



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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STARTING AND ENDING WELL: BOOKENDS FOR A SUCCESSFUL SEMESTER

Each semester we provide faculty development and training opportunities to new and experienced faculty members, with varied backgrounds and specialty areas. We meet for a full semester and study ways to improve our own and our students' experiences.

Any great coach or athlete will confirm that a successful game plan includes having a strategy from start to finish. Often, teams will practice opening plays all the way through the last seconds of a game in order to help maximize performance under pressure. How you begin and end your course might very well provide the most important bridge for student learning.

Beginning Well

PEEP: Use the PEEP method—a brief introduction designed to stimulate and excite. Offer your students some insight into what they will be studying, why it is relevant, and how the course fits into a bigger picture. Providing this broad-scale viewpoint will reduce the chance of your students getting “bogged down” and asking themselves (and each other), “Why are we doing this stuff?” Adult learners need an instructor’s experienced support to answer this question. Provide the “why” beyond common placations. Show your interest and passion in your subject, and create the proper contextual framework to improve students’ vision and comprehension. It is important to ask students how they see the class fitting into their world. Their answers and insight will likely provide better clues.

Experiences: Let students get to know you, your own struggles and successes with the material. How much you open up depends a great deal on your own comfort level. None of us can claim complete mastery of our discipline, and acknowledging that makes us more “real” to our students. Adult learners bring a wealth of knowledge to the class setting. Honor and respect their experiences by seeking out background information and investigating expectations.

Expectations: Effective instructors articulate what they hope the class can achieve—in each session and the course. If you do not have a well-defined vision for the course, how can students? Seek input from the class about hopes for the course. Ask class members to submit written statements of what they hope to get from the experience. Take a few minutes the first or second session, and allow them to brainstorm together. During the last week of class, review their ideas, and then give the statements back to them. It serves as a powerful reminder of how far they have come during the semester. Take time to review these statements on occasion.

Performance Standards: Be clear in your explanations and consistent in your applications of how you plan to keep score in your class. Offer examples of acceptable and unacceptable work. Help students understand the style and format of work you demand. Be supportive and encouraging.

Instructors should think strategically about the end of the semester. Often, faculty rush through final learning objectives in order to “get it done.” Late in the semester, most of the students have settled into a comfort zone with your approach, style, and expectations. Suddenly, as you near the end of the semester, things change. A significant pace increase can result in confusion and discomfort. Consider the following as you end your time with your students.

Teach Less, Better: Keep in mind that just because you present it does not mean the students “get” it. Trying to speed up at the end can instill more fear and frustration than confidence and satisfaction. Focus on what you want the students to leave with and keep.

Ending Well

Put It All Together: Concentrate on putting all the pieces together. Offer students some perspectives on what has happened over the course of the class. Help them leave with a macro-view of *what* was covered (content) and *why* (relevance) covering it was worth the time.

Ask for the “Burning Question”: Give your students the opportunity to “fill in” gaps in the material. By taking time to determine where the “holes” might



be, you can learn what may not have been presented adequately or clearly, and get feedback about the overall interpretation of the material. Both will help you do a better job next time. Not every student will have a burning question. The significant message is that their views and needs are important.

Helping students learn and retain information more effectively requires a great *beginning* and a great *ending*. It increases your chances for helping students have a great class with you!

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