TEACHING, TECHNOLOGY, AND SUPPORT IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM: A GUIDE FOR NEW COMMUNITY COLLEGE TEACHERS

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Beginning community college faculties have many responsibilities associated with teaching. Technology can alter and enhance some of the traditional expectations for teaching and learning. New professionals will benefit by becoming familiar with existing and new technology and by recognizing the college mechanisms and support systems available to them including mentors, faculty, and staff.

Beginning teachers will benefit by becoming aware of their teaching responsibilities, the requirements and support mechanisms of the college and department, and associated technology issues. Technology integration and the ability to effectively use and model computer-based tools will continue to be important issues among successful academicians in the twenty-first century (Gonzales & Thompson, 1998). This paper focuses on selected areas that are important to new community college teachers. Teaching is given preeminence because of its importance, but technology and other forms of support are included because they add to the growth and development of new community college professionals.

TEACHING

Teaching responsibilities dominate the time of a beginning teacher. Since the era of Plato and Aristotle, teaching has been attempted—often through mentorships, role modeling, trial-and-error, and apprenticeships. Effective teaching involves setting and attempting to
reach goals; bridging the gap between theory and practice; using listening and other effective communication skills; and utilizing prior experiences and reiteration (Pinnegar, 1997; Sanford, 1999). If the beginning teacher’s instruction is to be effective, it will be learner-centered, organized, and planned; instructors assume the role of mentors, coaches, and motivators in the learning process. Effective teachers sequence content; they begin with prerequisite skills and progress to applications of theory and demonstrations of students’ mental models of the subject matter. Successful instructors are flexible; they are aware of student’s concerns and incomplete knowledge, and they redirect questions, reword, and restructure content to match the needs of individual learners. Incidental learning, humor, hands-on experiences, and connections between current information and newly forming knowledge are often found in the classrooms of good instructors.

Other traits beginning teachers add to their personal teaching repertoire include active student participation, fair evaluation procedures, respect for student rights and needs, and activities for different learning styles (logical/deductive, verbal/visual, visual/kinesthetic). Learners’ retention abilities are directly related to levels of active participation; when they have opportunities to explore and experiment, rather than just hear or see text, concepts and constructs become familiar and adaptable. In addition to the development of knowledge constructs, students also build and share ideas about instructors. These perceptions can affect teaching loads by either building classes to capacity or causing course cancellations due to low enrollments. Successful teachers strive to build positive rapport with learners and gain reputations of fairness and knowledge of their disciplines. Instructors are to follow procedures that respect students’ individuality, their diversity, and their unique skills and talents (Kuforiji, 1998; Parsons, 1998). Diversity in the classroom requires different types of content-based activities crafted to match dissimilar learners. Examples of activities might include role-playing, individual projects, group projects, computer-based learning activities, simulations, case studies, thought questions, analogies, and cultural exchanges, as well as mini-lectures and lectures. In an attempt to help new teachers, several additional items are noted that are related to the instructional environment and good teaching practice.

**Understand Obligations and Workloads**

Beginning teachers must become aware of the teaching load and the average number of students per class. They also must find out about
student advising tasks, mentorship of students, and weekly office hours and ask about community college expectations. These factors will vary depending on departmental requirements, the institution’s focus, and location. Initially, beginning teachers should consider limiting their personal participation in time-consuming outside activities. The hours of involvement in some tasks could be used to develop class materials (Golde, 1999).

**Prepare for the First Class**

Many hours are involved in preparing the learning environment for the first day of class. Students should have all requirements and important criteria for the duration of the course. These may include course syllabi, course schedules, assignments, grading criteria, classroom procedures and policies, textbook titles, required reading lists, inventories of supplemental materials, examination dates, project requirements, and timelines.

Individual lesson plans will reflect the date this information was made available to the class and the days and dates of all scheduled assignments, exams, projects, and other expectations. Following outlined procedures will assist by lowering conflicts while increasing understanding between students and teachers.

**Build Teaching Skills and Information**

Beginning teachers should teach from experience and knowledge and should read to stay abreast of changes in fields of specialization and interest. Using current information as often as possible makes learning more relevant and is an asset when teachers advise students about career paths, current trends, and special projects.

