

# *Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence*

Responses to "What Constitutes Effective Teaching?"

by Bruce Henderson, 11/1/93

Bruce Henderson's presentation is some of the best sense on teaching effectiveness I've seen. I'm really uncomfortable with the uncritical application of the usual criteria for evaluating teaching, including student evaluations made while the students are in the midst of the teaching-learning process. I could provide other examples to add to Bruce's, but he gets it across: the bottom line is NOT the slickness of the presentation, the student-teacher ratio, or even whether the students are happy and enthusiastic during the process; the bottom line is how much the students gain in terms of capability and attunement to knowledge. The students remain the best judges of teaching effectiveness, but I trust their judgment better at some remove, when the gloss has worn off and real life has intervened to test the validity and usefulness of what they have learned and of how they have learned it.

**Allen Moore, Biology**

## The Master Teacher

Then Jesus took his disciples up the mountain and gathering them around him; he taught them, saying:

Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven,  
 Blessed are the meek,  
 Blessed are they that mourn,  
 Blessed are the merciful,  
 Blessed are they who thirst for justice,  
 Blessed are you when persecuted,  
 Blessed are you when you suffer,  
 Be glad and rejoice for your reward is great in heaven.

Then Simon Peter asked,  
 And Andrew asked,  
 And James asked,  
 And Philip said,  
 And Bartholomew asked,  
 And John said,  
 And Matthew said,  
 And Judas asked,

"Do we have to write this down?"  
 "Are we supposed to know this?"  
 "Will we have a test on this?"  
 "I don't have any paper."  
 "Do we have to turn this in?"  
 "The other disciples don't have to learn this."  
 "I have to go to the bathroom."  
 "When are we ever going to use this in real life?"

Then one of the Pharisees who was present asked to see Jesus' lesson plan and asked Jesus, "Where is your anticipatory set and your objectives in the cognitive domain?"

And Jesus wept.

received and passed along by Jeff Neff, Geosciences & Anthropology

# Responses to Bruce Henderson

continued

In response to Bruce Henderson's article on teaching, I agree that just as faculty have different presentation styles, students have different learning styles, and no one faculty member will be able to reach all students in the same way. In one of my graduate courses years ago at a North Carolina University, I had an example of a teacher just opposite of the type that Bruce mentions. This professor was scholarly, polished, and could have been an actor. His classes, in fact, reminded me of a theatre production in that he entered the classroom on the stroke of the hour, delivered an inspiring oration, and left very shortly thereafter. It was very obvious, however, that he did not want to be interrupted by student questions and that he did not really want to deal with students if he could possibly help it. He was a top researcher in his field, and he went on to become the president of a prestigious, national, scientific organization--which was probably where he belonged rather than in the classroom. I certainly learned the subject matter from his well-organized and orchestrated classes; but due to his cold and aloof attitude, his was not effective teaching for me.

I do, however, take issue with the notion of having to "trap" students into learning. I prefer to give the students more credit than that and would like to believe that the atmosphere we create in the classroom motivates them to make a conscious choice to learn.

Perhaps, however, we really don't know what students are looking for in effective teaching. For the past three years, I have done a short experiment in my Principles of Precepting class. In one of the first classes of the semester, I divide the students into groups and ask them to come up with a list of characteristics for a "good" teacher. The four traits that stand out in importance are: (1) organization and preparedness, (2) conveying a sense of enthusiasm, (3) showing concern for students, and (4) communicating on the student's level of understanding. Thus, students are not necessarily looking for showmanship but for someone who has something to offer and who is genuinely interested in them.

As faculty members, each of us brings a unique style to the teaching-learning relationship. I would like to think that by setting the example of excitement and immersion in scholarship we can inspire rather than trap our students into learning.

Christine Stevens, Health Sciences

