

Innovative Classroom Strategies that Prepare Graduates for Success in the Workplace

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Introduction

“Employers report hiring substantial numbers of new entrants who are poorly prepared requiring additional company investment to improve workforce readiness skills” and the existence of “a workforce readiness gap”
(Conference Board, 2009, p. 4).

Introduction

The role of the university in career preparation has often been to improve and increase students' content knowledge. While this approach has been successful for many years, in our rapidly changing world, the ability to synthesize, analyze, and think has become more important to the long-term success of the graduates

(Conference Board, 2006; McManus, 2005; Paranto & Kelkar, 1999).

Introduction

Employers “have expressed a need for students who can communicate, value teamwork, solve problems, acquire knowledge that is broad and deep, and do so for their entire career” (Sibley & Parmell, 2008, p. 42).

Enhancing students’ employability is vital to the knowledge driven economy of the United States (Hawkrige, 2005).

Problem Statement

Current college graduates have not consistently acquired the skills needed for success in the workplace to continuously learn and thrive in our rapidly changing world. The College of Agriculture and Life Science must identify the specific classroom strategies that best develop the needed skills for the success of the graduate and society.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of the study was to *identify* a land grant college of agriculture and life sciences' classroom strategies for developing students' ability to continuously learn and thrive in our rapidly changing world.

The specific objective was to *describe* those same innovative instructors' classroom strategies.

Methodology

Population – purposefully selected working through the CALS Office of Academic Programs.

☞ Seven contacted, five agreed to participate.

Data Collection – one-on-one interviews.

☞ The power of “in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (Seidman, 1998, p. 3).

Sessions were audio recorded

Findings - Innovative Instructors

Six major themes emerged including classroom strategies that:

- ✓ Demonstrate enthusiasm for student learning
- ✓ Actively experiment with new ideas for educational practice
- ✓ Approach teaching with a guiding mentality more than a directing mentality

Findings - Innovative Instructors

Six major themes emerged including classrooms strategies that:

- ✓ Foster student ownership of learning
- ✓ Stay abreast of new developments in recommended educational practices
- ✓ Time and resources to overcome barriers to change

Demonstrate Enthusiasm for Student Learning

“How personally rewarding it is to see students ‘get it.’”

Actively Experiment with New Ideas for Education Practice

“This year I’ve tried something totally different, which I’m a little scared of. So I’m hoping, and obviously I’m excited, and I’m hoping it goes well. I have no idea.”

“And the first time they heard this, you could see the look on their face, they’re just, pardon but, they’re pissed!”

Approach Teaching with a Guiding more than a directing mentality

“[Students] say, ‘I’ve never done this before. Oh, my God! What do I do?’ ‘Well, you know what...the class before you did it just fine and they’ve never done it before either. You’ll be fine.’ I’ll give examples from previous year for them to see. ‘This is what we’re aiming for,’ and I actually have them write critiques of previous years’ proposals so they get practice writing critiques, they get practice thinking...and some will actually ask me, ‘Were those professional proposals?’ ‘No, this was last year’s class. You can do this. I know you can do this.’”

Stay Abreast of New Developments in Recommended Educational Practices

“Our pedagogy has to change. Our scholarship has to change.”

“We tweak what we hear!”

Time and Resources to Overcome Barriers to Change

“Time is my biggest obstacle, and it’s not just mine, but it’s everybody’s, and with the current hiring and retirements we are down in our department, so something has to give. I don’t want it to be teaching, but that’s what gives.”

Findings – Graduates Perceptions

Graduates ranking of skills most developed or improved:

1. Priority setting
2. Identifying problems and solving problems
3. Learning to learn
4. Adapting to change
5. Ability to work independently and in groups

Conclusions

Innovative instructors are implementing strategies to address skills needed for success in the workplace to continuously learn and thrive in our rapidly changing world.

Recommendations

Academic Deans and Department Heads

Promote and adapt learner-centered pedagogy

Instructors

Explore and adapt improved strategies that encourage and promote student growth in ability to function productively in teams or groups

Questions?

THANK YOU!