Welcome to the Otis teaching blog. This blog is similar to a faculty lounge where we can come to talk about teaching and particularly what are some of the best practices at Otis. (There’s only so much you can accomplish while waiting for the elevators or in the stairwell!)

What are Best Teaching Practices and why should we care? I believe most of us teach at Otis because we genuinely care about the students and their learning (and I can say from experience that is not true of all colleges). However, as faculty we come with many different backgrounds and levels of preparation. I distinctly recall the very first time I walked into my own class (18 years ago, when I was mere 16). I was excited and intimidated. It was then I realized teaching was both an art and a science and became interested in pedagogy, or “the art or science of being a teacher, generally referring to strategies of instruction or a style of instruction.” Up until then I must confess that I assumed if you knew your content, you could watch others do it, use them as a model, and then call upon some teaching gene and perform effortlessly. Though my evals were good and the students seemed to learn, I felt like a fraud, albeit one clever at disguising my inexperience. This was the first time I had the “teaching naked” dream (and in my 18 years of teaching. I’ve become quite the exhibitionist, usually just before the semester begins).

Skip this paragraph if unbridled ego makes you revisit meals past. I can’t say for sure if I am a really good department chair, wife, mother, sister, friend, or neighbor, but I am certain I am really great teacher. I certainly didn’t start out great, just good and motivated to get better; a characteristic that encourages me to improve every semester along with my willingness to be a reflective practitioner, looking at what worked, what didn’t, and keeping up the ever growing literature on best practices in teaching and student learning.

So how do I know that I am really, really good at it? Consistently high student evaluations (though I’ve been getting more and more with emoticons on them, a disturbing trend for an English teacher. Did I not teach you to express yourself?), anonymous sites like “Rate My Professor” and “Grade My Professor” (I must confess the chili pepper buoyed me. At my age, those kinds of things are important)? Though all interesting the reason I am confident I am good is because over the years I’ve, slowly, sometimes painfully identified the characteristics that make teaching effective. Nevertheless, I know I can be better and am very interested in learning what works (or does not) for other faculty at Otis.

I also believe that the basics of great teaching cross disciplinary boundaries and departments. The methodologies are very similar, only the content changes. In addition to anecdotal evidence for practice, I’d like to share some of the research that I have done about teaching.
Feel free to comment, help me out, ask questions, and suggest topics. Because I have no personal life but Otis, I thought I would like to cover a range of topics that might be of interest from the beginner to the experienced practitioner. Other possible topics I am interested in are learning styles, assessment, information literacy, writing across the curriculum, the new Integrated Learning curriculum at Otis, ESL learners in the classroom, technology and teaching, active learning, layered curriculum, what should Liberal Studies be in the 21st century, and what should be "core" at an art and design college?

Filed Under: TEACHING/LEARNING CENTER
Tagged With: WELCOME

Comments

RICKP says:
April 6, 2007 at 11:22 am

With regards to "I can't say for sure if I am a really good department chair, wife, mother, sister, friend, or neighbor, but I am certain I am really great teacher. " All I have to say is "I know your son well enough now to say with confidence; if you are even half the teacher that you are a mother, your students (and Otis) are very lucky to have you as a teacher" your son is not only brilliant, he has outstanding character.

~Rick

YAEL22 says:
April 5, 2007 at 6:55 pm

RE: Getting the quiet ones to participate in class discussion:

I make leading one class discussion a required assignment. Students are asked to give a brief précis of the assigned reading and come up with questions for class discussion that are generated from the reading, but not limited to it. I ask for volunteers on the first day of class, and generally it is those who are most likely to contribute to class discussion that volunteer to go first. This is not a bad thing, as they set an example for other students, often putting those reticent to talk at ease in ways that us teacher/authorities might not be able to do. Plus, they are first to be critiqued, and rather than be a hard act to follow, they are often an easy act to emulate.

Another way I bring everyone into the discussion is by printing out “Student Insights” taken directly from student essays, putting them in quotes with their names next to the quotes. If the students are not speaking up in class, what they have written is now part of a conversation. Having one choice quote from each student put into writing seems to be a good confidence building measure. Once those quiet ones see what they have said in writing as part of a conversation, albeit on a printed page, they at least recognize that they are in the discussion. This often gets them talking.

JVENTURINI says:
April 5, 2007 at 12:17 pm

I would be very interested to hear from other faculty regarding an issue of pedagogy. Namely, when you approach discussion in a course how do you engage those students who are less inclined to speak in class? I often find that there are a select group of students who dominate a given discussion and those students predisposed to remain quiet. My concern is with those students who are clearly struggling in the class and do not participate in class. Often they are not able to articulate where they have fallen behind and what they do not understand. Usually I have met with these students one on one outside of class but it still does not resolve the quietness in class.
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9045 Lincoln Boulevard
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