



Minnesota
STATE COLLEGES
& UNIVERSITIES

WEEKLY UPDATE

A WEEKLY COMMUNICATION FROM THE CENTER FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

February 12, 2007

SoCTL *The Scholarship of Teaching & Learning at CTL*

Looking Back, Looking Forward: Changes in Teaching and Learning

Elizabeth Douvan, in a book chapter entitled Capacity for Intimacy (in *The Modern American College*, by Chickering et al.), wrote about the importance of faculty-student relationships within the context of a student's academic development. Douvan addressed the specific needs of several distinguishable student age groups: traditional college students (18-22 years old), mature students (30-50 years old), and older students (50-80 years old). She made two important observations about the development of faculty-student relationships relative to all student groups: First, "faculty likely represent models of a particular life-style and a style of interpersonal behavior that vary from the received styles of many students bring with them when they enter college." Second, whether faculty members recognize it or not, they influence students in many different ways, and in roles that vary considerably by institution type. For example, Douvan observes that, unlike their colleagues from large universities, faculty at smaller colleges often have interactions with their students that take them outside of the classroom. These roles vary "from colleague in college governance to employer of the student's babysitting services."

25 years after the publication of *The Modern American College*, the importance of the faculty-student relationship is at the forefront of the literature on student development and retention. Research by Astin (1993) and others over many decades underscores the positive contribution of that relationship to successful outcomes. Betsy Barefoot, co-director and senior scholar at the Policy Center for the First Year of College writes in her article, *The First-Year Experience: Are We Making It Any Better?*, about the value of increasing faculty-to-student interaction within the critical first year of college. Barefoot acknowledges the tenure and promotion struggles that university faculty members face in spending precious little research time with students outside of the classroom. However, she also draws our attention to the increasing number of universities recognizing the value of faculty-student interaction and points to how some large universities are focused on increasing this interaction consistent with their research mission. For example, the University of Michigan and the University of Texas, El Paso, support student collaboration with faculty members on scholarly research. At the University of Virginia and the University of South Carolina, students live in residence halls with resident faculty members, so as to increase informal faculty-student interaction outside of the classroom. Finally, Harvard University and The Pennsylvania State University both enlist the support of tenured faculty in first-year seminars.

The Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) and the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), ongoing studies in which many of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities participate, both point to a correlation between faculty-student interaction and overall student academic success. According to the 2005 NSSE report, students who participated in a first-year seminar reported that they interacted more frequently with faculty, and that they gained more from their first year of college. The CCSSE Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice include student-faculty interaction.

-Martin Springborg

References

Chickering, A. W., & Associates (1981). *The Modern American College*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Astin, A. (1993). *What Matters in College? Four Critical Years Revisited*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Barefoot, B. O. (2000). *The First-Year Experience: Are We Making It Any Better?*. *About Campus*, January/February, 12-18.

To find out more about the CCSSE and NSSE, go to:
[Community College Survey of Student Engagement \(CCSSE\)](#)
[National Survey of Student Engagement \(NSSE\)](#)

Register Now!

REALIZING STUDENT POTENTIAL/TEACH 2007

CONFERENCE PROGRAM

Registration Closes February 22!

Teaching Tip of the Week

Checking for Understanding

As instructors, we strive to find ways to assess beyond testing. This tip utilizes concrete teaching, while incorporating some higher level thinking skills. Using concrete examples through demonstration, exercises, case studies, metaphors, and life experiences are great ways to get learners to understand the concepts of your course.

As for assessing or checking for understanding of these concepts, have the students create their own metaphors, demonstrations, and life experiences to share in class individually, in groups, or through written paragraphs and threaded discussions to show their mastery of the topics you want them to know.

- Zala Fashant

CTL Report

Understanding China in 2006: Opportunities and Challenges for Teaching and Learning

Minneapolis Community and Technical College hosted a conference about China on October 5 and 6, 2006. The symposium was supported, in part, by [discipline and program workshop funds](#) from the Center for Teaching and Learning. Conference faculty planners Diane Pearson from Minneapolis Community and Technical College; Paul Richgruber from Inver Hills Community College, and Kathy Johnson from St. Cloud State University reported many opportunities for system faculty members to learn from each other.

The keynote speaker was professor Ted Farmer from the University of Minnesota. Farmer and the other conference presenters addressed the complexity of modern and political aspects of China. Conference participants were asked to reflect, both at this conference and afterward, on the implications China has on their work in the classroom.

Faculty members will be able to discuss outcomes from the conference at a second and connected [symposium about China](#) at St. Cloud State University on March 25 through March 27, 2007.

-Martin Springborg

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