

# Relative to Teaching...

University of Arkansas

February 2003

## How do you deal with the details of teaching?

*An unscientific test to assess your teaching style with comments from the Co-Directors:*

1. **It is the first day of class. Do you**
  - a. Distribute the syllabus and dismiss class.
  - b. Tell jokes and funny stories that will build rapport with the students.
  - c. Tell students to prepare to study hard because this is a complex and difficult subject.
  - d. Give students examples of how useful the course content will be to them in the future.
2. **It is still the first day of class. Do you**
  - a. Write the assignment for the next class period on the board.
  - b. Distribute your six-page syllabus and announce a quiz over its content at the next class meeting.
  - c. Read your sixteen-page syllabus aloud to the students. It contains important information they need to know for the semester.
  - d. E-mail students before the first day of class telling them where to find a copy of your syllabus on Blackboard, WebCT, departmental homepage, or other electronic medium.
3. **It is the first class meeting after a test. Do you**
  - a. Return the graded tests and continue immediately with the day's lecture, collecting the tests at the end of the class so that questions can be used later.
  - b. Return the graded tests and go over each question and answer in detail.
  - c. Promise to return the graded tests after the upcoming deadline for a research paper submission date.
  - d. Return the graded tests and take time to answer any student questions.
4. **Students complain that a test question was unclear. Do you**
  - a. Dismiss student complaints since all students were treated the same in the grading.
  - b. Throw out the question. If so many students were confused, it must be a bad question.
  - c. Dismiss the student complaints because the question came straight from the text's test bank.
  - d. Reread the question in light of the student complaints to judge the clarity of the question and decide if some adjustment is needed.
5. **A student comes to your office to discuss his grade on a test. Do you**
  - a. Tell him that you have already recorded his test grade and grades are not negotiable.
  - b. Listen to his complaints and personal problems with a sympathetic ear and allow him to do an additional assignment for extra credit.
  - c. Tell the student your graduate assistant graded the tests and any questions about the test should be directed to her.
  - d. Go over the test with the student, pointing out his errors and giving him suggestions for improving his study methods for the next test.
6. **You enter the classroom after Spring Break. Do you**
  - a. Tell students, "Boy, I really didn't want to come back after the break, but I had to since I am not independently wealthy."
  - b. Plan something easy for the class period since students won't be prepared after the break.
  - c. Tell students, "I worked 12 hours a day during the break on a very important research project, so don't expect too much today."
  - d. Greet students personally and ask briefly about their break and then continue with the day's assignment.
7. **Students on the back row of the class are talking. Do you**
  - a. Throw an eraser at the students to get their attention.
  - b. Ignore them and talk louder.
  - c. Call on one of the offending students to answer a question.
  - d. Move toward the offending students as you continue your lecture.
8. **A student's e-mail states she missed the day's quiz because she was up all night vomiting and went to the health center instead of coming to class. She wants to schedule a time for a make-up. Do you**
  - a. Tell her she needs to take better care of herself in the future.
  - b. Tell her that she can take the quiz whenever she feels ready.

*Continued on next page*

- c. Tell her you do not give make-up quizzes, but she can drop one quiz.
  - d. Tell her that she can make it up within the week if she brings a note from the health service.
- 9. A student paper appears to have been written by someone with much greater ability and knowledge than that student possesses. Do you**
- a. Give the student a failing grade and go about your business.
  - b. Call the student in to ask about the paper and give him/her a chance to explain.
  - c. Report the student to the Judiciary Board.
  - d. Consult with on-line papers and try to track down the source of the plagiarism before proceeding with any accusations.

## Dealing with the Details

### *Our bogus grading system:*

**If you answered mostly (a):** You are an old-school teacher and close to retirement (we hope).

**If you answered mostly (b):** You are a caring teacher who wants to be liked by the students.

**If you answered mostly (c):** You are a researcher first and a teacher second. Ask for a reduced teaching load next year.

**If you answered mostly (d):** You are a strict, but reasonable teacher.

## Comments from the Co-Directors:

**Concerning the first day of class:** Making the class relevant is important (answer d.), but if the class is difficult, also let them know that we will break it down into its parts, that everyone can succeed and have fun (a bit of answer c.).

**Concerning the course syllabus:** The consensus of the co-directors is to make the syllabus available electronically before the first day of class. Go over the highlights and let students know that you will answer any questions they might have. But wouldn't it be nice if we could eliminate the "legalistic" portions of the syllabus and substitute two rules: DO RIGHT for the students and BE FAIR for the teacher?

**Concerning tests:** Getting tests back as soon as possible is always a good idea. Do not spend a lot of time going over the details. Do not argue with students about the right answer. But be sure to let them know that you are sympathetic with their struggles and will look over exams in response to student concerns. Anticipate problems with test questions by instructing students before the test that if they find a question to be ambiguous or unclear, to state their assumptions and answer the question based on that assumption.

**Concerning grades:** If a student complains about grades, point out the University guidelines for grading: "The grade of 'A' is given for outstanding achievement to a relatively small number of excellent scholars ..." Have clear guidelines for every assignment so that you can show a student where he fell short.

