

GOT TEACHING?

A Student Perspective on Effective Teaching at UA

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Background:

Collaborative Leadership is a course designed to offer students an opportunity to learn and apply leadership concepts and skills within the context of the campus community. The course is based on the philosophy that collaborative leadership is intended to create positive change. Therefore, as students in Tuesday section of this course (AED 403/503) during the fall semester, we implemented a project that we hope will help to enhance the student experience at the University of Arizona.

Information Sources:

To address our concerns about the effectiveness of teaching and student/faculty interaction, we gathered information from three sources: the Teacher Course Evaluation (TCE) form; the “Seven Principles of Good Practice in Undergraduate Education” as listed on the Arizona Board of Regents (ABOR) web site; and responses to a widely distributed survey which asked what effective teaching means to UA students. (See Appendix A for a copy of the survey.)

First we examined the Teacher Course Evaluation forms that are filled out by students at the end of the each semester and are used to determine teacher effectiveness and the usefulness of course activities. The TCE also asks questions on the difficulty of the class, if the student was respected, and for information relating to the individual student and his/her major. These evaluations are supposed to somehow ascertain the effectiveness of both the faculty and the classes they teach.

Our second source of information was the Arizona Board of Regents’ (ABOR) web page which lists the “Seven Principles of Good Practice in Undergraduate Education.” These principles focus on techniques such as encouraging student-faculty contact, cooperation among students, active learning, prompt feed back, time on task, communicating high expectations and respect for diverse talents and ways of learning. In regard to active learning, the 3rd principle states, “Learning is not a spectator sport. Students do not learn much just sitting in classes listening to teachers, memorizing pre-packaged assignments, and spitting out answers.” Demonstrating ABOR’s acknowledgement of how students effectively learn, principle # 1 states “Knowing a few faculty members well enhances students’ intellectual commitment and encourages them to think about their own values and future plans.” These seven principles outline an effective teaching strategy for learner centered education.

The third perspective was derived from our student survey. To insure that our data for this project involved a diverse sample, we distributed surveys to more than 600 students from all class standings and the various colleges across our campus.

(Demographic information is provided in appendix B, attached.) The data from these surveys indicated to us what students truly feel describes an effective teacher. Our survey asked students two questions:

- 1.) Think about effective teachers you've had ... then tell us what words you would use to describe effective teaching. Can you list three or four words for our survey?
- 2.) Can you think of some specific examples of effective teaching based on your own experience? What are they? Please describe briefly.

The survey also asked for their major and year in school so that we could make sure our survey reached a broad population of students on campus. To avoid replication we assigned everyone in the class to two or three different demographics. Specific targets were drawn from various student clubs, athletes, senior classes, freshman general education classes, grad student classes, Greek societies and listservs. We also did some random surveying in the student union to increase the diversity of responses.

Findings:

The most common responses to the first question which asked students to list descriptive words for effective teaching included passionate, caring, enthusiastic, engaging, funny, clear, positive, friendly, mentor, interested, involved, helpful, flexible, approachable, and consistent. We attempted to categorize all the descriptors from this question according to the Seven Principles of Good Practice. The results are summarized in the table below. (The total number of responses is greater than the number of students participating in the survey because they were asked to list three or four words rather than just one.)

Seven Principles of Good Practice	Total related responses
student/faculty contact	373
cooperation among students	90
active learning	520
gives prompt feedback	110
emphasizes time on task	141
communicates high expectations	237
respects diverse talents and ways of learning	273

We see this as a pretty clear indication that students value active learning more than any of the remaining six principles. However, it is worth noting that student/faculty contact is also very important.

Responses to the second question which asked for personal examples of effective teaching were widely varied. However, the following themes were prevalent:

An effective teacher...

is passionate about what he/she teaches
is willing to help students
applies class material to real life
encourages class participation, discussions, and group work
is flexible and willing to meet with students outside of class
uses humor in class
knows how to use different types of media
encourages learning that is interactive, hands-on, individualized
relates to students, understands conflicts
uses multiple teaching strategies
encourages feedback
is organized and well prepared
uses examples
encourages students to do well
is knowledgeable and has experience in the field
paces the class well

Conclusion:

Our examination of the data gathered shows there is a great deal of congruence between the students views of what constitutes effective teaching and the Seven Principles of Good Practice in Undergraduate education found on the Arizona Board of Regents web site. However, the measures found on the TCE form are not in alignment with the Seven Principles listed. Therefore, it is our recommendation that a task force of students and faculty come together to review and evaluate the Teacher Course Evaluation form for possible revision so that faculty are actually assessed on the teaching concepts and techniques that make for effective teaching. We are also interested in exploring ways to create a larger number of student generated awards to recognize effective teaching in all colleges and departments each year.

It is our hope that the campus community will consider our suggestions in recognition of the students' expressed desire to have a positive classroom experience and enhanced interaction with outstanding faculty at the University of Arizona. Our request is respectfully forwarded by the members of the Tuesday section of Collaborative Leadership, AED 403/503, fall semester of 2003. (If you would like additional information, please feel free to contact Dr. Nancy Huber via email – nhuber@u.arizona.edu.)

Appendix A

Collaborative Leadership Survey: Effective Teaching at UA

The students of Collaborative Leadership are requesting your opinion of what constitutes effective teaching at the University of Arizona. We would appreciate your help. Please answer the following questions – your opinion matters!

1. Think about effective teachers you've had...then tell us what words you would use to describe effective teaching. Can you list three or four words for our survey?

2. Can you think of some specific examples of effective teaching based on your own experience? What are they? Please describe briefly.

To assure that we get broad representation for our survey, please provide the following information:

Major: _____

Year in school: _____

Appendix B

Demographic data – AED 403/503 Student Survey Effective Teaching

Total number of surveys collected = 610			
Total number of majors represented = 84			
Respondents by college/school		Respondents by class standing	
CAL S	83	Freshman	120
CAPLA	1	Sophomore	112
COM	12	Junior	123
EDUC	34	Senior	223
ELLER	88	Grad Student	18
ENGR	27		
FCS	64		
FA	63		
HUM	29		
IDP	4		
LAW	1		
NU	5		
OPSCI	2		
PHARM	7		
SBS	88		
SCI	39		