Teaching Ethical Leadership in An Unethical Time

Susan M. Fredricks, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
Communication Arts and Sciences
smf17@psu.edu

Andrea Hornett, Ed.D.
Assistant Professor, Business
axh45@psu.edu
Penn State University—Delaware County
Media, Pennsylvania

Introduction
The past few years have shown a dramatic change in how business is conducted. The collapse of Enron, the turmoil within Adelphia, the never-ending litigation with Scott Sullivan, former CFO of WorldCom, and the made for television movie of Martha Stewart create a sense of urgency for those teaching ethical leadership. This urgency became the primary focus of two courses, one in communications and one in business. These courses examined how undergraduate students made sense of a questionable business leader’s behavior.

Students were encouraged to choose among the leaders on a list for a final paper or annotated bibliography. (See Table 1 on pg. 3.) Though the courses were structured differently, by the end of the semester few students were capable of applying leadership theories and practices to unethical leaders because few leadership theories incorporate ethics. Students made varied comments about the severity of their selected leaders’ alleged behaviors. One and only one student, of the total forty-two students enrolled, applied an ethical model studied in the class. Helping students to understand and to apply ethical behaviors is the challenge that faces all professors. If a student is unable accurately to analyze the situation when faced with an ethical dilemma, s/he may choose an unethical action with severe repercussions (e.g. cheating, plagiarism, stealing).

Students’ Interpretations of Some Unethical Leaders
The two courses’ final assignments were designed to test the students’ views of unethical leaders. Through either a final paper in the communication course or an annotated bibliography and a presentation in the business course, students were to analyze a particular leader’s behavior. The results were limited applications of the leadership models and considerable forgiveness of the unethical behaviors.

One of the twenty-three leaders (Table 1 on pg. 3), John Rigas, former CEO of Adelphia cable television, serves as a good model to demonstrate the students’ interpretation of unethical actions. Rigas was an early pioneer in cable television, going door to door in the 1950s to enlist subscribers. He grew his company as a family business, employing his sons. One student felt sorry for what happened to Rigas, an old man, and focused on his good deeds at home in Coudersport, Pennsylvania. Another student claimed that as the company grew,
Rigas focused more on what he could gain and not on what the company would gain, as if it became an entitlement for him. Reporters concluded that “the Rigas family had a hard time distinguishing between public and private” (Moules & Larsen, 2002). Apparently, Adelphia owed Rigas land, condos, golf courses, art, planes, and immense amounts of cash.

In another example, one student did a good job researching background information on Scott Sullivan (WorldCom) and seemed a little sorry that this smart persevering guy took a fall. The student failed to assert that by “cooking the books” to the tune of four to six billion dollars, WorldCom has defrauded its investors. Other students were also unable to make the connection between fraud and cost to consumers. For example, WorldCom’s MCI raised rates from 5 cents to 9 cents a minute during the semester. This increase was mentioned in class, but not one student reported this fact in a paper or presentation. Further, the Pentagon is one of MCI’s largest customers, so taxpayers as well as consumers will be paying back the debt incurred by Scott Sullivan’s alleged fraud. Perhaps undergraduates cannot identify with damages to taxpayers or payers of phone bills, even though at least half of the students are non-traditional commuters who work. Cultural values may be operating here—values which preclude the students from judging or condemning the fallen leaders. Another general comment regarding several other leaders was that they were still good people and deserved a second chance. Instead of seeing the behavior as unethical and wrong, the students focused on the “good” and the money-making behavior rather than on the ethics associated with the action. One bright student, the only one in the two classes, applied an ethical interpersonal communication process model—Rest and colleague’s model (Hackman & Johnson, 2000)—to Sam Waksal of Imclone. Rest’s model has significant application to teaching and learning ethical leadership competency.

Applying the Model of Ethical Behavior to Leaders

In order to be ethical, leaders must first be able to analyze their actions and understand how these actions will affect others both positively and negatively (See Diagram 1 below.). This quality is known as moral sensitivity and is the first component in Rest and his colleague’s model. Then, leaders make a moral judgment, the second component. In this phase, they select the course of action that is the right one to follow based predominately upon the effects. After the leaders make a judgment, they then analyze the moral motivation which inspires them do the right thing. Finally, leaders implement this action through the moral action component (Hackman & Johnson, 2000, p. 337).

