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CETL Capstone Project
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Participation:

This last year, my participation in the CETL seminars helped me to develop an increased awareness of my teaching strategies and goals. Several strategies, specifically active learning, learning assessment, critical thinking and the general education discussion, have been and will continue to be useful to me in the organization and course development of SPEE 101W, Interpersonal Communication. This is the first semester that I have taught Interpersonal Communication, which is a general education course that fulfills the writing intensive component.

Area for Concern:

At the beginning of the semester, I started with the intent to devote 30 minutes to lecture, utilizing PowerPoint, and then, the remaining time left for discussion of the course concepts. This particular course lasted for an hour and 15 minutes. The majority of my students enjoyed this format because as a large group we spent most of the time talking about relationships and current events. All they needed to do, for the time being, was attend class and talk. I, however, began to notice that the discussions were great for filling the time; however, I had to question if the students were really learning. On my midterm assessment of the course, the students expressed enjoyment in the class overall. However, they also voiced concerns because they did not know how I would be testing the discussion information and what was expected on upcoming assignments. My students were not keeping up on the readings. I needed to apply more active learning and multiple assessment techniques. This was I could involve every student and then assess whether or not my students understood the course concepts before the exam.

Active Learning:

During our CETL discussion, I discovered that the maximum attention span or listening capacity for most people was at about twenty minutes. If twenty minutes is the maximum, I was pushing the envelope with 30 minutes of lecture. I lost the attention of my students after about twenty minutes. While participating in our CETL discussions on active learning and integrating course design, I learned how to create learning objectives for each class time and activity. Also, we discussed strategies on how to break the class time into intervals of teaching/learning activities. For instance, now, I create PowerPoint presentations with breaks where students are asked to apply the information by taking part in reflective thinking and journaling. I also have students take surveys that will help students indicate their own communication styles and beliefs. I utilize case studies, role playing and allow for students to present and lead discussions. In terms of class discussion, in order to get more students involved, I utilize pair share. Students answer the discussion questions on their own and then share their answers with a partner. Then, we come together as a larger group to discuss. This helps to build confidence in those

students who may hesitate in participating in discussion. Also, I set aside class time for observation. Students are given course concepts and are asked to observe and describe the concepts at play in television clips and movies.

Assessment Techniques:

In terms of assessment, before mid-semester, I had no way of knowing if my students understood the course material. Many of my students could share experiences related to the course concepts, but I had no way to gauge the learning of my quieter students. In terms of assessment, I began incorporating the muddiest point concept. I would cover the course material; then, the students would work on an active learning activity and last we would discuss as a large group. When we finished discussing, I would have the students write on a piece of paper their “ah ha” moment, which is a concept they believe they understand, and then they would write down their “muddiest point.” The muddiest point is a concept or term they are struggling to understand and articulate. The students would submit these anonymously. After gathering the student feedback, I would analyze the responses, and I prepared a response to those concepts students struggled to understand. Sometimes, I would go over my responses in class. Other times, I would post my response to D2L. Students could then pick and choose which concepts they wanted to review. I will continue to utilize the muddiest point assessment technique. To review the responses was time consuming; however, I was extremely satisfied with the information I was able to gather. I was able to increase my students’ understanding of course concepts and thus midterm and final exam scores reflected my learning objectives.

Critical Thinking:

As a teacher, I tend to take a critical pedagogical perspective. I am aware that in terms of research in certain fields some experiences are given more precedence over others. The material I incorporate tends to be reflective of my interests. Therefore, there is inherently a bias in what and how I teach. Theories are ways of explaining phenomena and they are tested by various means, but these theories may not explain each every person’s experience. I encourage my students to take a critical perspective. I ask my students to question the material. I present a theory and I ask my students to tell me what they like about the theory and why. On the same note, I ask my students to also tell me if they do not like a theory and why and what may be a better way of explaining the phenomena. My students then begin to incorporate the beginnings of their own theorizing. Then, I’ll cover some of the advantages of a certain theory, concept, and then some of the criticisms. I believe this is a higher level of understanding. Matching a concept with the correct term is good; however, I place a higher weight on being able to apply terms or concepts to an experience and to explain whether or not the concept enhances the student’s ability to communicate at large.

General Education:

The Interpersonal Communication course 101W is a general education writing intensive course. Initially, I designed the course with very little background information on the objectives of a writing intensive course. I found the discussion on general education extremely beneficial. Since the CETL discussion, I have decided to make changes geared toward achieving the general education outcomes. My students in this class wrote reflective journal pages and a few responses to discussion questions. My educated guess is that most students understand how to write a journal paper. The structure is fluid and the writing style is not exactly preparing students for future academic papers. The change I intend to implement is that instead of focusing on reflective writing, the major paper for this class will consist of a research paper. With this change, I will be able to teach standard academic writing guidelines. My objective is students will have a basic understanding of how to write an academic paper and utilize correct APA or MLA style guidelines. I will devote more time to teaching correct formatting for college level writing. Again, this session was extremely valuable.

Overall, the CETL sessions have been instrumental in my development as an instructor. The content allowed for me to critically assess my teaching objectives and goals. I was able to change and adapt mid-semester, and also, prepare for the future courses I will teach. Throughout my teaching career, I intend to incorporate active learning, assessment techniques, and critical thinking. In regards to general education, I will, in the future, better research the general education outcomes and objectives for the general education courses. My hope is to design a course that will build a base for my students' future college coursework and career aspirations.