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CETL Faculty Certificate Program 2005-2006
Capstone Project Summary

I really enjoyed attending all of the CETL activities this year. As the new faculty lighting designer in the Department of Theatre and Dance, all of my training has been in the areas of technical theatre. I have had no training in how to teach classes. Without the learning opportunities presented by Stewart Ross and the rest of the CETL staff, I fear I would have traveled the well worn path of boring lectures and stale class content that never changes year after year. The CETL program really sparked my imagination with the idea of incorporating active learning in all of my classes.

My capstone project was to completely revamp the Theatre 100 Introduction to Theatre class. Introduction to Theatre has always been the workhorse of the Theatre Department. The class usually had 100-150 students per section, mostly non majors fulfilling general education requirements. With high enrollment figures, the class served its twofold purpose of attracting new theatre majors to the department and significantly raising the average class size; which compensated for the many specialty acting and design classes that have much smaller class size. Over the last few years the enrollment in Introduction to Theatre has steadily declined. Students were bored with the lectures and stopped coming to classes. Students then found themselves doing poorly on the exams since they were not learning the material. This vicious cycle caused enrollment to drop over the years. It was time to reinvigorate the class and as a new professor I naively thought I could easily turn that around with raw enthusiasm. I quickly discovered that I needed lots of help.

Stewart Ross came to several of my lectures and set up several one on one help sessions with me to help turn the class around. Since that time I have made several improvements. I attended workshops about D2L and put all the grading on D2L. In this way students could get instant up to date feedback on how they were progressing in the class. I put all of my notes for each chapter in the Content section of D2L. I also updated all of the lectures onto PowerPoint including many visuals to help illustrate each lecture. Through informal polling of the class I found an almost unanimous liking to the PowerPoint lectures. Students felt they had more organized notes and knew what the key points were. I also incorporated a tablet PC with digital ink software to allow the class to raise their hands and contribute ideas and content that would get digitally written into the PowerPoint lectures. Students enjoyed seeing their ideas written into the slides, as opposed to traditional PowerPoint presentations that don't allow for active learning and student participation.

I also found that by switching over to PowerPoint with the notes available online, that I was able to cover the material faster, leaving time in the semester for other activities. I chose to use that extra time to break the large class into small groups after we finished each chapter. The small groups were given sample test questions from the material just covered. The team that scored the highest on the test received extra credit points. The natural competitive nature of the students took over! The team test scores

kept resulting in two way or three way ties with near perfect scores! Being very stingy with the extra credit points I decided to make the sample tests harder!

Now that the semester is nearly over I have the opportunity to compare exam scores from last semester and this semester. Last semester I taught the class using a fairly traditional lecture style, mimicking how the class had been previously taught. The scores on all three major exams improved using this updated style combining PowerPoint with notes online and utilizing team based active learning. I still have many things about my teaching methods that can be improved. But thanks to the help I received from Stewart Ross and the CETL program I feel that I have the tools I need to continue to improve my ability to promote active learning here at MSU.