Diagram 1. Rest’s Model of Ethical Interpersonal Communication

This model has a linear quality to it; one seemingly progresses through the components one step at a time. Once a leader has been able to grasp this linear function, all other situations which do not quite fit into the first component can be explored as well. And, in order for ethical behaviors to be accomplished,
a leader needs to be competent in all the components. From the students’ examples, Rigas had limited moral sensitivity. He was able to do the right thing at certain times, but not when it came to a conflict of interest. Scott Sullivan also failed the moral sensitivity component. Like Rigas, he focused on the amount of money he could make without analyzing how it would affect his company and society. The students see the application of the four components and how they make a competent leader. Without this applicable model, students may not be able to see the larger context or ways unethical leaders can harm society.

**Challenges of Teaching Ethical Leadership**

This inability to see the unethical behavior becomes a major issue when we teach undergraduates about ethical leadership. If they are unable to see how behavior affects others, thereby possessing limited moral sensitivity, then students have problems determining for themselves what is ethical and unethical leadership behaviors. This issue becomes the greater challenge for professors, namely, to teach students how to increase their moral sensitivity and then progress through the other three components to the end goal of ethical actions.

**Overcoming These Challenges**

Handling these challenges to teaching ethical leadership can be accomplished through the use of case studies and self reflection. The twenty-three examples listed in Table 1 are some cases for teaching ethical competency. However, the case studies were not enough for the students to learn completely about ethical leadership. In addition to the case studies, students need a deep self-reflection into their own behaviors, one which forces them to go through the four components of Rest’s model. One suggestion is for students to recall an ethical dilemma—one in which their ethics are challenged—and to reflect on how they handled it. (For example, taking a pen is unethical but does not involve a true ethical dilemma.) The students need to go through the four components and re-examine how they handled the dilemma. This self-reflective activity may have to be done several times in order for students to grasp fully the ideology behind it in order to change their behavior.

**Sharing Models for Teaching Ethical Leadership**

Ethical leadership is a concept that is a struggle for many, not only for our business and political leaders, but also for our students. Teaching them to be ethical leaders during times of turmoil and selfishness is one of the major challenges facing professors. Increases in cheating and plagiarism on campuses illustrate the need for students to learn about and apply ethical behaviors (Zernike, 2002). And Rest’s model is just one example among many that professors may use. Many more models need to be examined and explored to help the students learn to be ethical leaders. With all of the current scandals and market problems, the time is right for professors to share this knowledge.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. List of Business Leaders Involved in Scandals</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. John Rigas of Adelphia</td>
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<td>2. Joseph Berardino of Arthur Andersen</td>
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<td>3. Ken Lay, former CEO of Enron</td>
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<td>4. Rich Causey, former Chief Accounting Officer at Enron</td>
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<td>5. Joseph Nacchio of Qwest</td>
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<td>6. Gary Winnick, CEO of Global Crossing</td>
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<td>7. Sam Waksia, CEO of ImClone Systems</td>
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<td>8. Martha Stewart of Martha Stewart Living, OmniMedia, Inc.</td>
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<td>9. Peter Bacanovic, Stewart’s Merrill Lynch broker</td>
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<td>10. Dennis Kozlowski of Tyco</td>
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<td>11. Robert Pittman, formerly head of America On-Line and Time Warner conglomerate</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Jeffrey Bewkes of Home Box Office</td>
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<td>14. Jack Welch, retired CEO of GE</td>
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<tr>
<td>15. Bernard J. Ebbers of WorldCOM</td>
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<tr>
<td>16. Scott Sullivan, former CEO</td>
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<td>17. Cynthia Cooper, former CFO, VP of internal audit</td>
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<tr>
<td>18. John Sidgmore, current CEO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Jack Grubman, telecom analyst at Salomon Smith Barney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Max E. Bobbitt, Chairman of the Board’s Audit Committee on the WorldCom board.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Bert C. Robberts, former chairman of MCI and current chairman of WorldCOM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Melvin Dick, currently CFO at Coldwater Creeks, a women’s apparel retailer, was a partner at Arthur Andersen and headed up the WorldCOM audits.</td>
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<tr>
<td>23. David F. Myers, former controller of WorldCom</td>
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The Successful Professor™

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Motivating Students to Become Responsible for Learning, Part 1

J. Dirk Nelson, Ph.D.

Chair, Department of Health and Human Performance
Central Missouri State University
Warrensburg, Missouri
jdnelson@cmsu1.cmsu.edu

“All genuine learning is active, not passive. It (learning) involves the use of the mind, not just the memory. It is a process of discovery in which the student is the main agent, not the teacher.”

