

The Teaching Professor Conference
May 19-21, 2006
Nashville, Tennessee.
Report
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I joined other EIU faculty in attending the 3rd annual Teaching Professor Conference in Nashville, TN on May 19-21, 2006. Impressively, all conference participants held diverse positions within academe: staff, faculty and administrators. Also impressive was the mix of institutions represented, which ranged from large R-1's, to mid-sized universities and small colleges. The diversity of participants and their parent institutions facilitated insightful discussion, and the use of a conference-wide case study as a jumping off point for discussion was a technique that I had not experienced before (please see link for case study handout "A Conversation About Student Ratings). Also, specific times were set aside to allow for discussion, which is an atypical experience for me (e.g. roundtable discussion times and topics were integrated into the conference schedule.)

One of the most helpful and interesting presentations was the keynote address by Kenneth Bain. Ken has recently accepted an appointment at Montclair State University as the Vice Provost for Instruction and Director of the Teaching and Learning Resource Center, and is the author of a new book entitled "What the Best College Teachers Do." He spoke about the qualities of the most effective college professors. This work involved careful study of some 63 faculty nationwide and the gist is Bain and colleagues found central qualities which accounted for best teaching practices. Bain pointed out that all excellent teaching faculty took care to understand human learning, and hold as a fundamental belief that teaching matters.

Bain mentioned that a primary goal of higher education is to build new paradigms for learners. He says that in order to build new paradigms three conditions must be met: 1) create an expectation of failure (introduce a situation where the existing mental model does not work), 2) the learner must care that their paradigm did not work; in order to learn deeply, the learner must care deeply, 3) the teacher must provide the learner with emotional support when confronting evidence which questions what they know.

Bain further suggested that intrinsic rewards are really only those which truly stimulate deep learning or deep understanding. Bain reminded us that when extrinsic rewards are involved, subjects feel a loss of the locus of control, or manipulated. He suggests that the best professors are those that ask deep questions for which there is an

intrinsic interest in simply answering the question. Bain quoted John Dewey, “We do not learn from learning, but learn from thinking about learning.” Further, Bain pointed out that to learn is to construct a sense of reality, not “absorbing” ideas.

Some Poster Session Highlights included:

1) EIU’s own Melinda Mueller and Barbara L. Poole’s “Service Learning from Scratch: Developing a Service Learning Component in a Rural University Setting” (see link to hand-out.). Mueller and Poole introduced the development of a service learning initiative in the Department of Political Science, at EIU. Although this program is in its trial phase (begun in Sp 2006), Mueller and Poole report that 74% of participants would continue to work with the same (or similar) agency in future employment. Mueller and Poole also included a valuable synopsis of positive outcomes and future challenges that such a program faces.

2) H.H. Schiffrin’s “Appreciative Inquiry in Classroom” was used in an introductory statistics course (see link to hand out). Appreciative Inquiry (AI) uses four steps called the 4 D’s: **D**iscover = identify strengths to bring to current problem, **D**ream = imagine the perfect resolution of the current problem, **D**esign = designate the steps needed to attain the resolution outlined in the previous step, and **D**estiny = recognize success. To use AI the course content is introduced according to the 4 D format. Schiffrin compared a traditional method of delivery for introductory statistics courses with AI and found student evaluation contained more positive comments addressing the professor’s knowledge, organization and efforts to assist students in understanding the materials. The positive comments also addressed student’s experience of reduction in anxiety about the topic of statistics.

3) Miller and Moores’ “Change For a Reason: The Only Way to Engage Experienced Faculty in the “Growth” Process” (see link to hand out). Miller and Moores’ presentation countered many myths about senior faculty, provided starting points for discussion about evaluation, and acknowledged contributions by senior faculty, as well as ways to access their talents to enrich program offerings.

Some Session Highlights:

1) Weimer & Tanner’s “An Editor Speaks on Pedagogical Scholarship” was a discussion concerning publication of scholarly work on teaching. Tanner, the editor of “Journal of Nursing Education” spoke about her role as editor, and the type of manuscripts which are publishable versus those which are ultimately rejected. Tanner and Weimer took questions from participants about how to prepare successful manuscripts on the scholarship of teaching in subject discipline journals or more broadly based pedagogical journals.

2) Sciarretta's "Perspectives on Sharing: the Fine Art of Scholarly Thinking" was geared toward exploration and empowerment of student's thought & problem solving processes, and reflection about the mechanics of thinking and solving problems (see link to hand out.). Sciarretta introduced the 3 dimensional flashcard system and compared information a student might include in a typical 2 dimensional flashcard with that of the 3-D approach. Sciarretta suggests the addition of evaluation (why is this term important), application (what can be done with this term) and association (what other information is connected to the term). The part of this workshop that still makes me laugh: I learned how to balance 12 – 16d in. nails on the head of one 16d nail stuck in the center of a 3 1/2 in. square piece of wood. No, it is not a trick; and if I can do it, then anyone can....(see link to hand out to see if you can solve ☺).

3) Larry Braskamp's "To Rate or Not to Rate: The Utility of Student Ratings of Teachers and Their Work" and his additional session, "To Rate or Not to Rate: A more in Depth Discussion," Braskamp's first session focused on his early research (ca 1970's ?) concerning student evaluations and ways which student evaluations are useful and ways which student evaluations can be misunderstood and misused. While the initial session was marred (in my estimation) by the format chosen to present Braskamp's ideas (he and a host sat on stage and chatted in an interview format, which I found taxing to follow), some of the findings of Braskamp's research suggest that student perspectives can be utilized in assessing communication skills by professors, respect accorded to students, morality & fairness in the classroom, etc. (see link to hand out). Braskamp elaborated on many of these themes in his later session (see link to hand-out) in which he shared his perspectives on student evaluations as a Professor, Department Chair and Dean. I thought most telling was the approach he described as an administrator, where he was not particularly interested in a number per se, but in the development of faculty (e.g. what does the faculty member plan to do with his or her approach to this course?) and the idea of assessment as "to share and care" (a model which he envisions as a "sitting beside", or mentoring process.)

In sum, the 2006 Teaching Professor was an inspirational, worthwhile glimpse into the scholarship of college teaching. I would recommend faculty consider attending this conference (2007 is Atlanta, Georgia) and consider presenting your work or approaches to learning, evaluation or program innovation in your discipline. You are welcome to email me (ahfritz@eiu.edu) with specific questions.

Presentation Handouts: [Click Here](#)