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Faculty Learning Community
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Introduction

This document recaps my experience in the 2007-2008 Faculty Learning Community at the Rochester Institute of Technology (FLC7).
This portfolio contains the following:

- My philosophy of teaching
- My metaphor of teaching
- A description of my FLC project
- Reflections on the FLC experience

Philosophy of Teaching

My teaching philosophy is firmly grounded in the theory that you go to college to learn how to learn. Although each of the courses that I teach has a strong technical and/or skill component, I want the students to come away from my class with the ability to think critically and apply what they learn to new situations. They should have an ability to know where to look when they come across circumstances that are similar to those experienced in the classroom, but not exactly the same. Of course, I emphasize the particular skills that are necessary for success. Whether it is creating an entity relationship diagram, using SQL to obtain data from a database, or creating a spreadsheet to help with their personal finances, there are specific levels of achievement that I would expect a graduate in MIS or accounting to attain. Beyond that, however, is the ability to model a database from the user requirements, using SQL in new and innovative ways to transform data into information, and the creation of spreadsheets that are applications, capable of being handed to novice users. Additionally, students should develop skills in locating answers to their questions, solving problems, and working with others in group situations.

I spend a significant amount of time in the classroom exposing students to the way things can go wrong. I intentionally introduce errors in spreadsheet and database exercises, thus allowing the students to see error messages. I then interpret the messages and explain to them how they would go about finding out what they mean and how to resolve them. We spend time in the DBMS class working through an example of a very poorly designed database that I encountered in my previous public accounting practice. In general, I try to encourage the students to see beyond the small examples that are found in the textbook and learn to see the bigger picture.

One innovation that I have been using for several quarters is the concept of "consulting dollars." Student groups in the DBMS classes each have a $1,000 line of credit with the database consultant (me). The fee per 15 minute session goes from $50 in weeks 2 – 6 up to $500 in week 11. This encourages groups to meet with me early in the quarter and helps to ensure that projects are begun early and stay on track. Those students who take advantage of this have found it to be very valuable. And, as I tell my students, they don't get to keep the leftover money!

I also maintain an open book, open notes policy for quizzes and exams. It is my belief that spending time memorizing things does little for comprehension. Students are better off working through exercises, and in the process they will learn the material. If they can't remember the exact syntax of an SQL query they can always look it up on the job, so I allow them the same advantage in class.

Finally, I have begun using Connect software to hold extra help sessions for all of my classes. The software is internet based, allowing students to work from any computer with an internet connection. It has a chat feature and the ability to share computer applications. Given the varying skill levels in the computer applications class (from novice to expert) it is important that all students come away from the class with some value added, but I don't want to overwhelm the novices. This weekly help session gives them the time that they need to fully grasp the material.

To summarize, my teaching style is one that encourages (even requires) students to be self-directed learners. My role is a facilitator and the students who are willing to rise to this challenge inevitably come away from the courses with skills that they can apply in many other areas of their lives.

Metaphor of Teaching

My metaphor of teaching is that I provide the students with a toolbox with many different tools. I am the master carpenter and they are apprentices, learning how each tool works and what it is used for. Ultimately I want the students to learn the content of the course (a specific instruction booklet that they can return to again and again) as well attaining a decision making capability as to which tools to use, when. The toolbox includes such tools as communication (verbal and written), group work, project leader, problem solving skills, learning how to learn, and improved self-confidence. Each of these tools is generic and can be used in multiple ways; much like a hammer can be used to pound nails into the board and also pull them out, depending on how the tool is used. As apprentice students I would encourage the learners to understand how each tool can be used and under what circumstances it should be chosen. I would also want them to know how to the tool, i.e. encouraging them to write effectively or problem solve creatively.

My FLC Project – Group Work in Accounting Information Systems- Engaging Students for Learning

In the fall 2007 quarter I taught Accounting Information Systems to a class of 35 students which included 4 graduate students. I structured the class to be project heavy, providing the students with multiple resume building skills such as manual accounting, business process flow, Peachtree, spreadsheet, database and SAP. Except for the manual accounting project, which was a group project, all of the other projects were individual. See Figure 1 for a breakdown of the grading assignments for each quarter of the 2007-2008 academic year. Although there are some differences in actual assignments over the three quarters, the bulk of the work is the same, particularly with respect to the "resume building" skills indicated earlier.