—Mortimer Adler

Introduction

Students entering college today seem to understand and appreciate the value of school; however, they may not understand or appreciate the value of learning. A good number of students come to colleges and universities with an expectation that the primary purpose of the school is to prepare them to earn a living. Certainly there are merits to this expectation or goal. However, a truly effective education is one that piques students’ curiosity such that they become their own best teachers. They should be motivated to learn for a lifetime. Recently, John Tagg (2003) wrote that a college education will be meaningless unless faculty can motivate students not only to appreciate schooling but also to appreciate learning.

In his book The Paideia Program: An Educational Syllabus, Mortimer Adler notes that the key cause of learning is the activity of the learner’s own mind. The teacher’s role is to assist the learning process by guiding the cognitive process of the students. More recently James R. Davis (1993) states that motivation (of students) is a complex process and is influenced by factors brought into the classroom a priori by both the students and professor. The most appropriate teaching strategy may only come to light subsequent to the faculty making the effort to identify and recognize the intelligence, aptitude, and motivation of the individual student. Albert Bandura (1997) describes a student’s “self-efficacy” as having a sense that one can meet challenges which present themselves to the student. A student may develop a high “self-efficacy” or a low “self-efficacy.” Student participants with high “self-efficacy” will be active in the learning process, display greater effort as well as persistence in class, and attain higher levels of performance. Conversely and unfortunately, students with a low “self-efficacy” will have less persistence and try to avoid learning.

In an attempt to motivate students as well as make them cognizant of their key role and significance in the teaching/learning process, I spend the first day of class distributing and discussing the following Teaching and Evaluation Philosophy and Class Policies. This document supersedes all others during the critical first class.

Teaching and Evaluation Philosophy

Education is a partnership among a number of entities: students, teachers, administrators, staff, and technology; all must work cooperatively to achieve pedagogical success. According to Baiocco and DeWaters (1998), the Traits of Excellent Teachers are expressed in the following outline:

I. Intrapersonal Intelligences
   A. Optimism
   B. Expressiveness
      1. Enthusiasm
      2. Sociability/friendliness
   C. Empathy
      1. Availability/generosity with time and with students

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Motivating Students
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II. Interpersonal Intelligences
A. Organization
B. Leadership
C. Ability to inspire
D. Rigor
E. Conscientiousness

My goal in teaching is to exude the aforementioned. However, as noted previously, education is a partnership and therefore the student must have similar traits if pedagogical success is to occur. We need to tell the students that success in our (professor/student) relationship means an improved quality of life for them, as well as for all of the individuals with whom they come in contact throughout their lifetime.

I evaluate all student work for class (examinations, quizzes, homework, papers, etc.) on the following criteria:

- Accuracy
- Thoroughness
- Writing skills (word usage, punctuation, and spelling)
- Creativity
- Professionalism (e.g., neatness, references)
- Completion of work on time

Whenever appropriate, I provide comments and suggestions on their work. I do not discuss individual grades on any work during class. However, I am more than happy to visit with them individually and provide them with specific and detailed feedback in my office.

It is my sincere hope and goal that the student will have the opportunity to question, to challenge, to explore, to introduce new ideas, and to have these contributions carefully critiqued. These conditions are the ones out of which true learning will occur.

As my students and I begin the learning journey together, I present to them the characteristics of “A” and “C” Students (See The Teaching Professor):

The “A” Students
- have virtually perfect attendance.
- Their commitment to class is similar to the professor’s. If an absence is anticipated, “A” students will make necessary arrangements with the professor ahead of time.
- are prepared for class. They always read the assignment. Their attention to detail is to catch the professor making an occasional mistake.
- show curiosity. They have an interest in the class and in the subject. They research what they do not understand. They often ask interesting questions and/or make thoughtful comments.
- have retentive minds, are able to connect past learning with the present, and bring a background to class.
- have a winning attitude. They have both the determination and the self-discipline necessary for success. They show initiative. They do things that they have not necessarily been told or asked to do.
- have special qualities. It may be exceptional intelligence and insight, or it may be simply an ethic of hard work and a drive to learn. Other characteristics may be organization, creativity, commitment, or some combination of the aforementioned. These abilities are obviously evident to the professor as well as to the other students in class.

