

WORKSHOP REFLECTION

Title of the workshop: Introduction to Teaching

Purpose statement: The Introduction to Teaching workshop is designed to introduce participants to the fundamentals of effective teaching and learning in the university classroom through exploration, application, and reflection. This workshop is designed to provide basic information about a variety of teaching topics and to offer “best practices” for enhancing teaching and learning in the university classroom.

Lead presenter: Dr. Barbi Honeycutt

Date: January 13, 2012

Location: Talley Student Center Room 3118

Number of people attending the workshop: 50

Reflection (e.g. what you’ve taken from the workshop, how you will incorporate what you’ve learned in your teaching, how you feel your teaching can be improved given information shared in the workshop, etc.):

When focusing on how to improve as an instructor, one needs to take a step back and look at the big picture before delving into specific issues that one faces throughout the teaching journey. A simple introduction to teaching lays out the broader concepts to take into account such as establishing a learning environment, effective lesson planning, and assessing the classroom. With these concepts, there is no cookie cutter technique that can be applied to every situation. Being a dynamic instructor about the direction your course will be taught is an invaluable trait that enhances the enjoyment of teaching as well as how effective students will understand the material.

The establishment of a learning environment occurs on the first day of class where the tone for the course begins to form. Borrowing from Machiavelli, the initial tone should be stern and rigid for the first week or so. After the first week, one should adjust the tone to become as relaxed as the particular class will allow. This ensures that you maintain a degree of power over students in order to cover material at the desired pace. If one starts a course out in a relaxed manner, then a big risk is that the instructor is inviting students to walk all over the instructor. It is easier to transition from a stern to a relaxed atmosphere than from relaxed to stern.

Every course has pertinent topics that must be covered as well as peripheral topics that can help in understanding the material but is not necessary. Knowing what these topics are is imperative to formulating an effective lesson plan. The most effective strategy that I learned at this workshop was to have a dynamic lesson plan for each class. When constructing notes for a class, one should start out with a skeleton of the absolutely necessary topics that should be covered. These are the points that can lead the instructor to either delve into the topic at a higher level, take a step back and explain the topic in a different fashion, or recognize the students would not benefit from further discussion of the topic and so you should move on to the major point. The overarching theme is to present the

lecture as a skeleton where gaining feedback during the lecture will influence the instructor to flesh out other aspects but potentially not others. The instructor should always be prepared to flesh out the entire topic, but this does not mean very detail will be presented.

Throughout an entire lecture during class, there should always be a smooth transition between points and topics. If one cannot make a cogent transition then one has made a mistake, material should not be presented in a herky jerky fashion. Especially in macroeconomics, the material should flow like a novel or movie in order to better understand the field of macroeconomics. If macroeconomics is presented in a sliced up perspective where one day GDP is presented and the next long-term growth without any indication that the two concepts are connected, then one cannot expect students to really understand the field. The best one could hope for from this manner is for the students to memorize and regurgitate information presented in class or read in the textbook.

From this workshop, I reaffirmed my belief in some of my instructor traits as effective traits. Ability to use humor throughout the course, using the Socratic method in engaging students, and being dynamic in what material to cover for each class. I also recognized that I should focus on trying different techniques in order to gauge the tone for each class. Finding ways to keep students engaged will help focus the material on important and interesting topics to the students. This becomes a two-way street; with students engaged I am more likely to be enthusiastic about the material I cover. The more enthusiastic I am as an instructor, the more likely students are to be engaged. Clearly, the tone of the class as well as the material are major factors to creating a learning environment that is conducive to learning.