Additionally, beginning teachers need the names and locations of exemplary teachers in the department and college so they can contact these individuals, interview them for pointers, ask to observe their class sessions, review their instructional materials, and seek to work with them on creative projects. Also, exemplary teachers can be invited to observe the new teacher’s classes and provide advice and recommendations to improve methods, classroom activities, and procedures, ideally through written documentation of their perceptions. Participation in teaching seminars, implementation of newer technologies, and other efforts to improve instruction may be beneficial, especially to beginning teachers.
Utilize Technology to Strengthen Teaching and Aid Teachers

Technology, a useful tool for new teachers, is not a panacea for poor, ineffective teaching. It cannot cure classroom maladies and single-handedly promote student learning. However, technology integrated within the curriculum and coupled with good teaching practice can produce positive gains in student motivation, retention, attitude, and learning (Coughlin, 1999; Gunter, Gunter, & Wiens, 1998; Sherry, 1997; Smith, Whiteley, & Smith, 1999). Technology in instruction implies computerized tools, hardware, and application-oriented software. This was not always the case, but as the field of Instructional Technology grew, computers became the predominate way to deliver, package, and develop audio-visual products, multimedia presentations, visual materials, and end-user products. Internet access, distance learning capabilities, and applications software are tools for the new millennium. They are often used to make the educational environment more relevant, rich, and rewarding.

The Internet

This popular and pervasive tool in educational settings was developed to allow a few research sites to continue communication during a national disaster. “The Net” consists of four major parts: Gopher, which is no longer updated or regularly used; World Wide Web (WWW), the most popular resource and which is synonymous with the Internet; File Transfer Protocol (FTP) for uploading and downloading files; and Telnet, for accessing remote computer systems. The Web, as it is commonly called, now contains millions of computers throughout the world linked by a high-speed backbone. This tool has many implications for education. It permits users to access information that would be difficult or impossible to physically obtain; allows users to select relevant information; presents current, real-time data; and enables file sharing. Students can visit the Louvre in Paris, use the Library of Congress, view current satellite data of weather patterns, and contact domain experts. Encyclopedias, dictionaries, thesauruses, user manuals, newspapers, and a host of other current references can be obtained and used by those with an Internet connection. Using the Internet can enhance student knowledge, provide motivation, make students feel connected to real-world events, and change attitudes about the educational applications of the Internet.

Nevertheless, like any other medium, the Internet must be appropriately used; it has certain barriers to successful integration and application. Some of these include difficulty locating relevant sources;
incomplete and inconsistent Web page designs; a lack of structure in the presentation of information; poor quality of some published information; and other cultural, technical, and administrative issues (Maddux, 1998). Once needed information is located, students must cite the Internet-based source (Barnett, 1999). There are dangers inherent in citing information that has not been validated and using files without scanning for worms and viruses.

**Distance Learning**

This medium provides opportunities for students to gain knowledge through satellite courses, interactive television, video-based conferencing, Internet-based discussion groups and chats, and Web-based course content rather than face-to-face contact. Remote technology used to encourage learning has promoted the concept of a “wallless classroom” environment. Students explore, have personal exchanges, relate new material, study relationships, integrate examples, and interact with video, multimedia, or Web-based instruction to accomplish academic goals (Academic Senate for California Community Colleges, Sacramento, 1999).

Distance learning situations can be convenient and effective if they are learner-centered, increase instructor-student contacts, and stimulate collaboration among users by encouraging exchanges of ideas. These exchanges may promote and enhance positive interactive learning environments. Ongoing technical support is essential for effective distance learning (Abou Khaled, Pettenati, Vanoirbeek, & Coray, 1998; Academic Senate for California Community Colleges, Sacramento, 1999).

Beginning community college teachers are encouraged to examine and incorporate distance-learning activities (i.e., e-mail-based exchanges, Internet-based discussion groups, chat rooms, guided or threaded debates, Web-based course content, and frequently asked questions). These activities improve the instructional environment in a number of ways. They can stimulate collaboration among students, increase student-instructor interactions, allow learners to conveniently access course material, and assist instructors with course evaluation and student assessment data.

**Application Software**

Several forms of technology can be used to produce documents that support teaching experiences. Spreadsheet software is useful in preparing graphs that visually reflect student evaluation trends, average
teaching performance, and describe the new instructor’s teaching load responsibilities.

Word processing and desktop publishing software can be used to create portfolios that describe instructional methods, best teaching practices, student projects, and classroom innovations implemented by faculty. Samples of student projects, student handouts, and lectures created with presentation software are all excellent items to include in a portfolio. Copies of e-mail messages to students and discussion threads can reflect the level of student involvement, student-teacher interaction, and the types of student issues addressed. Copies of material posted on a classroom Web site might be used to demonstrate a commitment to integrating technology within the classroom, connectivity, and a willingness to provide student access to course materials.

New community college teachers will find that application software is flexible, user-friendly, and easily obtained. These general tools can produce high-quality instructional materials, presentations, and Web sites. Integrating these into educational environments will be important instructional support aids in this millennium. Community colleges may have site licenses with major vendors that allow personnel to obtain copies of software at reduced prices. Contact the campus bookstore(s); director of technology; departmental assistant; and campus computing center for titles, prices, availability, and licensing information. Several packages include electronic communication tools; Web site development titles; software suites which contain word processing, spreadsheet, database, and mail packages; statistical analysis programs; and graphics software (Bird, 1998; Leh, 1998). New teachers can decide which specific titles and brands match their personal needs based on contact with vendors, operational environment, and product availability.

