

## Friday @ the Center: September 21, 2007

### First Impressions, Part 3

In terms of first impressions, we've talked about the significance of the syllabus and the need to communicate to students both an interest in them as individuals and a willingness to help them succeed. A third issue to consider is exactly what happens on the first day of class. The worst possible first class is one in which the instructor takes role, passes out the syllabus, reads the syllabus out loud, and then dismisses the students early. The second worst scenario includes taking role, the syllabus distribution and reading, followed by the kind of lecture in which the instructor talks nonstop for 30-40 minutes. The way you structure the first day of class sets up your students' expectations about how the class is going to be run.

The first class period should be a model of the kinds of activities that the rest of the course will involve. If you want students to talk during the quarter—ask questions, participate in discussions, make presentations, etc.—you need to make sure that they talk on the first day of class. If you do all the talking, that's what they will expect will happen the rest of the time. Promote active learning on the very first day of class by making students *do* something—take a pre-test; write a brief essay; read a paragraph and respond; repeat, respond, or provide additional examples to a mini-lecture (no more than 15 minutes); do an activity, etc. In my Emily Dickinson seminar, after hearing a mini-lecture on textual criticism, students will try turning a Dickinson holograph into a poem themselves.

### Senior Capstone Reflection Papers

Recently, I've received several inquiries about the status of the Senior Capstone Reflection Papers, given this year's changes in the CFE program. A reflection paper remains a required element of all capstone courses, per a decision made by UPEC in 2002. The senior reflection paper can EITHER be an essay assignment of the instructor's design OR an essay written by means of an on-line process originally set up for the CFE requirement. Check out the Center's home page at <http://www.spu.edu/depts/csfd/> to see UPEC's description of capstone courses and a list of suggested questions to use to structure a reflection paper of your own. To see the on-line process, log in to Banner, go to Faculty & Advisor Menu, and scroll down to Senior Reflection Report. Many departments use senior reflection papers for departmental assessment purposes. All capstone instructors should also submit anonymous copies of the papers, with gender indicated, to Cindy Price's office, for potential use for cross-campus assessment.

### DCL Sessions on Hope

The slots for afternoon sessions for the upcoming Day of Common Learning are filling rapidly, but there are still a few openings. Send your proposals to me as soon as possible, if you want to suggest a session examining the topic of hope from your own disciplinary perspective or with an interdisciplinary approach. The School of Theology is still leading the sweepstakes for most proposals submitted. Apparently few social scientists, arts, or humanities scholars have much hope.

Best wishes for a fruitful start to a new academic year!



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