As a result, “A” students make high grades on examinations, quizzes, assignments, and papers—generally the highest in the class. Their work is accurate, thorough, creative, informative, professional, and brings a smile to my face while I am grading.

The “C” Students
- miss class and/or are tardy frequently.
- They lack good time management, scheduling, and prioritizing skills and place other issues before their classes. Occasionally, poor health or constant fatigue renders them as being unable to perform well.
- prepare their work in an apathetic, careless manner, submit it late and/or incomplete.
- are obviously not committed to the course. They may participate but without enthusiasm. Their appearance or language displays boredom.
- vary considerably with regard to ability. The performance of some intelligent ones suggests otherwise. Others may be diligent but simply average in academic ability.

As a result, “C” students receive average or mediocre results on their work. They may have a superficial idea of the material being presented, yet clearly they have not mastered the concepts covered. Similarly, their work is presented in a non-professional, indifferent fashion.

[Part 2 will appear in the April 2004 issue.]

References
For today’s students at the community college setting, learning through applying knowledge and practicing skills is essential. As these students enter the classroom, they are loaded with responsibilities and stress. They are not the cohort of students that were socially, financially, and/or academically prepared to enter a full-time curriculum at a four-year institution or college. Part of the new role of the community college faculty member is to train these students not only to learn the necessary material but also to function appropriately and professionally in the workplace setting. These students may not carry these skills from their home environment or even possess a social support system that is conducive for academic success. Some persons from their environment may even discourage educational achievement. These students need more than a lecture; they need participation in the development of their intellectual selves.

Coming from a background of social work and sociology, I became a teacher with strong experience in group work and a passion for people to work together. My position prior to CCBC was as a licensed clinical social worker at Carroll County General Hospital Outpatient Behavioral Health Services. There my main function during the last two years of employment was to operate groups for persons with acute psychiatric illnesses, such as depression and bipolar disorder. These groups were not always easy to operate; however, the feedback from patients included that they received the greatest help from each other with a professional present to facilitate and ensure organizational smoothness.

When interviewing for my current position, I remember hearing about the importance of collaborative learning and partnerships with students in the classroom to enhance learning and student responsibility in the learning process. I recall being a student myself in classes that were lecture only and even though I learned by listening and taking good notes, I found the approach monotonous. I am also a very good note taker, but not everyone has the ability to write quickly or listen effectively for that type of learning. I also recall in other courses, when the professors gave experiential assignments, I had fun while learning in the process. I have to admit that the most fun assignments in my college experience were role-plays and in-class group assignments. I did not feel that group assignments for homework outside of the classroom were always fair due to inability to find time to meet with other students and not having the authority to penalize group members who did not do their share of the work. The final project counted the same despite how much some members participated, and the professor certainly did not have time to play referee. That is the reason I am such an advocate of in-class group work and experiential learning. The experiential assignments did help me learn in depth and retain the information in my long-term memory. It also helped me learn to model the expected behaviors of a professional in that field of study, mine being social work and sociology.

Another benefit to the group experience was forming friendships with other students. I met persons from different cultures, backgrounds, and ages that I may not have had the chance to get to know while rushing from class to class focusing on all the work to do for the professors. These friendships with other students lasted and really helped me to become a member of the college community, especially because I was a commuter student.

These experiences enhanced my love of education to this day, which led me to graduate school and then to an academic position as my lifetime career. Because education became so important to me and such a part of my life, I feel unnatural to be out of a campus setting. During my employment at CCBC, I have had the opportunity of instructing all of the Human Services courses, as well as Introduction to Sociology, Social Problems, and Group Dynamics. In all of these courses, I have integrated some level of group work and experiential or collaborative learning. In the Group Dynamics psychology course, I have been able to have the class become a group in itself in order to learn and actively practice all of the concepts. Also my integration of group work in the other classes has been successful. Some extra work in the beginning is needed to motivate student participation and to display relevance during the student adjustment out of the traditional lecture only format in the classroom. I have found in my experience that some of the students who have been in school for several years have a little more difficulty than freshman. It eventually evens out though, once students gain trust and notice how much they are learning.

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Student-Centered Learning
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I strongly believe a group/experiential learning method can be incorporated into any course subject even if it has to be planned around important lecture materials. Medical schools have been teaching this way for decades, for example by attending hospital rounds where students share and discuss medical diagnoses and treatments.

