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Women and Authority

The topic of women and authority issues in the classroom is not new on our campus. The Women's Faculty Resource Network has sponsored events bringing together experienced and less experienced women faculty and GTFs to collaborate on ways of dealing with classroom problems which are linked to how women are sometimes perceived and treated differently by their students than are their male faculty counterparts.

Women faculty at Illinois State University recently held a brown bag lunch on the topic "Issues of Authority in the Classroom." With permission from the individuals who posted this information to the professional developers listserv (POD), I have included the group feedback on this issue as well as comments from other faculty developers who responded.

One suggestion made by this group is the idea of having departmental support for socializing students and teachers before and when they arrive on campus to the appropriate norms and behaviors for academic life on the campus. This kind of support could be in the form of a departmental statement in each course syllabus which clearly states expectations for appropriate classroom behavior, appropriate use of electronic communication, the role of graduate teaching fellows, etc.

February 8, 1997 Posting from the POD listserv

The Question:

I'm working with some faculty women who find they are disrespected by various student populations — for some it's the older women, for others it's the younger women, and for others still, it's the younger men. They've tried with mixed success to introduce themselves as, e.g., Dr. Jane Doe, hoping particularly that undergrads will say "Dr. Doe" instead of "Jane."

Ironically, they come across as accessible, friendly—just what the literature lauds, but it becomes an obstacle for



them. Is there another stance women should and could take in order to achieve more respect in the classroom without being labeled "cold and distanced"?

(Pardon all the stereotypical language, but I guess it's become that way for a reason.) How to use body language and all other strategies or articles on the topic appreciated.

Responses to the posting

From Kathleen McKinney, Illinois State University:

We recently held an informal luncheon brownbag on the topic “Authority in the Classroom” at the request of several young women faculty. We discussed problems of disrespect, inappropriate questioning of authority (not all is inappropriate, of course), and similar issues. I will try to summarize some of the ideas or suggestions we shared.

- 1) Participants were in disagreement about the use of faculty titles versus first names by students. We concluded that this depended on the faculty member’s style, the nature of the class and so on.
- 2) Consider forms of “impression management” including dressing, speaking, and behaving professionally.
- 3) Be strict and firm initially, because it is easier to start firm and become flexible later than to do the opposite.
- 4) Treat students with respect, in order to be treated that way in return.
- 5) Make expectations and standards (both academic and behavioral) very clear and explicit. Stick firmly to those expectations and standards, except under unusual circumstances.
- 6) Seek support (back-up) from departmental chairpersons in certain situations.
- 7) Draft a department statement of expectations and norms (both academic and behavioral) for both students and faculty that would be included in all course syllabi and in the department literature.
- 8) Earn respect through good pedagogy—be on time to class, be prepared and organized, know your material, involve your students, use diverse techniques, use active learning, allow students to question, etc. . . .
- 9) Make use of the informal social control of other students, co-opt the problematic student, or openly discuss such problems, especially if you can relate them to the course (gender, deviance, norms, roles, inequality, stereotypes. . .).

I can tell you that what’s responsible for the lack of respect for women faculty in the classroom is gender, and norms for the treatment of women at specific schools and in specific departments.

From Caitilyn Allen, University of Wisconsin-Madison:

This is a familiar problem. Sometimes it helps to lay your professional credentials out explicitly for students. You can do this in the context of getting to know each other at the beginning of a semester, for example, so it seems friendly and accessible. But, in fact, the purpose is to remind the students that you’re a professional scientist with many years of training, much experience, and stature in your field. (Not their mother or confidant.) So you might say:

“Well, as you know, I’m Professor Doe.” (Don’t even admit to having a first name.) “Let me tell you a little about myself, since I expect to be getting to know you over the course of the semester. I completed my bachelor’s degree with a double major in Molecular Biology and French Literature at Prestigious Little Liberal Arts College; then I began my graduate studies at Great Big State University in the laboratory of Professor Important. My thesis project concerned the transcriptional regulation of mitochondrial genes in human cancer cells. After that, I went to Cambridge University in England for a three-year post-doctoral research stint in the lab of Dr. Impressive, which resulted in five publications in scientific journals and landed me an interview for this job. I’m currently doing research in my own lab on gene regulation in bacteria pathogenic to AIDS patients. My laboratory is supported by grants from three different Federal agencies. So as you can see, I’m quite busy, but I’m delighted that we’ll be working together this semester because I LOVE teaching science.” (Accompanied by a fiercely intense smile.)

