

PROGRAM: 'Cool for faculty to do this'

Continued from Page A1

Working together

Faculty buy-in far surpassed Ross' expectations. He hoped for a handful when they launched their initial certificate program. But when sign-ups closed, they had 60 faculty.

"I was stunned," Ross says. "I was scared to death that day." The next year, 70 signed up. The next, 58.

At the beginning of a school year, faculty are put into multi-discipline groups. Instructors from chemistry and English and urban studies and everything else are mingled together.

The point of mingling is this: English instructors, for example, may be used to learning and teaching in a certain way. Chemistry instructors may have a different way. Bringing differing styles together can potentially open doors to new teaching methods an instructor didn't know existed.

Better teaching, more grants

Mechanical engineering faculty member Pat Tebbe teaches courses such as thermodynamics. He worked with the center and went through both teaching certificate programs.

He wanted to have his students play a more active role in daily class sessions, and Ross helped him revamp one of his classes. He included components such as group work and multi-media, and submitted his revamped course to the American Society for Engineering Education. His ideas won him a "best paper" award.

Tebbe's work with Ross also has resulted in a \$111,000 National Science Foundation grant to develop textbook supplements engineering students can use in class to get them more engaged.

Good chemistry

When Mary Hadley first came to MSU a few years ago, she was forced to return to giving lectures, instead of the more nontraditional approaches she'd been using at North Dakota State University.

Her class sizes jumped from a handful of students to about 150, and all she could think to do was lecture. She called Ross, and together they put together a chemistry class like no other.

Today, when students arrive to the first day of class at the beginning of the semester, she spends an hour telling them how the class is going to be run. And that's where the lecturing, for the most part, ends.

From there she puts the students in groups and tells them to discuss how they want the grading system to work. Group leaders present their arguments to the class, and together the class decides what percentage (based on parameters she provides) of the grades will be based on individual work, group work, lab work, etc.

The rest of the semester's class time is spent learning the material as a group and taking individual exams. They work in teams answering questions. Some are easy, while others force them to use what they know to figure out a problem.

"Word is around now how I teach, and I get the students who like to work in teams," she says. "I have almost 100 percent attendance. And they come because their team gets mad at them if they don't come ... I'm enjoying myself, I'm having more fun and I think my students are, too."

Shedding light on teaching

Smith, meanwhile, says he's infused his course with multimedia presentations, guest appearances, storytelling, music, online notes and study guides and in-class group

learning.

He's gone from being the only one in a room full of 100 students who cares about the class to a room where many (you'll never get them all) are very much into the lesson of the day.

"The neat thing for me is

my students seem to be more enthused about class," he said. "I feel better about my teaching, and I think my students enjoy classes more."

For Smith, that's a far cry from his humble beginnings, when 84 students enrolled, and on any given day, about

half showed up.

Two common threads emerge when talking to faculty who have been through the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning.

One is a general sense of wonder that, across the world of academia, more focus has-

n't been put on teaching.

The other is praise for Ross. Smith, Hadley, Tebbe and other faculty have credited the center in general and Ross in particular for helping revive their careers and, ultimately, benefiting students.

Ross is aware of the

impact. He says he's happier than ever to be doing this kind of work, and even happier that so many faculty are finding value in the work of a former band leader.

"It's become more cool for faculty to do this," Ross says, "than to not."



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