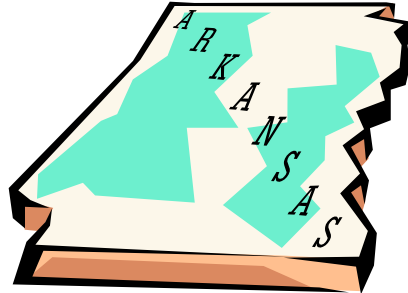
**Concerning the day after vacation:** It is good to welcome students back after a vacation or even after the weekend. Spending a very short time on pleasantries and indicating that you know and care about who they are helps the atmosphere of the class. Show that you are a real human being, but that the business at hand is your priority.

**Concerning disruptive students:** The Co-Directors have the following suggestions: Looking at the students as class proceeds can be effective. Or stop talking until they do if their conversation is disruptive to the class. If necessary, move into a brief discussion of the "character" issue – respect for others, respect for self with students other than the offending students commenting.

**Concerning missed class due to illness:** Give the student the benefit of the doubt and give them a chance to make it up – the sooner, the better. If there are many daily quizzes, allowing students to drop a quiz can cut down on the problem of arranging make-ups.

**Concerning possible plagiarism:** University standards require that all grade penalties be reported to the administrative board. It is best to have a watertight case before confronting a student. Try to make sure that assignments are so unique that copying from internet sources is almost impossible.

# EXPLORE



## Register for the LEARN ABOUT ARKANSAS BUS TRIP!

On Tuesday, May 13, 2002, we will load the bus for the three-day Learn about Arkansas Bus Trip. The purpose of the trip is to acquaint U of A faculty with our wonderful state. This year's trip includes stops in Russellville, Hot Springs, El Dorado, Scott, Little Rock and Fort Smith. Highlights are: Dinner in the home of U of A system President Alan Sugg, the Arkansas Museum of Natural Resources, the Toltec Indian Mounds, the Capitol, high school and university visits, and tour of businesses.

All faculty are welcome to join us, with a special invitation for new faculty (at U of A for two years or less). To register, go to [www.uark.edu/misc/tfscinfo/bus03.html](http://www.uark.edu/misc/tfscinfo/bus03.html) or call Lori at 5-3222. Please apply by March 24<sup>th</sup>.



## IT'S TIME TO REGISTER FOR CAMP 2003!!

**DATES:** SUNDAY, JULY 27 TO WEDNESDAY, JULY 30

**PLACE:** CRESCENT HOTEL, EUREKA SPRINGS, ARKANSAS. We will travel together by bus leaving campus Sunday afternoon and returning Wednesday afternoon.

**MAIN EVENT:** WORKSHOP LED BY MEL SILBERMAN, author of Active Learning: 101 Strategies to Teach Any Subject (free copy for each participant), with follow up sessions led by U of A faculty and staff.

**BENEFITS:** TALK ABOUT TEACHING FOR THREE DAYS! And mingle with colleagues from across campus.

**APPLY NOW:** at [www.uark.edu/misc/tfscinfo/camp-03.html](http://www.uark.edu/misc/tfscinfo/camp-03.html) or call Lori at 5-3222. The application deadline is March 3<sup>rd</sup>. Those who have never attended the U of A Teaching Retreat will be given preference. Experienced campers may be asked to lead a discussion group.

## Want to Document Your Teaching Efforts? Do a Teaching Portfolio!

It's hard for others to see the thought and effort we put into teaching. One way to document your teaching accomplishments is to prepare a teaching portfolio. And the best way to do a portfolio is with the help of a mentor who can help you organize and present your thoughts about teaching. A portfolio is also an opportunity to reflect on and improve your teaching practices.

### *Interested in preparing a teaching portfolio?*

Contact the Cordes Teaching Center at 5-3222 or [tfsc@uark.edu](mailto:tfsc@uark.edu) and we will connect you with a portfolio mentor.

## Teaching Discussions

The Cordes Teaching Center will come to your department or other group to lead discussions on teaching. Possible topics include:

- Learning Styles
- Motivating Students
- Elements of a Course Syllabus
- Writing Tests
- Group projects
- OR suggest a topic of interest to you

We would welcome an invitation to bring the resources of the Cordes Teaching Center to you.

### **PLAN TO ATTEND!!**

#### **Spring semester luncheon dates and discussion topics:**

#### **New Faculty Luncheons:**

**February 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup>**

**Topic:** *Rhythms of the Semester*

**March 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup>**

**Topic:** *Visiting Master Teachers*

**April 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup>**

**Topic:** *Teaching Portfolios*

#### **Not-So-New Faculty Luncheons:**

**February 20<sup>th</sup> or 21<sup>st</sup>**

**Topic:** *Students' Wish List for a Course Syllabus*

**March 27<sup>th</sup> or 28<sup>th</sup>**

**Topic:** *Teaching at a Research University*

**April 17<sup>th</sup> or 18<sup>th</sup>**

**Topic:** *Evaluating Teaching*

Announcements will be made as dates approach with menu choices and reservation deadlines. Hope to see you all!!