



Teachers talk

Motivating students to learn is the primary goal

By ANNA TURNAGE and PAM EMERSON
Staff Writers

College professors are not just people who teach, they are facilitators, motivators, analyzers and researchers.

"When someone decides to be a professor, it means they have a real desire to learn, they love to experiment, and they have a keen commitment to help other people," said Barbara Day, a professor at UNC's School of Education.

"At a university, a teacher's challenges are different than in high school education because the students are already bright kids and eager to learn," she said. "This presents even more of a challenge to them because their job is to help students develop to their full potential, knowing that potential is great."

Part of the challenge in helping students develop potential means that professors must continue to learn and study, Day said. "Professors are constantly reading and researching so they can motivate students to be the best they can be."

Teaching teachers

Helping teachers be the best they can be is the function of UNC's Center for Teaching and Learning. Dr. Joe Schwartz, the director, describes the center as "a one-stop K mart for all your teaching and learning needs."

According to Schwartz, the best type of method for a professor depends on the personality and teaching style of the individual person.

"It's all very individualized," he said. "You can't suggest a teaching technique unless you know what kind of style the professor has."

The center is located in the basement of Wilson Library and has been operating for almost two years to help professors improve their teaching skills. It provides teachers with objective points of view about how they can improve their methods and gives them the necessary materials to improve their approach.

Schwartz, a political science professor, said he did not believe that simply standing in front of a class and lecturing is the way to reach students effectively. "Frankly it gets boring to get up there year after year and have a monologue with yourself," he said. "There is actual research stating that students forget at least 90 percent of the information two weeks after the course has ended."

"There is no way to make them learn unless you create a learning environment in which they can apply their skills," he said. "What's the point of going over a semester's worth of material if they're just going to forget 90 percent of it?"

To remedy the problem Schwartz allows open group discussions in his classes.

"It's not only important for students to hear what I have to say, it's also important for me to hear what they have to say," he said.

"I think the role of a professor is to help and to force students to examine their ideas, morals and values about themselves and the world around them," Schwartz said. However, he said many of the professors that come to him for help feel their students aren't putting any effort into their classwork.

"Professors become very discouraged when students don't seem interested and motivated," he said. "A lot

of them just say, 'Why should I spend so much time and energy preparing to teach a class if students spend so little time trying to learn the material?'"

"In other words, it takes two to tango. If a professor spends a lot of time preparing for a class, then so should students," he said.

A tough job

One of the greatest challenges facing teachers is how to motivate students and hold their interest throughout the class period.

Student motivation is one of the most important jobs a professor has, Day said. "The essence of it all is to make sure that students 'buy in' to what you're teaching."

How a professor motivates a student depends on what kind of methods are used and what kind of students they have. "Most students respond better to a professor who uses different strategies," Day said. "Some students don't really need that — they're simply going to learn the material no matter what the method is."

A large class size makes a difference for some teachers when trying

"I can't stand still, for one thing."

Kaufman said he tried to stress insight and evaluation rather than memorization in his classes. To help accomplish this goal, he distributes questions before topics are discussed in class and offers voluntary discussion groups.

Kaufman, who has taught at UNC for 10 years, said he loved teaching because it was always new and never routine. "This is an extraordinarily wonderful place to teach in terms of the student population."

"My students are motivated," he said. "They usually do not take my classes if not."

Attorney Barry Roberts admits he uses intimidation to motivate the students in his business law classes. "I cannot tolerate for a student to be unprepared," he said. "I can't come to class unprepared, so neither can they."

His students must be trained to function in the real world where there is tension and pressure, he explained.

The Socratic question-and-answer method is Roberts' way of keeping students involved in class. He tries to call on each student at least once a week in classes of about 50 students and more often in the smaller classes.

Roberts said the closest he could bring students to experiencing the situations discussed was by creating hypothetical situations. "I can create an outrageous hypothetical they will remember, and along with it, they will remember the law that applies."

He said there was no way to describe the ideal student due to the many acceptable patterns. "There are some who are too quiet, and I try to get them to speak up, and then there are others who talk too much without thinking."

One mistake Roberts said many students made is failing to pay enough attention to the instructor when choosing a course. By picking the classes that best fit their schedules, he said students waste great opportunities.