Technology can aid new teachers in class preparations, content delivery, grading, recording of scores, and other areas. However, teaching responsibilities are broad in scope and become more time consuming as class sizes grow.

COMMUNITY COLLEGE AND DEPARTMENTAL SUPPORTS

New community college teachers need to be aware of the support at the college and departmental levels to facilitate their activities. Three forms of support, including student assistance, mentoring, and physical environment, are often handled at the departmental level. The fourth, finances, might involve the department and college as assistance is requested for travel, information about conferences and college activities, and student recruitment programs.
As a new hire, every friend and comrade is important. Be courteous and kind to staff, custodians, secretaries, and administrative assistants. These individuals can be supportive allies; they usually know the major players, the access codes, the necessary forms, and the office politics. Another form of administrative support is student assistants or student workers. Find out how to gain access to the department’s pool of student help. Determine the tasks they can complete (i.e., grading, preparing instruction, delivering instruction, copying, getting signatures, delivering mail, finding literary material, ordering textbooks, scheduling appointments, etc.). Use the established procedures for scheduling and obtaining this assistance. If formal procedures must be followed, adhere to office protocol to secure these resources.

New faculties need the support of the department and college when seeking money for travel and finances for instructional activities, recruitment, and enhancement projects. It is worthwhile to contact these offices to determine whether supplemental monies are available for specific projects that further the mission of the college and assist faculty with the accomplishment of professional goals.

**Mentoring**

The mentor and mentee relationship can be a priceless form of support for new faculty; it can help new faculty adapt, promote professional and personal growth and success, increase productivity, enhance collegial relationships and cooperation, provide networking opportunities, decrease stress, and improve faculty retention (Dunn & Moody, 1995; Luna & Cullen, 1995; Mihkelson, 1997). Mentoring approaches can be formal, informal, or a combination of both. Formal structures help less experienced faculty acquire skills and knowledge that familiarize them with the institution, its rule structures, governance, and operational protocols. Informal programs provide a sense of well-being and psychological safety; they emphasize nurturing, emotional development, advice, and guidance. Combination approaches holistically deal with the needs of individual faculty. As a whole, mentoring helps new faculty achieve professional goals, set priorities, develop teaching strategies, and balance the duties of the position. These programs are successful when mentors are knowledgeable and have training that allows them to understand, interpret, and actively meet the needs of mentees (Tauer, 1996). Mentors and mentees need to understand their respective roles and missions, desire the relationship, respect each other’s individuality, and work in an equitable and collaborative manner.
A departmental mentor is an excellent idea for beginning teachers, but often this depends on personality, time constraints of senior faculty, and desirability. If the department’s senior teachers are unable or unwilling to serve as mentors, junior faculty members might seek mentors through college faculty development programs or formal mentoring programs sponsored by the college.

Physical Environment

Office space, laboratories, equipment, and associated resources may either support or hinder teaching. The physical environment is a bonus when it has a great deal of needed tools and technical support. Equipment might include: desktop computers with Internet access; distance learning capabilities; access to computer laboratories; digital cameras; printers; copiers; and telephones with voice mail. A technical support staff is essential for updating equipment, keeping computers functional, helping faculty use hardware and software, and handling associated problems and technical issues. New faculty members need opportunities to gain technical support and obtain hardware and software that supports instruction at minimal or no cost.

SERVICE

Initially, new community college teachers are encouraged to limit the amount of service they perform (Golde, 1999). Service is rewarding because of the exposure and networking opportunities, but it can interfere with the amount of time that new instructors have for preparing class activities, experimenting with technology, and becoming acclimated to the politics and procedures of a department.

Service involvement in professional organizations can help new faculty members make important contacts that may be useful when seeking information, securing recommendation letters for new positions, and serving as coauthors for presentations. These professional peers can enrich the lives of new teachers and may serve as benefactors throughout their careers.

ETHICS

Principled and morally correct practices are to be used in all interpersonal relationships, in preparing teaching units and lessons plans, in conferences, in class presentations, and in other areas of professional and personal life. Avoid plagiarism and violations of copyright laws. Give credit where credit is due, and cite data and text sources on
handouts, transparencies, PowerPoint presentations, and other visual materials.

CONCLUSION

In addition to teaching, new community college teachers need to become familiar with technology and how it contributes to their welfare, the students’ education, and the mission of the institution. Seeking the support of mentors and the backing of others within and outside the immediate work environment can be helpful to new professionals.

REFERENCES


