Elsie M. Hood Outstanding Teacher Award

Associate Professor of Psychology, Dr. Kelly Wilson, is the recipient of the 2010 Elsie M. Hood Outstanding Teacher Award. Wilson is the director of the University’s Center for Contextual Psychology. Former student, Lauren Sanifer, described Wilson as “a teacher that cares. He makes the most of his opportunity to mold young minds and push them toward a greater good.”

The university has recognized excellence in teaching by presenting the Elsie M. Hood Outstanding Teacher Award since 1966. Nominations are received from alumni, students and faculty. The recipient is recognized each year at Honors Convocation and recipients’ names are engraved on a plaque displayed in the J.D. Williams Library.

Graduate Instructor Award

The Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning is pleased to announce Otis W. Pickett as the 2010 recipient of the Graduate Instructor Award. Pickett, a Ph.D. candidate in American history, has been a part of the Department of Curriculum & Instructions since Fall 2008. Former student, Murphy William Turner states “Mr. Pickett has been nothing short of amazing as my instructor this semester.”

This award is intended to honor exemplary instruction and to recognize the importance of the teaching role performed by graduate students. A plaque displaying winners is in the J.D. Williams Library.

Graduate Student Training Programs

Over 160 graduate students attended the 2010 Graduate Instructor/Teaching Assistant Training co-sponsored by the Graduate School and the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning. The three-day event drew graduate students from 31 departments, offering them stimulating presentations by faculty members from Business, Education, and Liberal Arts and staff members from the Academic Support Center, Counseling Center, Dean of Students, EORC, FTDC, Graduate School, Library and Registrar. The event was very successful in terms of both learning and enjoyment for attendees and presenters alike.

A year-long Graduate Education Workshop series began in September with a presentation by Graduate School Dean Maurice Eftink and Associate Dean Christy Wyandt. Drs. Eftink and Wyandt outlined the roundtable discussions and workshops that will be a part of this series, which is intended to help prepare graduate students for future careers in academia or business. A complete schedule can be accessed at http://www.olemiss.edu/depts/cetl/Grad_Instructors.html.
Scholarship of Teaching & Learning
applied to Biology 160 and 162

By Dr. Lucile McCook, Department of Biology

Each academic year, 600 to 800 students take Biology 160 and/or 162. Although a majority of students make passing grades, these courses are especially challenging to the large number of entering freshmen and, as a result, have a high failure rate. Rather than lower standards for passing, we have been studying the problem in an effort to improve student learning and success in the study of biology.

In May of 2009, we identified several important reasons for poor student performance: inadequate study skills, poor class attendance, and failure to adapt to the new learning environment of college. Once we identified the problems, we devised solutions targeting each one and studied the impact of those solutions. The remainder of this article describes the first problem and solution, and the results of our efforts on student success. A larger article briefly discussing all the problems can be found on the CETL website.

Problem 1: Students lack adequate study skills at beginning of semester

Typically, students begin the semester with inadequate study skills such as cramming rather than pacing learning, and mistaking recognition for true understanding.

Solution: Offer on-line quizzes beginning the first week of class to help students establish effective study habits early in the semester, provide an immediate assessment of understanding, and allow students to earn extra points for their efforts.

Ten optional on-line quizzes for extra points were set up in Blackboard, beginning the first week of class in Fall 2009. The quiz schedule was included in the syllabus and posted on Blackboard, and the BISC 160 lecturer reminded the class each Friday of the weekend quiz. Each quiz effort included five randomly selected questions from a test pool that covered material from the lectures that week. Students could take the quiz as many times as they wished from Friday noon to Sunday midnight, and the score they received on their last attempt was recorded in Blackboard’s gradebook. Quiz scores were averaged over the semester, and were worth up to an extra 5% of their final average.

Results: Overall, participation in on-line quizzes was good, but varied through the semester, declining from 87% (28 Aug) to 66% (20 Nov). It should be noted that the single largest drop in participation from quiz to quiz occurred on the 25-27 September weekend, which coincided with Bid Day (27 Sep.). Participation and extra points earned varied among student groups as defined by their final grade. Viewed as a regression/correlation, it appears that “effort” and extra points earned per quiz is a better predictor of overall success in BISC 160 than ACT scores or high school GPA, even taking into account that extra points contribute directly to final score.

Conclusion and Future Plans

Our study shows that BISC 160 final grades and class averages were highest in the 2009 semester when compared to final grades and class averages for BISC 160 in 2003 through 2009 (including 2006, when McCook did not teach). Prior to 2009, 5% was added to the final grade point average of all students, regardless of their effort or final average. Because a maximum of 5% was added in 2009 based upon effort (as realized through on-line quizzes), we anticipated that class averages might dip in 2009. Instead, class averages improved.

Based on this data, we implemented the following changes to BISC 160 and 162 in 2010-2011:

The data suggests that on-line quizzing has been successful. It offers convenient opportunities for students to test their on-going understanding of concepts and receive immediate feedback. It costs very little in terms of money and effort from the teaching staff after the initial creation of quiz pools. Additionally, it reinforces weekly...
study habits beginning early in the semester.

Another change that was implemented to help students improve their study habits and adapt to the new learning environment is Supplemental Instruction (SI), an academic assistance program utilizing peers (Mantle, Feb. 2010, p. 3). Three students were chosen to be SI Leaders based on their successful application of test analysis and subsequent improvements, and their overall success in the BISC 160-162 program last year. They participated in SI training in August and began SI study groups the first week of classes. Ongoing training and supervision will be funded by the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning as part of a pilot program.

The BISC 160 Fall 2010 semester started with 796 students. We hope that these changes will help even more students be successful in their studies at the University.
In collaboration with the College of Liberal Arts, the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning is piloting a Supplemental Instruction (SI) program for the 2010-2011 academic year. SI is an academic support program designed to facilitate student learning through peer interaction and focuses on specific content courses that are historically difficult to complete successfully. The program does not target specific student populations. Instead, SI is designed for all students desiring to improve achievement in certain courses. The individual SI sessions are structured around study groups involving a trained leader, an undergraduate student who has successfully completed the course, and students enrolled in the course. The SI Leader attends lectures and organizes session activities, not to re-teach information, but to provide students with useful techniques and collaborative opportunities to study. Ultimately, the goal for these sessions is to encourage student autonomy in the learning process, helping them recognize that learning is an active process.

The courses targeted for the UM SI pilot are Accounting 201/202, Biology 160/162, and Chemistry 105/106. SI programs depend on partnerships with content faculty. Drs. Suzanne McCaffrey, Colin Jackson, Lucile McCook, and Kerri Scott provide support by assisting with SI Leader selections, working with SI Leaders in their courses, and collecting data for the SI Program. Six SI Leaders have been selected: Chelsey Chapman for Accounting; Jacob Elrod, Alexa Lampkin, and Kelli Dulaney for Biology; and Adams Briscoe and Samantha Egger for Chemistry. Everyone involved looks forward to a successful pilot and a productive year.