H.R. Pollio (1984) found that students in lecture-based college classrooms are not attentive 40 percent of the time. Moreover, while students retain 70 percent in the first ten minutes of a lecture, they retain only 20 percent of the last ten minutes. Students in a lecture-based introductory psychology course knew only 8 percent more than a control group who had never taken the course at all. Two well-known figures in the cooperative education movement, David and Roger Johnson, along with Karl Smith (1991), point out several problems with sustained learning:

- Student attention decreases with each passing minute.
- Lecture-based classrooms appeal only to auditory learners.
- They tend to promote lower level learning of factual information.
- They assume that all students need the same information and at the same pace.
- Students tend not to like lecture-based classrooms.

According to John Holt (1967), learning is enhanced if students are asked to do the following:

- State the information in their own words.
- Give examples of it.
- Recognize it in various guises and circumstances.
- See connections between it and other facts or ideas.
- Make use of it in various ways.
- Foresee some of its consequences.
- State its opposite or converse.

To conclude, I would like to note that there are many ways to incorporate group work and experiential learning with lecture in the classroom. Here are a few methods I have developed:

- Lecture with group work on a chosen topic of learning that is critical.
- Lecture and do group work equally.
- Lecture on every topic incorporating a group work activity with each lecture.
- Form the class into a group for the entire semester using the classroom to form desks/chairs in a circle in applicable courses.
- Let the students lecture. Assign a topic from the text for each student. Have the student present the topic in the beginning of the class, then open discussion to the entire class, and end the class reviewing important points you really want the students to know.

Size is an important determining factor on how you choose to utilize group work. Forming a group for the entire semester can be frustrating for both students and professor with a class size over 20 students. I would recommend using a combined lecture and groups of 4-6 student members in class sizes over 20.

Benefits of using group work in a diverse classroom setting are immediately seen. As the students work together, they find common interests and talk socially. They learn about each other. I have noticed in my Human Service 101 courses that towards the end of the semester, the students plan their class schedules for the next semester with each other and hold end-of-semester parties. In my upper level elective human service courses, the students have become so close from working with each other that they have asked me about forming a human service club, which I will be pursuing this upcoming spring semester as well as acting as the advisor. The beautiful phenomenon is witnessing the transformation of students forming social subgroups within a lecture-based classroom to collaborative learning which brings a diverse group of persons of different ages, religions, races, cultures and gender together.

In conclusion, I do not have data yet to show the factual outcome of this type of learning; however, I have a passion to teach and learn and realize the classroom is not only about my acquired expertise only. I know that I can learn and grow from hearing what my students have to say and that doing so makes me a better professor. I am honored to have the opportunity to share ideas. ■

References

I strongly believe a group/experiential learning method can be incorporated into any course subject even if it has to be planned around important lecture materials.
A Recipe for Teaching a Successful Online Course

Lisa Barnstrom, M.B.A.
Adjunct Instructor
Instructional Design
lbarnstro@accd.edu

Don Lucas, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
Psychology
dlucas@accd.edu

Christa Emig, M.S.
Instructor
Mathematics,
cemig@accd.edu
Northwest Vista College
San Antonio, Texas

Introduction
What does it take to “cook up” a successful Internet course? It is actually a simple recipe composed of four ingredients: Students, Orientation, Professor Involvement, and Student Involvement. This article will examine each of these ingredients to benefit those who are new to teaching online as well as those who are seeking new ways to make their online courses more successful. At Northwest Vista College, we define success as a student earning a grade of C or better in a course. Other colleges have their own definitions of success. No matter what one’s definition, all of them probably have the same goal, namely, facilitating student learning.

Ingredient One: Students
In preparing a meal, the cook must consider who will be eating the meal and adjust the recipe to meet their needs and tastes. Designing a successful online course (the meal) is much the same. The first step is to analyze who is “eating,” namely, the students. Who are the students in the course, what do they know, and why are they taking the course? The cook (the professor) should take into consideration all of the following factors in order to address students’ intrinsic and extrinsic reasons for being in an online course.

- Factor: The reasons students are taking an online course.
- Reasons: It fits into their schedule. They live too far away to get to campus regularly. It was the last course available during registration. They like and do well using the online format.

- Factor: The reasons students are taking this particular online course:
- Reasons: They want to (for whatever reason): Intrinsic. They need to graduate, to keep their financial aid, because Daddy said so: Extrinsic.

