation forms. Students added color and imported objects. They



employed acronyms and computer-generated symbols for their scales, and they evaluated in the vernacular of the college student. These forms sang with clarity, creative energy, and an honest approach to evaluation.

In the End

I have pulled together the evaluation sheets from their rationales. When the VC class meets again to present persuasive speeches this month, I plan to use each speaker's newly created evaluation sheet to grade speeches. I may have to add more personal notes on each speaker's form than I would normally on my own tried-and-true forms, but the assignment will have come full circle. I'm looking forward to this change.

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A WEB-ENHANCED PHOTO PROGRAM

Over the past year, I have posted my courses and content (syllabi, competencies, lessons, assignments, examples, and web resources) onto the Internet, using a program called Blackboard Course Info. Students in our photography program (once registered and assigned passwords) access and review their courses, numerous examples of former student work, and a vast array of photographic techniques and processes; and receive weekly progress reports (and grades) throughout the semester via e-mail and online discussion forums.

An excellent example of web-enhanced instruction (and real-world experience) is our team-taught photo-journalism class. One instructor assigns actual newspaper assignments to advanced photography students after the other instructor lectures and demonstrates the dynamics of newspaper photography—reinforcing the lectures, putting students in touch with the local community, teaching them the realities of meeting deadlines, and producing quality work for publication.

We communicate with our students using a specified course website called Blackboard, which keeps students abreast of breaking news across the county and class activities. Students access the class web site using an assigned password and review course lectures and specific examples before covering the newspaper assignments. Covering newspaper assignments and getting published provide great rewards, foster healthy competition, and make learning "real."

The recent revolution in digital technology has changed all the rules in photography. Hours once spent alone in a darkroom, for example, are now spent among other students and instructors in a computer lab setting. Our program is keeping abreast of these technological innovations throughout its curriculum and supplementing traditional photographic practices with digital and Internet technologies. As well, the history of photography is taught on the Internet as well as in the classroom, offering students more learning options.

The web-enhanced photo curriculum has added a new dimension to our photography program. Our students search the web to generate creative ideas for their own work and solutions to assigned photographic problems, in addition to sharing their findings with the rest of the class on the discussion board. I facilitate the learning experience using the web as a supplement (and instructional tool) for my regular classroom, studio, and darkroom activities. We post examples of student work in our cyber classroom and show examples of specified class projects to help students with concept development.

We offer courses that are taught totally online (History of Photography, Design and Art Appreciation), in addition to a combination of traditional classroom courses supplemented with a web component. Online course delivery offers teachers and students more educational options and adds an element of flexibility and creativity to all courses. Students are more responsible for their learning and able to push themselves beyond the limits of the traditional classroom environment. Our photography program continues exploring and implementing new and innovative techniques for training students, using the latest communications and digital technology. As the photographic industry evolves and incorporates more digital technology into its varied disciplines, so does our photo program.

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