

## *Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence*

Responses to "Cooperative Learning: An Alternative to Song and Dance"

by Maurice Phipps and Susan Kask, 4/1/94

Cooperative learning techniques provide an excellent alternative to traditional, passive approaches to teaching; and, soon, more of our students will be coming to us with experience in cooperative learning from their public school days. The University of Aalborg, Denmark's newest university, is designed around cooperative learning. At the University of Aalborg, most student learning is based on collaborative work on projects, often in connection with community agencies and businesses. Even the physical plant at Aalborg was constructed with collaboration in mind. They have over 1,000 rooms dedicated for use by student project groups. We do not have all the advantages of the dedication Aalborg has made, but certainly we could do more to involve students than we do. One impediment to the use of such approaches is our obsession with "covering the material." We will have to realize that involving more students in "deep" learning will require a sacrifice of breadth. Maybe we should seriously think about an end to "survey" courses. The tradeoff may be worthwhile in terms of the long-term education of our students.

**Bruce Henderson, Psychology**

Some form of cooperative learning can be a useful component for many classes. Many of the theatre classes which I teach include some cooperative experiences--some outside of class time, some within. Often the "within class" opportunities take the form of encouraging other students to critique the work of others. While the individual student always gets my comments, if the important points are covered in class discussion, I often don't say much. This may be easier to do in an area like theatre because it is a cooperative art form, but the idea would seem to have application in a number of areas.

**Richard Beam, Communications and Theatre Arts**

The question of whether or not to use cooperative learning in the classroom is addressed like many instructional issues. Those professors who believe they ought to help their students learn the material try multiple approaches. Those who believe it is the student's responsibility to learn on their own see no need to alter the way the teach--if the student does not understand, it is the student's fault.

It appears to me that WCU has many professors with the first philosophy. My students tell me they are experiencing many different instructional approaches in their classes, some of which involve cooperative learning and other kinds of group work. As a university, we may be doing better than we think in this area.

It is likely that those professors with the second philosophy, however, see no reason to try different instructional approaches. Their philosophical position insulates them from the question of whether or not some instructional approaches may be better than others.

**Casey Hurley, Administration, Curriculum, & Instruction**