- Factor: The academic experiences of the students
- Reasons: They are incoming freshmen.
- They are experienced students, but new/exposed to this subject.
- They are graduate students.
- They are experienced online students.

- Factors: The self-discipline and maturity of the students
- Their time management skills
- Their study skills
- Their self-confidence
- Their motivation
- Gender (females more likely to be successful than males)
- Age (older students [> 24 years of age] more likely to be successful than younger ones)
- Life overload (non-academic obligations)

This information is important because it has a significant impact on how one builds and teaches an online course. For example, at Northwest Vista College, our students are relatively young and inexperienced. Certainly they need much more academic support, structure, and guidance within an online classroom than—say—a graduate student may need. So we build in more structure within the classroom, set more stringent schedules, and offer more extrinsic rewards, like points, than one would need for self-motivated graduate students. Knowing who our students are and understanding what they need help us to set up a successful learning environment that will allow students the opportunity to succeed.

Ingredient Two: Orientation
Orientations are critical to the success of online students, and this success is even more likely if the orientation is face-to-face, as it is at Northwest Vista College. Before the orientation, we have a number of ways to attract the appropriate students to enroll in our online courses. Online learning simply is not suitable for everyone (students and professors alike). As a community college, we are unable officially to restrict students from an online course, so we rely on the following self-elimination methods:

- Questionnaires that measure whether or not a student is a good candidate for online learning
- Realistic previews of what to expect in an online course—e.g., making sure students know that online courses generally require more reading and writing than on-campus equivalents
- Activities that help students determine if their personal learning styles are suitable for online learning
- Realistic advising before students enroll in a course

Another way we attempt to attract appropriate students is to require a minimum of twelve college credit hours. Continued on pg. 9........
A Successful Online Course
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Though this requirement may close the door to some students, we consider this restriction a way to reduce attrition.

Our own experiences have shown that students who attend a face-to-face orientation are more successful because they see their professor and peers. This type of orientation builds a sense of community, trust, and openness; helps students understand that the traditional methods of student-teacher communication—visiting the professor on campus or making a phone call—can complement the electronic methods of email and instant messenger of the virtual classroom; and helps students perceive the experience as being real.

Face-to-face orientation also allows the professor to assess nonverbal levels of understanding of course expectations and requirements and to introduce the technology with hands-on experience. In this scenario, students can work through the inevitable techno-glitches, like addressing password problems, practicing key skills, sampling the course, and identifying areas for improvement.

We do many introductions, icebreakers, and other community-building activities as part of the orientation. By concentrating on those activities one cannot do online, professor and students come to know each other and identify commonalities—all of which build a sense of community. The following are a few of the issues that we discuss during orientation:

- The syllabus, philosophy, and professor’s expectations
- Characteristics of successful online students, namely, time management skills, the ability to prioritize, self-discipline, self-motivation, study skills, and a willingness to ask for assistance.

- Active learning as essential to online courses
- The analogy of online courses to classroom courses
- Introduction of course content

**Ingredient Three: Professor Involvement**

A professor who is accustomed to teaching a classroom course will find involvement in an online classroom significantly different. One has to work harder to overcome the lack of nonverbal feedback and to maintain contact with students. Perhaps the most difficult feature is anticipating and planning for every question and problem. The most common complaint of first-time online professors is that the process is too time consuming. But the process can be otherwise if one designs an effective online course based on the features presented above and teaches it proactively. The following guidelines will help the professor be proactive:

- Teach a course online that one has already taught in the physical classroom.
- Minimize unnecessary student-to-professor interactions.
- Empower students to help each other through base groups/cohorts.
- Allow students access to their grades online.
- Create specific topic areas on the bulletin board to encourage discussions and avoid (or minimize) information overload.
- Create a grading rubric for every assignment, share it with students, and confirm they understand it.
- Give students online access to as many self-help resources as possible and advise them on their proper use, for example, technical “how-tos,” practice exams, homework solutions and/or alternate problems, websites on content, study skills, time management skills, stress management, motivation.
- Require students to check in weekly with professor and/or student cohort for the purpose of committing themselves to progress, talking about their completed work and their plans for the upcoming week.
- Be redundant on assignment due dates by placing the dates in at least two different places—the classroom, the bulletin boards, the calendar, the assignment list/syllabus, and email.