Fall 2007

Event	Method	Percent
Quizzes	Individual Work- Online	10%
Flowchart Assignment	Group Work	5%
Manual Accounting	Group Work	15%
Spreadsheet	Individual	10%
Peachtree	Individual	10%
Database	Individual	10%
FlyA Kite (SAP)	Individual	10%
Accounting Controls (SAP)	Individual	7%
Security (SAP)	Individual	7%
Software Evaluation	Group	16%

Winter 2007-2008

Event	Method	Percent
Quizzes	Individual Work- Online	10%
Manual Accounting	Group Work	15%
Spreadsheet	Group Work	10%
Peachtree	Group Work	10%
Database	Group Work	10%
FlyA Kite (SAP)	Individual	10%
Accounting Controls (SAP)	Individual	5%
Security (SAP)	Individual	5%
Software Evaluation	Group	10%
Final Exam	Individual	15%

Spring 2008

Event	Method	Percent
Quizzes	Individual Work- Online	10%
Manual Accounting	Group Work	10%
Manual Accounting	Individual	5%
Spreadsheet	Group Work	5%
Spreadsheet	Individual	5%
Peachtree	Group Work	5%
Peachtree	Individual	5%
Database	Individual	10%
FlyA Kite (SAP)	Individual	10%
Accounting Controls (SAP)	Individual	5%
Software Evaluation	Group	15%
Final Exam	Individual	15%

Figure 1- Grading Events and Methods

An average of one major project per week was handed in, and each one needed to be graded. No final exam was given, but anecdotally it appeared as if the students understood the material. As quoted from a coop report:

"Accounting Information Systems is the one course that provided me with the best resources to perform my job related responsibilities.... I had the advantage on information systems because I took the class....Other interns had no idea about the systems and their school did not have a course like that for their accounting program."

I was providing value to the students, but at a very high cost to myself. Thus, I changed tactics during the winter quarter (again, see figure 1 for the breakdown). I sorted the students into groups at the beginning of the quarter, carefully balancing majors and strengths. All projects (except for SAP) became group projects, thus eliminating the need for me to grade 35 individual projects each week. I added a final exam component to the course which was reflective of the application of material that I expected them to achieve. Overall project grades were extremely high (in the 90's, see figure 3) while the final exam average was extremely low (62%, with a range from 10% - 85%). See figure 2 for this breakdown. It was very clear, based on the final exam grade, that most students were not processing the material. I hypothesized that a strong leader worked on each project, allowing the weight of the projects to be passed from student to student, with no one student achieving a high level of learning on all projects.

Winter 2007-2008		Spring 2008	
Average	**Range**	**Average**	**Range**
62%	10% - 85%	79%	54% - 91%

Figure 2- Final Exam Grades

Given this low level of achievement I decided that the students needed to be held personally accountable for the work they did on the projects. In order to assess this, I included an individual exercise at the end of each group project, requiring students to demonstrate that they had understood and apply the material covered. Each project was thus split in two- half the grade was for the group project and half was for the individual assignment. These assignments were applied in nature- the student needed to be able to understand the material in order to answer the question(s) on the individual assignment. Additionally, the individual assignments were meant to introduce the student to the type of questions that would be on the final exam. Overall, the project grades were somewhat lower than they had been in the winter (since all students were required to learn the material it is hypothesized that a strong leader did not dominate the process, thus passing responsibility for projects from one team leader to another.) However, the final exam grades were higher than they had been in the previous quarter (figure 2). As can be seen in figure 3, the overall average project grade decreased between winter and spring quarters, and overall GPA (figure 4) for the class decreased each quarter (a goal of mine since an 88% GPA is frowned upon.) Overall, I am pleased with the results, although I anticipate that I will tweak the course a bit more in the coming quarters, particularly with respect to encouraging each student to be actively involved with projects so that they will be well prepared for the individual assignments.

	Fall 2007		Winter 2007-2008		Spring 2008	
	Average	Range	Average	Range	Average	Range
Manual- Group	87%	71% - 98%	91%	85% - 96%	84%	81% - 90%
Manual- Ind					60%	0% - 90%
Spreadsheet-Group			93%	86% - 99%	96%	95% - 96%
Spreadsheet- Ind	79%	0% - 96%			58%	0% - 100%
Peachtree Group			96%	92% - 99%	87%	85% - 89%
Peachtree- Ind	79%	0% - 100%			60%	0% - 100%
Database	87%	0% - 100%	99%	99% - 100%	86%	43% - 100%

Figure 3- Grade Distribution

	Fall 2007		Winter 2007-2008		Spring 2008	
	Average	Range	Average	Range	Average	Range
Overall GPA	88%	72% - 96%	86%	75% - 93%	83%	70% - 92%

Figure 2- Overall GPA

Reflections on the FLC Experience

I was introduced to the Faculty Learning Community my first year as a professor at RIT. The emphasis in the Saunders College is discipline based scholarship, while at the same time being an excellent teacher. For this reason, I put off becoming part of the FLC for many years. I have been a proponent of active teaching and learning since I began teaching over 20 years ago (before I even knew it had a formal name or definition!) and joining the FLC 7 group was a very conscious decision. I believe that being a part of this community was helpful in furthering my teaching abilities, but even more importantly, being part of FLC7 helped me to see that there are many more people at RIT with a goal and focus of helping our students to become life-long learners. Because this approach is so much more work for the students, I sometimes feel like I am banging my head against the wall☺, but being a part of this community has provided support and friendship that are vital to maintaining a positive attitude. Additionally, given the current inter-disciplinary focus of RIT, I think this group can be an opportunity to foster inter-disciplinary projects and relationships. I am grateful for being part of FLC 7 and look forward to being part of FLC 7.1.