



# INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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## ALL THE HELP WE CAN GET

About midway through the spring 1999 semester at Hutchinson Community College, I was pleasantly surprised to receive word from Buhler High School that I was being invited to evaluate two high school seniors taking my English Composition 1A course. The evaluation form asked five questions, covering such areas as attentiveness and current grade. While I have had numerous high school students from different area high schools taking college composition, this was my first opportunity to communicate with high school officials concerning the performance of their students. I responded to their questions right away.

After returning the evaluation forms, I thought about the merits of such intervention on the part of high schools whose students participated in these academic collaborations. When I was a high school senior in 1964-65, only a handful of exceptionally bright students were offered the opportunity to take college courses. But within the last decade, significantly larger numbers of high school students routinely take courses for college credit. For various reasons such as an onerous workload, poor study habits, or an inadequate academic preparation, some of them are unsuccessful. It was clear to me that the high school ought to know how they are faring, and perhaps interventions could be made to reduce the number of unsuccessful students.

According to the principal of the high school, "...the purpose in using this [evaluation form] is to enhance the probability that our students will take this experience seriously." When I interviewed him, he assured me that high school officials counsel students whose evaluations are unsatisfactory—an intervention strategy that they trusted would help students be more successful.

I share the five evaluation questions here; they provide the information necessary to assess performance generally and perhaps pinpoint some reasons for lackluster performance. Answering the five questions was not time-consuming; however, a more

extensive list of questions could discourage college instructors from participating in this evaluation procedure.

- Does the student attend class regularly (not more than 1-2 absences)?
- Is the student attentive in class, participates when asked to do so?
- Is the student prepared for tests and other class assignments most of the time?
- Does the student appear to have a good background of information and/or training in preparation for the class?
- Is the student's current grade a "C" or better?

When I informed our college's president about the evaluation procedure, he shared my enthusiasm and expressed the desire to inform other area principals and superintendents about the program. An open remark on the evaluation form states that Buhler's purpose is "to help us encourage [students] in this important transition and to evaluate our academic program..." I appreciate Buhler High School's concern. We need all the help we can get!

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## UT PICTURA POESIS: ENHANCING ART STUDIO COURSES WITH POPULAR IMAGES AND RAP LYRICS

Not long ago, one of my printmaking students came up with a novel idea. He wanted to enter an MTV cover design contest for Korn, a popular hip-hop/rock/rap group that enjoys tremendous popularity among young students today. He asked if I would allow him to work on the design of the cover during class time and if I would mind giving him pointers about the composition and design. I thought that he should integrate the project as one of the assigned techniques (relief printing) in printmaking, thus maintaining the integrity and scope of course objectives.

The student worked on a lino cut, which was the easier technique by which he could graphically translate the design. He not only created the image, but also integrated some words into it. As if Horace's dictum, *ut pictura poesis*, "as in painting, so in poetry," had become a truism, other students became intrigued with the idea of connecting an image with words, and so the project took the form of a true "cordel literature," or literature on a string.

Cordel, a 16th century Iberian art form now thriving in northern Brazil, is the perfect vehicle for visual art students who want to expand their images with words. Relief illustration (woodblock or lino printing) has been both the craft and vehicle that provide the mechanics for these perceptual "literary" flights of the imagination. My students have become adept cordel authors who are not at all shy about performing their verses aloud, as well as displaying the images hanging from a string. These works, however, have been designed/written more for the eyes than for the ears.

With the intention of expanding the cordel idea of an image relating to a narrative, I have developed exciting projects for my Design I students. These students have honed their designing skills on projects as varied as a poster highlighting arts and letters day, a mural depicting the Hispanic heritage for a housing development in Little Havana, and a mural on marine life for the Miami Metropolitan Police Telecommunications Bureau.

The relationship between art and literature has been eased on our campus. Once students see the validity of obliterating the artificial barriers between disciplines, a multi-disciplinary approach to teaching/learning can become a reality. The English department and art department faculties, as well as students, have been working together in *Miambiance*, an award-winning

literary/art publication. All of these projects, however, had "strings" attached: By melding the verbal and the visual, the art students in the studio and the literature students in the classroom have crossed unseen boundaries together, without infringing upon their career interests. In fact, these literary/art projects have held these students and their audiences captive.

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