The role of the professor in an online class is more the “Information Facilitator” and less the “Information Giver.” Research and experience have shown that “lecturing” alone online is relatively ineffective. The following are some of the responsibilities of an online professor:

- Clarifying content
- Motivating participation
- Recognizing contributions
- Discouraging procrastination
- Raising questions
- Stimulating problem solving
- Summarizing and weaving together concepts
- Providing guidance and focus

Creating a successful online course is certainly more work comprehensive up front. But, if this work is done correctly, then the workload during the semester is equal to or even less than the workload in a compatible traditional course and has the professor simply learning with his/her students.

**Ingredient Four: Student Involvement**

Just as there is a need for professor involvement, so is there one for students, though they may not think so. Not all students are used to being actively involved in their own learning, so getting
A Successful Online Course

Introduction

The typical college professor shows up on the first day of class with a syllabus. Often, this syllabus includes a daily schedule or calendar for the course. Many professors are so organized that they can tell you what topics they will be covering on any given day of the course. This organization, in and of itself, is not bad. As a matter of fact, many people would commend the professor for such precise organizational skills.

Purpose

However, the purpose of this brief article is to share an idea that will open the door to some real learning to occur in those courses that are so well planned. If faculty are willing to give up just five to six minutes of each class, they may make their course so much more meaningful to students. After all, that is what higher learning is about—giving students the chance to learn.

Method

On the first day the class meets, provide the students with a 3 x 5 index card. On this card, ask the students to write questions they would like answered about ways the course relates to their future professions. Ask them to write the questions that are never answered in their coursework. For example, in my courses for future teachers, I have had questions about how to interview effectively, how to deal with irate parents, how to handle

Conclusion

Creating a successful online course is an art, just like cooking. It is not difficult to feed people, but to prepare a meal to meet their needs and tastes is quite a different story. Creating an online class is fairly easy; the art comes in designing a course to help students succeed. By determining the most suitable students for online courses, by conducting meaningful on-campus orientations, by spending quality time planning the course, and by truly involving students in the course, the professor can create an online learning experience that genuinely helps students succeed.

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The Question of the Day

Dr. Dennis M. Docheff
Associate Professor of Physical Education
Central Missouri State University
Warrensburg, Missouri
docheff@cmsu1.cmsu.edu

Introduction

The typical college professor shows up on the first day of class with a syllabus. Often, this syllabus includes a daily schedule or calendar for the course. Many professors are so organized that they can tell you what topics they will be covering on any given day of the course. This organization, in and of itself, is not bad. As a matter of fact, many people would commend the professor for such precise organizational skills.

Purpose

However, the purpose of this brief article is to share an idea that will open the door to some real learning to occur in those courses that are so well planned. If faculty are willing to give up just five to six minutes of each class, they may make their course so much more meaningful to students. After all, that is what higher learning is about—giving students the chance to learn.

Method

On the first day the class meets, provide the students with a 3 x 5 index card. On this card, ask the students to write questions they would like answered about ways the course relates to their future professions. Ask them to write the questions that are never answered in their coursework. For example, in my courses for future teachers, I have had questions about how to interview effectively, how to deal with irate parents, how to handle

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teachers that are out-of-date, how to best motivate students, how to handle special discipline problems, and more.

I begin each of the classes with a question of the day. Usually, I put the class into small groups (two, three or four), and the students are given an opportunity to respond to the question. Then, they share some of their responses with the class. Then, if appropriate, I share my two cents worth. Sometimes I do not have the best answer to the question. And that is okay. More appropriate is that students learn that one best answer for some questions is not always possible.

Sometimes we do not discuss the responses as a class. After the small group interaction, we may proceed to the day’s lesson. My decision to skip the responses to the class may depend on the feel that I receive as I roam the class, listening to the small group discussions, or on the relevance of the question to the course. That being said, I try to include each question posed by the students given on the 3 x 5 card sometime through the course because students have the right to have their questions asked. Sometimes I give the class a question as a precursor to the day’s lesson material.

**Results**

When I first used this technique, I expected to spend anywhere from three to five minutes on the question. What I have found is that on some days the discussion can last up to ten to fifteen minutes. And sometimes those fifteen minutes are the best fifteen minutes of the class because we are discussing issues that students really care about. These issues become their curriculum in the course I have prepared.

