

A Reflection on Two Years of CETL Interaction

There were two major reasons for joining the CETL Teaching Certificate Program in the fall of 2004. The first involved my enjoyment of teaching at the university level over the past decade and the fact that I had never had any formal training in how to teach. The second was more selfishly because it would be "good for tenure".

The very first class I taught, 12 years ago UNC Chapel Hill, was an introductory course with nearly 200 students. Since I had no formal teaching training, I simply tried to emulate the best practices of my favorite college professors. I also have the added advantage of being able to discuss pedagogical ideas with my wife who is now an adjunct professor here at MSU. I have always known that there is no such thing as a perfect lecture or perfect teaching and I have always been interested in improving my lectures and classes. I viewed the opportunities that the CETL discussions offered as a way to think outside of my normal "box" and a way to help my students learn more effectively and efficiently.

My experiences, as an Aardvark, Owl, Walleye, and Roadrunner, with CETL teaching certificate program have been very positive and usually very helpful. The greatest benefits have been hearing how other professors dealt with the specific problems and challenges in their classes. For example, the group member who does little to help, disruptive students, those who don't read the text, or those who play on their computers and text message throughout class need to be "convinced" to behave like a college student. New ideas and concepts for dealing with these problems immediately went into the syllabi, particularly for the large introductory General Education sections.

Another helpful aspect of the CETL experience involves the development and implementation of active learning techniques. This has often been difficult in the sections with large numbers of students. Dividing 267 students into groups is difficult, unwieldy, and time consuming. To meet this challenge, the lab manual was revised and improved so that students could use the labs to re-enforce what they had learned in the lectures. The labs not only re-emphasized the important parts of the lecture, but they kept students alert and reduced disruptive behaviors such as text messaging. The labs were also very useful in convincing students to attend class since the labs were counted as part of their attendance points. Another great benefit of the CETL has been their mini grant program. The mini grant program funded the equipment needed for the implementation of a new field methods course, which introduces students to the hands on experience of field methods in Earth Sciences.

There were also aspects of the CETL program that were not so glowing. Being asked to develop goals for a course revision and then not being asked what those goals were during the meeting was frustrating and emphasizes the amount of effort involved with little obvious immediate reward. Also, trying to voice experiences or ideas during the meetings was often difficult or impossible due to the overwhelming influence of committee members. Overall, these problems are minor compared to the obvious benefits. As a final overview, I simply challenge the MSU administration to not only continue this excellent program, but to provide the funding and opportunities for the MSU faculty to continue to improve their efficiency and effectiveness in the classroom.