For me, the key has been combining this very professional approach with a high level of enthusiasm and energy for science in the classroom. Constructive intimidation, or

something like that. But I think each woman has to find a style that works with her personality.

Caitlyn Allen (that's Professor Allen to you.)

From Dina Wills, Lehigh University:

As a female faculty member teaching communication classes for 25 years at two community colleges, three large state universities, and one private college, I can tell you that what's responsible for lack of respect for women faculty in the classroom is gender, norms for the treatment of women at specific schools and in specific departments, and the idea that the same behavior may be called "tough" from a male professor and "bitchy" when it's a female professor.

Women who aren't feminists and have never studied the post-modern canon find the same testing being done by some of their students. The brown-bag lunch group came up with the list of ideas that do work—done over time. Wear the formal clothing, use the title, don't change the class policies the first time someone whines, immediately face down a student who tries to challenge you rudely in class, let your competence show (which isn't always easy for a woman) in your teaching, be respectful of students but firm with them—nothing new about the ideas, but it's still a shock to a woman when she gets that student reaction to her as a woman, not as a competent professor.

TEP welcomes other comments and suggestions on this topic. You can now respond on-line at this address:

http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~als/tep/lizard/women_authority.html



The Alchemy of Ed-Tech: An E-mail Interview with Elizabeth Rocha

by Michael Sweet

In my efforts to learn what makes different types of educational technology work in different classroom settings, I am continually tracking down stories of "failure" and "success" right here on campus. By sharing these stories of failure and success, I may be able to help some of you keep from re-inventing the wheel in your own attempts to adopt these exciting new teaching tools.

Many aspects of teaching harbor seeds of unpredictability, and technology is no different. Just like the small-group activity that soars with your 9 o'clock section and bombs with your 10 o'clock section, technology has a curious alchemy that makes a realistic approach to it one of "How can I stack the odds in my favor?" rather than "What is guaranteed to work here?"

Last summer, Elizabeth Rocha (PPPM) participated in TEP's educational technology summer short course. This quarter, Elizabeth tried using a listserv in one of her courses, and so far has enjoyed a satisfying success. The following questions and answers are taken from an informal "e-mail interview" we held recently.

Michael: Elizabeth, I'd love to hear what the structure and maintenance of your successful listserv experience has been. How big is the class? What level is the class?

Elizabeth: The class is a core class for 1st year Master's students. There are about 25 enrolled this year. It is a theory class.

Michael: What is the function of the listserv?

Elizabeth: I started it to do several things: the main one was to increase class dialogue. I hoped that it would be a

vehicle for communication for those students who did have comments and ideas, but were reluctant to speak out in class. This is working very well. Participation ebbs and flows depending, I think, on other pressing needs, like assignments from other classes.

The second major reason was I hoped it would also be a vehicle for increasing the level of understanding of the theory (articles and perspectives) presented in class. The class is divided into groups based on weekly topics. Each group is required to summarize the readings (de-jargonize them if needed and interpret, relate to previous topics, etc.) and post it before the class dealing with that topic. When it comes time for the final paper (which always prompts a lot of questions about the readings) these questions can be answered on the listserv by each group. This part has yet to be tested.

Michael: What kind of maintenance/moderation do you do as instructor?

Elizabeth: In the beginning I had a GTF moderate it. However, it soon became apparent that this wasn't necessary—none of the comments were inappropriate, nor were there too many. For this reason, I changed it to unmoderated, and it works just as well—even better because all messages are instantly posted. All I do is read them. The GTF prints out the messages and saves them because I did make participation mandatory and students will be graded on the quality of their participation.

Michael: What do you think has been the biggest factor in your success?

