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Section I

Teaching Improvement Practices and Programs

As we go about our daily business of encouraging faculty to examine and to improve their teaching, it would be helpful to know where we can most effectively expend our energies and resources. The articles in this section define which teaching improvement practices instructional developers believe are most likely to result in improved teaching and describe several successful instructional development programs.

W. Alan Wright and M. Carol O'Neil surveyed instructional developers in Canadian and U.S. colleges and universities to determine their perception of the relative effectiveness of 36 teaching improvement practices. Their study concluded that the most effective practice was the leadership provided by deans and department heads. "Employment policies and practices," including, among others, recognition of teaching in tenure and promotion decisions and regular review of faculty teaching effectiveness ranked second. Least effective was the summative evaluation of instruction. There seems to be a curious disparity here. While an institutional climate that demonstrates the importance of teaching through evaluation of teaching for employment, retention, promotion, and tenure is considered very important, the actual practice of evaluation is considered at best unimportant and at least suspect. Perhaps the clue to the disparity lies in the highly ranked category "deans/heads promote climate of trust for classroom observation." Or, faculty may need to see teaching as

part of summative evaluations but prefer that the process of evaluation be, at least in spirit, formative.

Jim Davis in "Deepening and Broadening the Dialogue about Teaching" recommends that our conversations about teaching be more firmly grounded in empirical research and theories of teaching and learning. This conversation must also be embedded in the dialogue about curriculum content and student outcomes. Davis goes on to describe the University of Denver's Center for Academic Quality and Assessment of Student Learning which works through colleges, schools, and departments to evaluate curriculum, assess student outcomes, and work with faculty to shape their teaching to the curriculum and desired student outcomes.

Anita Gandolfo suggests that learning outcomes assessment, when owned by the faculty and done as formative evaluation, can serve as an important force in instructional development. In "Assessment and Values: A New Religion?" she describes a successful formative, learning outcomes assessment model in the West Virginia University general education program.

A many faceted program at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst provides central administration support for teaching that enables deans, department chairs, and faculty to express their strong commitment to teaching. Aitken and Sorcinelli describe the program which includes, among other approaches, celebrations of teaching, formative evaluation, mentoring, and consultation.

Miami University's Teaching Scholars Program focuses on junior faculty to demonstrate the institution's commitment to teaching. The honorific program, described by Milton Cox in "Reclaiming Teaching Excellence: Miami University's Teaching Scholars Program," provides seminars on teaching and learning, involvement of senior faculty as mentors, teaching projects, national conferences, and retreats.

Students can be trained to observe teaching and give various levels of feedback. D. Lynn Sorensen summarizes the major elements of these programs and gives suggestions for implementation in her article on student observer/consultant programs.

Darlene Hoffman suggests that faculty are better able to approach improving their teaching if they uncover the ways in which their teaching reflects their values. In "Metaphors of Teaching: Uncovering

Hidden Instructional Values,” she compares problem based and value based teaching consultation. She describes a value based teaching consultation model.

Sugar and Willett have designed a board game around issues of academic ethics. This game, presented in “The Game of Academic Ethics: The Partnering of a Board Game,” can be used with faculty to generate discussions of ethical issues that arise in teaching.