Dr. Chris Armitage, English

Favorite Meal:
British Columbia Salmon

Favorite Movie:
Lawrence of Arabia

Favorite Entertainment Spot:
Privacy of Living Room

Dream Vacation:
Sailing the Pacific

Alternate Profession:
Playing Beethoven's piano music as Arthur Schnabel played it

Students who sign up for Dr. Robert Johnson's psychology classes have to be motivated, according to Johnson, or they would not be willing to drive the 40 to 60 miles a week necessary to complete their

required hours of volunteer work. For several years, Johnson has taught a class that allows students to actually work in a mental health care facility or within a related organization. Most of the students complete their volunteer hours at John Umstead Hospital in Butner.

Dr. Robert Cox, Speech

Favorite Meal:
Dr. Wood's Shrimp Scampi

Favorite Movie:
Matawan

Favorite Entertainment Spot:
Cat's Cradle

Dream Vacation:
Trek to Mount Everest

Alternate Profession:
Environmental Activist

"My own personal viewpoint is that other fields would do well with practicum courses, so students can see what it is really like out there," Johnson said. "No one talks theories in real jobs."

The student view

A good teacher inspires a student to do his best personally, according to Jolie Westerman, a junior psychology and French major.

Mark Dendle, a senior French and international studies major, said class discussion was not only important, but should be considered in calculating grades. Grades should improve if a student speaks up in class, he said.

"A teacher should stop between major sections of the lecture to ask if there are questions and never slight a response to one of those questions," Dendle said.

His major complaint was teachers who do not speak English clearly. "I dropped those classes," he said.

Mike Archey, a senior political science major, once walked out of a class because a teacher could not solve his own logic problem. "I did not pay my tuition so he could stand up there and not know what he's doing," he said.

Some students feel it is important for a teacher to reach out to them on a personal level. Huffy Huffman, a junior economics major, said the teacher should know every student's name whenever possible.

Daphne High, a senior English major, agreed. "I like a teacher who involves the class and who has a personal relationship with them — someone we know a little about," she said. "A good teacher is someone who not only likes the subject but enjoys teaching it."

Of course, it is virtually impossible for a teacher to learn the name of every student in a class of 300. That is one of the reasons many students prefer smaller classes.

Huffman said he preferred an atmosphere where students and teachers are interactive. "I don't like large classrooms," he said. "It's too easy to get bored."

Of-ignored TAs play dual role

By JACKI GREENBERG
Staff Writer

They are all over campus, but they rarely receive as much attention as they deserve. Teaching assistants — known to most as TAs — play an indispensable role at this university.

A TA's responsibilities depend on the needs of the department. Some grade exams or lead discussion sections while others teach independent sections of a course.

"People call us TAs, but we're really the 'T,'" said Andrew Ade, French TA. "In the foreign language department, we don't assist anyone."

Hannelore Jarausch, director of the French language program, said language teaching assistants were generally very good. "Since teaching is a new experience for them, they may be more enthusiastic than someone who has taught for 20 years."

Dr. Joel Schwartz, director of the Center for Teaching and Learning, said there was tremendous variability in the types of training, preparation and support programs the different departments provide for TAs.

"Often TAs train themselves by seeking out more experienced TAs who have taught that course before," Schwartz said. Also, TAs are observed by faculty and videotaped to help evaluate their teaching techniques.

Math TAs have a very short period of training before entering the classroom, said Sue Goodman, director of graduate studies for mathematics. "Ideally, we would not put TAs in class until they have had a full semester of training, but budget restrictions do not allow that."

Foreign TAs may have more trouble teaching if they have

trouble expressing themselves clearly. One foreign TA said, "I know I pronounce some words differently and sometimes I speak too fast, but I tell my students to ask me to stop if they can't understand me."

Cameron Cooke, a junior from Greensboro, said, "Many foreign TAs are very good teachers, but students refuse to give them a chance because of their accent. There are situations, though, where TAs aren't equipped with the language skills to teach."

The math department is careful to choose foreign TAs who speak English well, according to Goodman. "I think TAs often get an unfair deal," she said.

The Center for Teaching and Learning is now conducting a survey to determine what the 30 departments in Arts & Sciences are doing to train TAs and what their needs are. "We suggest some things they might consider, and the center is prepared to help implement these suggestions, if (the department chairmen) choose to act on them," Schwartz said.

The math and political science departments need the most help because both use large numbers of TAs, Schwartz said, and neither department has any systematic training program. But the physical education department is in the best shape.

"The training, support and supervision which they give the graduate students who teach the required P.E. courses is unbelievable," Schwartz said. "The University must find additional resources to train, prepare and support TAs in other departments."

Schwartz suggested that students should be more assertive if they felt they weren't being taught well.