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# See You on Wednesday!

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The first class meeting seemed to go smoothly enough. I went in, introduced myself, and ran through the course syllabus and calendar. The students seemed pretty much like the students I taught at State U—maybe a little older. They asked the same questions about how long the papers should be and which books to buy. They made no comments about the journal assignment for the next class. They filled out my survey readily enough. In fact, the class ended twenty minutes early.

In my eight years of teaching at State U, I never saw anything like the survey responses I received from this class. Can community college students be that different? I just don't know how I'm going to cope.

I used the same survey I used at State U with exactly the same directions: "I'm just looking for some information to get a feel for the class. Tell me: 1) why you are taking this class, and 2) what you want me to know about you. Please be honest. You don't have to sign your name if you'd rather not."

Then I read their responses. What did I get myself into? What am I going to do on Wednesday?

Take a look at the responses for yourself:

- *Learn to write very, very well.*
- *I want you to know is that the main reason for me to learn, is because I wanna go to computer afterwards.*
- *This is my first class in college. Since I graduated I wanted to try writing to see if I didn't have the ability.*
- *I am an international student. Sometimes I don't speak or tell what I want to say well.*
- *I want to how to use research information then write paper.*

- *To enter to the nursing program, and have a good abilities.*
- *You should know that I have a learning disable.*
- *I have a Leaning Disability in Reading and I think my writing is Poor.*
- *I would like to prove to myself that I am am now ready to be a serious student and that I can get an A in this class.*
- *I failed out of school and it has taken me a long time to get the guts to try again. I really want to do well.*
- *I have taken this course last semester and wrote three essay.*
- *A lot of things come very easily to me but what does not I become easily frustrated which makes it that much harder. I have to read lips. I am slightly tone deaf.*
- *I would like to learn how to get my thoughts down in an organized fashion. I would like my writing to be impressive and express how I feel.*
- *I would like to write a paper on my own that really makes sense.*
- *I want to be able to write a good essay, or other papers I might have to write in my college days.*
- *I want to be prepared for the other courses for my college education. I want to improve my writing skills.*
- *I'd like read different kinds of books and I want to try to like writing.*
- *I want to learn to read and think about a situation or article and know what to write about.*

## Use of the Case entitled “See You on Wednesday!”

Believing that we must build professional collaboration into our own work if we expect students to work collaboratively and that the improvement of teaching and learning begins with inquiry, the two of us, a faculty developer and a learning specialist at Massachusetts Bay Community College (MBCC), worked on the case, the workshop design, and our authors’ notes over a four-month period. Our collaboration began in AAHE’s workshop for case authors in May 1991, where we scrutinized a sample case written by Pat Hutchings and learned how teaching cases were being introduced at other schools. We were particularly influenced by what the University of Maryland’s University College does for orientation of new faculty.

We wrote the case with one major purpose in mind: to stimulate inquiry into teaching/learning issues at MBCC. Our objective was to use the case to socialize MBCC full and part-time faculty to the value of inquiry into and dialogue about teaching and learning. We planned to use the case in a workshop to: a) spark discussion by providing the structure to talk about instruction in a community college classroom, and b) model what we are encouraging participants to do. We wanted our case to raise some major points about teaching and learning in general and in our community college in particular.

We decided to organize the case around the diverse student needs that present themselves in a typical community college classroom. In fact, we let student voices tell part of the story. Half of the case consists of brief student responses to a questionnaire that one of the authors had used to get to know her classes at the college. We think that letting MBCC students speak for themselves gives the case immediacy, authenticity, and robustness.

Beyond specifying a writing course, we made the case fairly generic. The protagonist is a writing instructor because: 1) the student responses—from a writing class—wouldn’t make sense otherwise, and 2) we hoped MBCC instructors would recognize how writing supports the curriculum. Our instructor speaks in the first-person and is only identified by previous teaching experience, not by age, gender, or race. We have provided just enough detail for readers to know that the person is not a new teacher but is new to the community college, and wonders whether usual strategies will be effective and what else can/should be done. By being as open as possible, we hoped to reach as many of the workshop participants as possible.

For our purposes, with the usual time constraints, a mini-case seemed best. A sketch of what transpired at the first class meeting could be readily comprehended; participants’ myriad reactions and interpretations could add needed complexity.

Both the case and the workshop were organized around the notions that instructors have to know who is in their classes and need to employ active learning strategies in order for good teaching and learning to occur. Ever mindful of parallels, we structured the workshop to foster participants' active involvement in the inquiry process. Our directions for the groups were to: 1) read both pages of the case; 2) describe the class; 3) suggest in-class activities or homework the instructor might assign, given the student population in the class; and 4) discuss how the instructor can assess student understanding/learning at any point. As with the case, we tried to give participants just enough detail in the questions for small group discussion to get them to identify the problems (and possible solutions) for themselves.

Upon completion of the case discussion, we conducted follow-up. Curious to learn whether our inductive approach was successful, we included a brief meta-analysis of the case workshop process. After the discussion, we used a questionnaire that asked what was the most important thing participants learned about teaching and learning from the workshop and whether they found the case an effective way to trigger talk about teaching and learning. Most agreed that the case was a good springboard for discussions because it presented a real problem and elicited a wide variety of reactions.