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Faculty Development Luncheon
Wednesday, November 13, 2013

Understanding X: Contextualizing Formulas

Presented by:
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Butterbaugh**, Mathematics,
2012-2013 Graduate Instructor
Excellence in Teaching Award
Recipient

Register [Online](#) by November 7.

Quotable Quotes

*"If you think education is expensive,
try ignorance."*

Derek Bok, President, Harvard University

*"It is not enough to have a good mind;
the main thing is to use it well."*

Rene Descartes

*"A teacher affects eternity: he can never
tell where his influence stops."*

Henry Adams

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Contextualizing the Learning Process

by Rebekah Reysen and Nancy Wiggers, Learning Specialists

All instructors have a common goal: student learning. But how can instructors actually achieve this goal? They define the kind of learning that should take place in their classes through the course objectives. Unfortunately, contrary to a popular Yogi-ism on the virtues of planning, instructors may plan where they are going, only to find that students end up some place else. Just because we want our students to learn more about a particular topic does not mean that the anticipated level of understanding is actually achieved. One technique that can motivate students toward better learning is embedding a topic into a particular context or "real life situation." Medical doctors, for example, want their students to not only remember important scientific concepts but also to apply this information to saving the lives of their patients. No matter what the field, contextualizing the learning process can have major implications and benefits, but what specific steps can an instructor take to contextualize learning?

Professors are considered to be experts in their respective fields, so their knowledge and expertise already make them the best people to contextualize the learning process. Additionally, one might argue that some of the most effective instructors not only relate well to their students interpersonally but also have a good understanding of what their strengths, weaknesses, and interests are. With Millennials comprising most of the traditional college student population, it would be helpful for instructors to consider Millennials' strengths, such as their ability to utilize technology and work effectively with peers. As Learning Specialists who teach students about studying strategies, we often talk to students about how they can utilize technology to enhance their study routine. Quizlet.com, for example, is a website that allows students to make and view flashcards on a variety of topics, from the arts to professional development. Professors can utilize technology such as television, YouTube videos, cell phone applications, and internet websites to help facilitate this process during class. Peer work such as role plays, Think-Pair-Share activities, etc. can also provide hands-on, interactive ways of conceptualizing information.

To actually place a topic in an authentic setting, however, is moving beyond key information and placing it in a context that the student can understand, relate to, and enjoy. For example, an epidemiology professor may use the popular television show *The Walking Dead* to "bring alive" the causes and contributors to disease. Using this show as a tool could help students move beyond purely memorizing definitions to applying these concepts to various scenarios. It could be a fun vehicle to ponder the "facts" and dispel the "fantasy." Curiosity can be a great motivator. Now, how does a Zombie actually work?

Supplemental Instruction Report

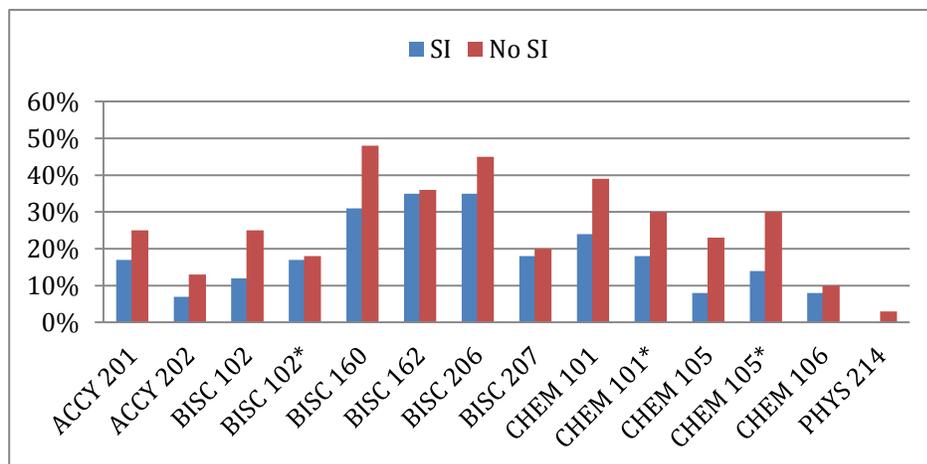
by Nancy Wiggers, Learning Specialist

Over 1000 students participated in the [Supplemental Instruction](#) program during the 2013 academic year. As illustrated in the chart below, the rates for

D's, F's, and withdrawals were lower for these students than rates for those who did not attend SI across all courses.

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About 490 students completed evaluation surveys last year. The majority reported that SI helped them learn course content. Many described SI as an enjoyable way to review content by working together with classmates and SI Leaders in addition to the fact that the scheduled SI sessions helped them to avoid procrastination.

In the first months of the 2014 academic year, the SI Program saw over 400 students. On average these students earned higher scores on their first course exams than their classmates. The SI Program and new SI Leaders are looking forward to another good year.

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