Elizabeth: I think the most important part (besides making it part of the grading process) has been the provocative nature of the topics under discussion. We began the class by discussing values —What exactly are Anglo-European middle class values and how are they embedded in the built environment that planners produce and reproduce? This was contested by some students who believed that everyone in this country (some insisted everyone outside this country) shared the same values. That, plus good postings by top students, got the rest interested. A number of students (particularly students from different ethnic, racial backgrounds or international students) were able to discuss the differences in values. I don't think they would have spoken out in class.

Michael: Any other surprises you have experienced, positive or negative?

Elizabeth: My dilemma has been—do I participate or not? I have been chomping at the bit to inject my comments, correct misinformation, and guide the discussion. But I decided not to because I think it would tend to dampen future participation. I only post announcements and responses to the weekly summaries with suggestions for improvement that future groups can use.

At this point in the quarter (week 6), participation has fallen off dramatically. How do I get it back on track? Or is this just part of the process? I expect postings will pick up near the end of the quarter as students begin to fulfill the requirement of five postings and begin to ask questions regarding the

readings in order to construct their final paper.

So, the lessons to take from Elizabeth's experience are these:

1) **Include on-line participation in assessing students' grades.** Require a minimum (and possibly maximum) number of posts per-week or per-term.

2) **Start the ball rolling with an engaging question or questions.** Hook them with a controversial topic that they cannot resist.

3) **Surrender control only as you feel comfortable.** Elizabeth began the term with a moderated listserv and turned it over to the students (as unmoderated) only when she was comfortable with their on-line behavior. This is the same principal used in beginning the term with strict classroom guidelines, and then easing up as you get to know your students.

4) **Do not over-post, yourself.** Though Elizabeth has been "chomping at the bit," her hands-off approach has created a perception of open air-time among her students—the teacher is not looking over their shoulders and evaluating every word. This works well with graduate students who need less structure than undergraduates.

If you have had experiences using electronic communication from which other instructors might benefit, let us know by commenting on this topic at:

http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~als/tep/lizard/edtech_alchemy.html

Two Spring Events!

Thursday and Friday, April 3, 4

Larry Michaelsen, University of Oklahoma, will be at the UO to present workshops on Team Learning. His primary research interests are the dynamics of group problem-solving and the use of group-based activities for increasing students' higher-level learning and group problem-solving skills. Dr. Michaelsen has received numerous awards for his teaching and his pioneering work with Team Learning. He has presented to more than 56 universities here and abroad with strong endorsements from faculty in fields as diverse as biology, psychology, chemical engineering, accounting, physics, philosophy and management.

Tuesday, April 22

TEP and the Faculty Consultants' Network will proudly sponsor a presentation by **Steve Gilbert**. Few people in the US are as informed about educational technology in higher education as Steve Gilbert. He is currently the Director of Technology Projects for the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE) and spends the majority of his year traveling around the nation, visiting colleges and universities that are struggling with issues of how to integrate educational technology successfully on their campuses. Steve moderates the AAHESGIT listserv, which has more than 5000 subscribers who share their expertise, problems, solutions and visions on educational technology in higher education.

Contact gcooper@oregon for registration and more information about these upcoming events.

The Lois Scharf Reed Seminar Room

by JQ Johnson

The Library has completed a new computer-equipped seminar room, the "Lois Scharf Reed Seminar Room," located in Knight Library 235. It features a unique conference seminar-style setting, with a computer hardware and software environment that you might find useful in teaching. The room is particularly appropriate for small group discussions that occasionally need computer support, perhaps in the form of team projects. The goal is to provide an environment where computing assists, rather than dominates, the instructional process.

Complementing a traditional seminar table seating up to a dozen participants, the room features six 166Mhz Pentium workstations arranged around the periphery. Computer and traditional projection are also available. Available software is currently somewhat limited, but the Library will consider

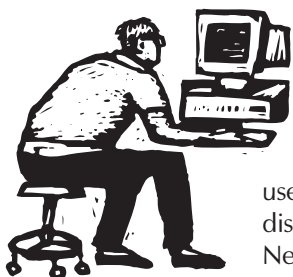
purchasing additional software appropriate for the library collections.

