

Teaching Facilitation Committee Provides Unique Setting For Faculty To Produce Teaching Improvement Results

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Introduction

A Teaching Facilitation Committee was established in the fall of 1987 to enhance teaching performance of faculty members in the Plant and Earth Science Department at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls. The committee provides faculty with the opportunity to video tape their teaching in either lecture or laboratory settings. The committee then reviews the tapes with the faculty member and offers an evaluation of technique and style.

The Setting

The University of Wisconsin-River Falls is primarily an undergraduate teaching institution of 5100 students. Since the University's foremost mission is to provide an environment for learning, focus and emphasis is directed at effective teaching. Plant and Earth Science is one of five departments in the College of Agriculture and provides degree programs in Agronomy, Geology, Horticulture, Resource Management and Soil Science. In a typical semester, approximately 2,000 students are enrolled in courses taught by 17 faculty members in the Plant and Earth Science Department.

The Participants

The teaching facilitation committee consists of 5 individuals appointed on an annual basis by the Department Chair. The committee's credibility comes through its members having earned national, university or college teaching awards or who have established reputations throughout the academic community for teaching excellence. While initially the committee was created to aid the less experienced teachers become more effective, it has now evolved to a much wider scope and purpose.

The committee requests that new faculty arrange for taping one of their teaching efforts and meet with the committee for an evaluation at least once each year. Initially two different lectures a week or two apart are taped. The first tape is to assist the faculty member in becoming comfortable with the process and familiar with the equipment. The second tape is then reviewed by the committee. Both tapes become the property of the participant. One important feature that allows this review process to work well is that the tapes and related discussions are not used in retention,

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tenure or promotion decisions. No written notes are taken during meetings and no entry is made in personnel files related to committee discussions.

Because the reaction of both participating faculty and the review committee was positive, tenured faculty were invited to participate in the taping and review process the following year. As a result, 50% of our faculty volunteered to be taped and critiqued by the committee during the past academic year.

The Procedure

Faculty choose the dates they wish to be taped. A student assistant sets up the equipment and tapes the class. The faculty member notifies the committee that his or her tape is available for review and a meeting is scheduled. Meetings are kept informal. The participating faculty member generally describes the setting for the tape: the class, content, purpose, level of students and goals of the lecture or laboratory being taped. The committee then reviews the tape until someone wishes to ask a question or make a comment. Our experience over the past three years is that the comments or questions are always constructive, directed at things done well, and quite often lead to a lengthy discussion that deals with basic philosophical concepts of learning and teaching. This open discussion-based approach obliterates any feeling of tension and removes the anxiety of "being on trial".

A recent visitor to our campus commented, "You guys are really serious about this teaching business". We were pleased to respond, "We are".

These discussions range from 2 to 15 minutes in length and continue until all involved are ready to continue viewing the tape. The tape continues until another question or comment is made. In some reviews the tape is run fast-forward to find a particular part of a lecture for which the faculty would like specific comments or shows how an earlier point is used later in a lecture. The total viewing time is probably between 5 and 15 minutes which generates 40-60 minutes of discussion. The evaluation process and discussions are not structured and do not deal with content. The committee has discussed topics such as board use, visual aids, lecturing style and pace, interaction with students, eye contact, knowing student's names, how to work mathematical problems in class, homework, exam construction, late papers, grading and others.

The procedure with tenured faculty proceeds much the same, with positive reaction and little anxiety. During one of the committee discussions, it was realized that all faculty in the department would benefit from greater participation in this activity. Increased participation is now achieved by inviting the entire department to view video tapes of our more experienced teachers. This allows all department faculty to participate in discussions related to teaching effectiveness. This technique provides a valuable inter-change of ideas within the entire department.

The Result

As with any teaching evaluation, objective numbers are not readily obtained. Yet enough subjective evidence has been gathered to conclude the activity of the Teaching Facilitation Committee does enhance teaching.

1. It has provided very specific suggestions for several faculty members which have led to significant improvements in their evaluations by students.
2. It has assisted this department in maintaining student evaluation scores well above the means for both the College and the University.
3. Specifically, in the most recent student evaluations of 46 faculty in the college, 10 from our department were ranked in the top 20, including 5 of the top 8!
4. In addition, establishing the teaching facilitation committee has provided an open forum for the exchange of ideas and philosophies which creates a positive environment to actively improve our teaching.

The ability to openly discuss teaching is rewarding. A recent visitor to our campus commented, "You guys are really serious about this teaching business". We were pleased to respond, "We are".

Acknowledgements

We sincerely appreciate the cooperation of our colleagues in the Department of Plant and Earth Science. Without their enthusiastic support, the Teaching Facilitation Committee's effectiveness would have been severely curtailed. The manuscript was critically reviewed by R.M. Kozak and D.H. Taylor. Their comments resulted in a number of improvements and are most appreciated.

INSTRUCTIONAL MEDIA REVIEWS

Victor A. Bekkum, Chair
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Agricultural Field Equipment

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Agricultural Field Equipment is a 30 minute videotape that identifies common agricultural equipment and explains the machines basic functions. The instructional objectives of the video is to provide the names and primary function of common tillage, planting, chemical application and harvesting machines.

Review Summary

The overall rating for this videotape was good. The video was produced using a mix of film, video and graphics. The intended audience is 9th grade plus. If there is one criticism of the video it is that it covers many machines in a very short time. Perhaps showing the video in segments and supplementing the presentation with discussion and other teaching aids would enhance learning and greatly compliment the video. The graph below represents the average rating of the reviewers.

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Picture Quality		x		
Sound Quality		x		
Editing		x		
Content	x			
Currentness	x			
Organization		x		
Accuracy		x		
Vocabulary			x	
Interest		x		
Technical Quality		x		
Overall (Average of Reviewers)		x		

Summary Remarks

Content Panel Member

The quality of the video tape was good. The presentation illustrated several types of equipment commonly used in crop production. Several graphics were included to enhance student understanding of the machine function. I would recommend using the videotape to introduce high school or college students to the wide variety of equipment used in agricultural crop production.

Robert Birkenholz
University of Missouri

Content Panel Member

As stated by producers the video *Agricultural Field Equipment* is intended for 9th grade, small group instruction, with an objective of providing names and functions of common tillage, planting, chemical application, and harvesting machines. This video pictures and explains the objective of the producers. It is very informative with much information covered in 30 minutes. There is a good, quick description of each machine.

Since this video is intended for 9th grade and small groups, it could be stopped and started after the explanations for the instructor to give some verbal comments for re-showing certain areas.

In some areas the narration seemed too fast. A definite break or pause after each machine or unit might be helpful.

Even though the producers are trying to keep the length to 30 minutes, there are certain areas that need to be explained further. Example: threshing process of combine. Equipment manufacturers have this and could be of use by giving them credit.

This is a good video. Very informative and understanding.

Harold Severance
Cloud Community College, Concordia, KS