

Student-Centered Learning Institute (Summer 2006) Executive Summary

Delivered by experienced and enthusiastic instructors, and largely well-received by participants, the Student Centered Learning/Teaching Institute resulted in a significant improvement in the participants' self-reported knowledge and abilities related to integrating more and/or improved engagement activities into their instruction. Besides increased understanding, participants reported leaving with a firm grasp of the fundamental "why and how" aspects of learning engagement as well as an interest to learn more about the concept. Many participants not only articulated a desire to learn more about engagement, but also outlined their personal areas of growth. While some initial resistance to what a few perceived as a pressure to absolutely eliminate "traditional" techniques (e.g. lecture) was observed early in the institute, the presenters attempted to reduce that "push back" by modeling engagement practices with the participants so they were able to "experience the difference" from the perspective of their students. Our central findings can be summarized as follows.

Strengths of the Activity

- Participants reported significant improvement in their understanding of the various factors that contribute to student learning engagement
- Participants also reported significant improvement in their ability to develop student learning engagement activities
- Group activities that *engaged* the participants in the learning process not only added to learning among the participants, they also *modeled the engagement process* such that faculty were able to *experience* engagement as would their students under analogous conditions in the classroom
- Participants also very much valued the ample resources provided by the presenters

Opportunities to Improve the Activity

- Although participants reported understanding the "why and how" fundamentals presented in the institute, they reported being less ready to engage in the "how to" connections that would actually allow them to integrate the individual activities they developed into their courses
- Participants also reported less confidence in their ability to assess student engagement activities and to follow through with applying these assessments toward continuous improvement of learning
- Based on some lingering sentiment expressed in the qualitative exit poll responses, it may be useful to adjust the early design of the institute to better gauge the range of participant teaching styles, since it appears some participants remained "put off" (and therefore not engaged) by what they perceived as an overly prescriptive approach by the facilitators to mandate teaching styles much different than the ones they historically used and trusted

Action Plan for Improvement

- Tasking the institute facilitators with developing/organizing activities in a two-part sequence - Part I, Strategies, techniques and resources; Part II, Integration into curriculum, model templates, assessment methods and continuous improvement feedback

- Providing the institute facilitators with a method to assess participants' existing and favored teaching styles as well as their teaching experience prior to the institute, deliberately grouping participants based on the style/experience-based profiles drawn from these data and matching participant groups to specific facilitators for initial assignments to maximize immediate engagement and minimize "push back"
- Develop follow up support meetings, discussions and resources
- Investigate and implement methods to measure/assess impact on student retention from first year to second year