Priority use is for library instruction and library-sponsored meetings requiring hands-on access to electronic resources. Faculty from other departments may schedule the seminar room at any time, although the room should not be considered as the sole or regular classroom for a course.

If you are interested in booking the room for one of your classes — perhaps for a discussion session or drop-in help session on electronic aspects of your course — contact Colleen Bell, the Library Instruction Coordinator (cbell@darkwing). If you'd just like to find out more about the seminar room and explore ideas of how you might use it in your courses, contact JQ Johnson, (jqj@darkwing).

*I totally disagree with Jeff's argument...blah,blah,blah
...blah,blah...The articles never states one way or the other*

Motet



At the end of January, TEP sponsored the second in its series of educational technology “show-and-tell” sessions. This session featured Motet conferencing, a relatively simple software package that allows users to have visually-threaded, on-line discussions via their Web-browser (e.g., Netscape). Lucy Lynch, from the Computing Center, introduced the technology and outlined the steps a campus teacher needs to follow in order to become a “conference host.” Next, Tim Gleason from Journalism and Kiernan O’Rourke-Phipps from AEI each presented the experiences they have had using Motet in their classrooms.

What is Motet?

Motet is a centralized piece of software that Lucy maintains, on which you can set up “conferences” for courses you teach. These conferences are accessible via a Web-browser and can contain as many threads of conversation as you want. These threads are organized into “topics,” and anyone using a conference (teacher or student) can create a new topic. Contributions to discussion are posted in the order that they are received, and at the bottom of each thread is a dialogue box where students can make their own contribution to each discussion. Each user’s e-mail address is also a “hot-link” to private e-mail, so that users can have private side discussions, if they choose.

Motet in the Classroom

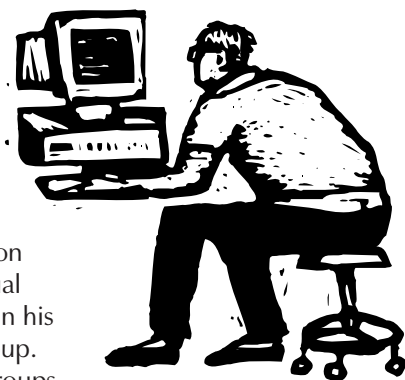
Tim and Kiernan have both used Motet in their classes, with radically different results. Tim learned a great deal about the limitations of Motet and on-line discussion in general, while trying to use it in his Information Gathering (J202) class last fall. The class had about 100 students, and revolved around individual research “mega-projects” (100

or more pages) that each student had to assemble over the course of the term.

When the students chose their areas of research and formed groups around common interests (e.g., environmental policy, education reform, right to die, homosexual rights, etc.), Tim set up topics in his Motet conference for each group. Except for one or two active groups, Tim was disappointed by how few students actually ended up using the conference—some topics remained completely dormant all term. He hypothesizes at least two reasons for this. First, Motet presents the beginning user with too many options, making the user-interface awkward and sometimes confusing. Without training, it takes a lot of getting used to. The developer of Motet has gotten quite a bit of feedback about this, and the update (planned to release before spring break) will include a more standardized and streamlined interface.

Second, since the thrust of the class was around individual research projects, there was no structured reason for the students to interact around course material. The momentum of the class was individual, and so on-line conferencing went somewhat against the grain of that momentum.

Kiernan, on the other hand, reported very positive experiences with Motet. She teaches English as a second language through AEI and required her students to post weekly journal entries to Motet. She found that Motet seemed to provide her students with a “safe zone” in



which to practice their writing skills.

While in-class writing was often stilted to the point of being almost incomprehensible, the somewhat informal atmosphere of Motet allowed a much freer flow of language to take place, revealing writing skills in certain students that surprised her. Indeed, the interactions online differed so markedly from the interactions in class, that it almost seemed like a completely different set of students.

Of particular interest to Kiernan was the peer-support and peer-review that took place online. Students not only began coaching each other out of their shyness and uncertainty, but would also clarify assignments for each other and gently rib each other for skipping class. At the end of the term, the students requested that the Motet conference remain active into the next term, because they had come to enjoy the on-line interaction with each other so much.