Therefore, the suggestion here is that professors open up their syllabus schedule in order to allow students to ask the questions that may never be answered. This method may help your course to develop lifelong learning skills—as students need to ask questions throughout their lives. In addition, it allows the students to practice communicating their views in a clear and logical way. Often, some of the simplest questions are the most difficult to answer because students have never been given the opportunity to answer them. In addition, the small group discussions provide an avenue for students to develop leadership skills, for this method allows them to volunteer to lead the discourse. Finally, this method becomes a way of allowing students to bond together as a class through team building.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, college professors should be on the cutting edge of learning. The source of some of the most important learning can come from questions posed by our students. Giving students the opportunity to ask questions, any question relevant to the course (or profession associated with the course) provides an avenue toward student ownership of a portion of the course. In addition, this method empowers students to ask more questions during the rest of the course because they feel that their questions are being heard and answered. Finally, it models a good teaching method for those students who will someday fill the role of teacher, whether it be in school or business.

The challenge is being laid out before college professors to give up a little of their class time to answer questions that matter to students. It is just possible that professors will profess less and teach more. Good luck. ■
Meet the Authors

**Susan M. Fredricks** received her Ph.D. in Communication Studies from the University of Kansas and her M.A. degree in Corporate and Public Communications from Seton Hall University. Currently, Susan is an assistant professor at Penn State University—Delaware County in the Communication Arts and Sciences program. Her research includes pedagogical topics related to public speaking courses, business and organizational communication, international studies, and leadership development. She has recently published “Creating and Maintaining Networks Among Leaders: An Exploratory Case Study of Two Leadership Training Programs” in the Summer 2003 issue of the *Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies* and “Karaoke in Public Speaking: Enhancing Nonverbal Delivery Skills” in the February, 2003 issue of *The Successful Professor™*.

**Dr. Andrea Hornett** has 20+ years experience in business and teaches business strategy and management at Penn State’s Delaware County campus. Her research partnership with Dr. Fredricks developed because they could not resist analyzing the spate of scandals in accounting and finance. She plans to continue to consider issues of ethics and leadership, expanding on her research agenda on virtual organizations.

**J. Dirk Nelson**, Ph.D., is currently Chair of the Department of Health and Human Performance at Central Missouri State University. His master’s and doctorate degrees are from the University of Kansas, and he received a baccalaureate from Montana State University—Bozeman. Throughout his fifteen years in higher education, Dr. Nelson has taught a variety of courses including kinesiology, physiology of exercise, nutrition, wellness, and motor learning. Administratively, he has been responsible for accreditation and curricular review, faculty development, student advising and retention, as well as honors programs.

**Marguerite Falcon** has been employed at the Community College of Baltimore County—Catonsville since 2001. She earned her bachelor’s degree in both social work and sociology from the University of Maryland, Baltimore County in 1994. She obtained a master’s degree in social work from the University of Maryland at Baltimore in 1996. Her current position is Human Services Program Coordinator and Assistant Professor. In addition to coordinating and teaching the human services courses, she teaches psychology and sociology courses, including Psychology of Group Dynamics. Professor Falcon completed a graduate level course in multimedia design at the Johns Hopkins University last year and plans on continuing earning credits towards a Ph.D.

**Lisa Barnstrom**, M.B.A., is an instructional designer and an adjunct instructor at Northwest Vista College in San Antonio, Texas. She has a B.S. in Organizational Communication, and her M.B.A. is in International Management. She has over a dozen years of experience designing instructional material for teaching, training, and performance improvement in the corporate and academic worlds.
Don Lucas, Ph.D., is an assistant professor of psychology at Northwest Vista College. He has been teaching since 1989, and has been presenting and publishing his research on teaching since 1994. He has presented at the International Conference on Teaching & Leadership Excellence, Society for Neuroscience, Association for Research in Vision & Ophthalmology, and the Primary Health Care Providers Research convention. Some of his more recent work has been focused on critical thinking and learning on the Internet.

Christa Emig, M.S., has been a tenure-track math instructor at Northwest Vista College for four years, and has been teaching on the Internet for three years. She has spent two years as Interim Director of Instructional Technology, with distance learning being one area of responsibility. Her current interest is developing effective hybrid classes.

Dr. Dennis Docheff has been an educator for twenty-five years. Though his career has been as an elementary classroom school teacher, he also teaches middle school, high school, and university levels. A highlight in his career was an appointment to the United States Military Academy at West Point, where he taught as a civilian instructor for three years. Currently, Dr. Docheff teaches at Central Missouri State University. His areas of expertise include teaching effectiveness, administration, and coaching education. Docheff has published over 80 articles and given over 100 professional presentations in physical education and sport.