At least two of the differences between Tim's and Kiernan's experiences say important things about using conferencing software like Motet. The first comes from the different reactions each class had to Motet's user interface. Whereas Tim's students found the interface confusing and too option-laden, Kiernan's students had no such problem. This occurred for two reasons. First, Tim's students had more experience with Netscape to begin with and so had certain expectations about how Motet *should* work, which confused them when it turned out not to work that way. Second, Kiernan limited the number of options she wanted her students to use. She told them "Click on 'List all

conferences,' and then 'List all topics.' Don't mess around with anything else." This standardized their experience and seemed to get them all "up to speed" relatively quickly.

The second difference between Tim and Kiernan's experiences says something about on-line discussion in general, not just Motet. The difference is that Kiernan required her students to post assignments to Motet and interact on-line, whereas Tim's on-line interaction was optional, and intended to help his students work together. In "carrot" and "stick" language: Kiernan used a stick to motivate the interaction, whereas Tim hoped that the interaction itself would be rewarding enough for the students to consider it a carrot by themselves. This did not happen. This seems to say that teachers need to use at least a small "stick" (requirement) to motivate everyone to go online at the outset, in order to build enough momentum for the carrot (value) to emerge there.

As an instructional tool, conferencing software has great potential to connect students in a "place" and in certain ways that are otherwise not available to the classroom. Tim's lessons remind us that we are still on the learning curve with Motet, but Kiernan's experiences also demonstrate that there are classes and students for which it is already working very well.

To learn more about using Motet in your classroom, contact Michael Sweet (mssweet@oregon) To set up a Motet conference for your course, contact Lucy Lynch (llynch@oregon).

One Out of Every Ten Students. . .

This quarter, the International Peer Assistants (IPA) presented a workshop titled "*The World in a Classroom: Faculty and International Student Dialogue.*" In addition to running an article in the Emerald to publicize the event, the IPA sent personalized invitation cards and e-mails to 80 faculty members, hoping to beat their previous attendance records.

When their hour arrived, EMU Cedar Room C held three well-prepared student facilitators, 25 international students ready talk . . . and two of the invited faculty.

What this may say about our faculty's willingness to listen to and learn from their students is somewhat troubling, especially considering that:

- 1) Roughly 10% of the UO student body consists of international students.
- 2) The last "World in a Classroom" workshop two years ago had a combined student-faculty attendance of 65 people (30 faculty, 35 students).

What has changed? Why does it seem, at least based on the turnout for this event, that teachers are not as interested in learning how to

communicate more effectively with this growing population?

Undaunted, however, the students came up with the following concrete teaching suggestions:

- 1) **Clarify how you want to be addressed.** On the first day, be sure to say “Call me Michael” or “I prefer that you call me Professor Johnson.” Other cultures have radically different norms of formality in the classroom, and even something as simple as correctly addressing the professor can confuse many international students.
- 2) **Clarify what you mean by “class participation.”** It is not fair to make it a subjective “X-factor” grade. If you expect people to contribute verbally to the class discussion, say so on the first day. Offer alternative forms of participation (office hour visits, written contributions, e-mail/listserv postings) to students who are uncomfortable with in-class verbal participation.
- 3) **Require at least one office hour visit** during the term. This one-on-one interaction allows the students

to make a personal connection with you. If everyone in the class is required to do it, the international students will not feel like they are “going to the principal’s office.” (In some other cultures, one-on-one interaction between teachers and students is rare and only occurs when a student has been “bad” or is “inadequate” in some way.)

- 4) **Allow students to connect in small groups.** The less-intimidating context of a small group can allow international students to make contributions and personal connections.
- 5) **Be willing to pursue a question.** When speaking in front of the whole class, ESL students sometimes have more difficulty framing their questions. Have patience and be willing to say, “Let me make sure I understand your question. Are you asking. . . ?”

For more information on international students and the challenges they face, contact Magid Shirzadegan (magid@oregon) or Ginny Stark (gstark@oregon) in the Office of International Education and Exchange.



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