

# PAES Instructional Enhancement Initiative

College of Education & Human Ecology  
The Ohio State University

## THEME FOR THE YEAR!

The PAES Instructional Enhancement Initiative has selected a theme for the 2007-2008 academic year:

*Enhancing Critical Thinking  
Among Our Students:  
Moving from Student to  
Independent Scholar*

Look for events over the course of the year that contribute to this theme!

## Eggheads & Eggrolls: Enhancing Critical Thinking Among our Students

The workshop on November 8th will get the ball rolling—we will discuss what critical thinking means, discover why it is important to develop classroom strategies to enhance critical thinking, and learn ways that such strategies have been implemented in other programs.

On December 4th, *Eggheads & Eggrolls* will give faculty in PAES the opportunity to continue the discussion with a look at our own programs.

- What are we doing that enhances critical thinking?
- How do we know what is working?
- What could we be doing differently?
- What can we learn from each other?

Make plans to join your colleagues on December 4 for what is sure to be a lively discussion!



*Eggheads Date:*

*Monday, Dec. 3*

*12:-00-1:30*

*Location: 4th floor*

*Lunch provided*

## November 8 Workshop: Enhancing Critical Thinking Among Our Students: The Path from Student to Independent Scholar with Dr. Kathryn Plank, FTAD

Critical thinking is best understood as the ability of thinkers to take charge of their own thinking. This requires that they develop sound criteria and standards for analyzing and assessing their own thinking and routinely use those criteria and standards to improve its quality (Elder & Paul, 1994).

This workshop will encourage us to think of ways to attend to the development of critical thinking among our students. We will discuss how to use the curriculum and classroom assignments to push students toward higher levels of critical thinking.

Dr. Plank will present some of the latest information on critical thinking and methods to promote critical thinking in our teaching. We also will hear how these methods have been implemented in programs within PAES, and of course, we'll have plenty of time for discussion!

### Workshop Logistics:

Room 412, PAES Building

12:15—lunches provided

12:30—workshop begins

This session is appropriate for faculty members at all stages of career development!

### Lunch choices:

**Sandwich:** Turkey, Ham, Roast Beef, or Veggie

**Bread:** Multigrain baguette, Sourdough baguette Whole Wheat, or Rye

**Side Salad:** Potato Salad, Pasta Salad, or Cole Slaw

**Cookie:** Choc. Chunk, White Choc. Macadamia or Oatmeal Raisin

Please email Darcy your lunch choices by November 5  
granello.1@osu.edu

## Walking the (on)Line: Avoiding & Troubleshooting the Challenges of Distance Learning

Terri Hessler, Moira Konrad, & Helen Malone  
Special Education

Distance education has become more commonplace in higher education in the last decade. With this new teaching format come methodological issues that vary from face-to-face instruction, including content delivery, class discussion, and quizzing. The primary challenges to distance education involve effectively managing the aforementioned issues without being physically present with students.

This past summer we delivered an asynchronous survey course in special education through distance education to more than 100 students. At the beginning of the quarter we uploaded to Carmen 16 podcasted lectures with corresponding PowerPoint presentations and guided notes that were all related to the chapters in the required text. Additionally, we designed a discussion board with topics related to each of those 16 lectures/chapters, as well as an “Ask the Instructor” forum. We also constructed online quizzes for each lecture/chapter and an online final exam. Course delivery was self-paced, so students could complete the requirements at their leisure with an end-of-the-quarter due date.

### Content Delivery

Instructors in distance education may find it difficult to gauge understanding of content in an asynchronous format due to the electronic medium of content instruction. Content instruction in a face-to-face delivery allows for a visual inspection of student countenance to determine understanding (e.g., a quizzical look indicates confusion). We attempted to use the discussion board to monitor student understanding of the reading and lecture material, but found it ineffective for the following reasons: (a) some students did not participate at all in the discussion board; (b) some students did not read other students’ postings and therefore did not contribute novel ideas; and (c) some students posted only (what they thought was) the required information and never returned to that posting to read responses by us or their classmates.

We thought providing optional guided notes combined with discussion postings would avoid such problems, but we propose the following adjustments to enhance monitoring of student understanding: (a) *re-*

*quiring* the completion of guided notes; (b) embedding strategically placed stopping points during the presentation for students to record questions or comments about the material; and (c) including a synchronous chat as a follow-up to the lecture or if possible, scheduling class meetings or office hours for face-to-face contact.

### Class Discussion

With distance education, discussions can be used both to assess content understanding and build a sense of a community. In an attempt to establish this community, we created one to three topics per lecture/chapter on the discussion board (i.e., forums) and required students to post two meaningful (i.e., text-related and manifesting critical thinking) comments or questions per forum. In some of the cohorts to which the course was delivered, a community already existed as the students progressed through coursework together. As a result, the students resisted accepting us as community members. Due to this, we found our ability to direct and guide postings limited. Some students even questioned our “authority” as instructors and the validity of classmates’ comments. Some discussion strings broke down as some students made threats, used profane language, and insulted forum participants. We saw this happening and attempted to quash it, but the overwhelming number of posts made it difficult to consistently monitor each topic. Further, our attempts to intervene (e.g., remove posts with profanity) were met with hostility and accusations of censorship.

One solution to this problem might be to form smaller groups in order to create new, more intimate learning communities. In addition, progressively closing off each forum as chapter deadlines expire would facilitate management of the discussion strings. Closing discussion topics would also hide the content so that students could not indefinitely and increasingly stray off topic, allowing them to focus only on “current” topics. Critically important to maintaining order on the boards would be to publish and enforce board etiquette policies. Instructors might also require each student to sign an agreement to abide by board etiquette and posting guidelines. It would also be a good idea to provide examples and non-examples of appropriate postings, modeling content, form, and length, and discouraging discrete responses (e.g., “Amen, brother!”

## Walking the (on)Line, Continued

and “I agree.”). Lastly, we suggest providing an off-topic forum whose postings would not count towards course requirements but would allow students to continue discussions that are not relevant to particular forum topics. An element of the signed agreement could be a recognition that instructors reserve the right to move postings that are off-topic, which incidentally also provides feedback to the students that moved postings would not “count.”

### Quizzing

We required students to take online quizzes that were ten items each, consisting of multiple-choice, true or false, fill in the blank/short answer, and matching questions. There was one quiz for each chapter, and they were given 20 minutes for each quiz with the exception of the first two. During the first week, they were given 30 minutes per quiz in order to allow time for familiarization with the online format and quiz process. This frequent assessment is more meaningful than the common mid-quarter and end-of-the-quarter exam method, because it gives students more frequent opportunities to demonstrate mastery of the material and gives the instructors feedback on the quality of instruction. Each student was allowed three opportunities to take each quiz, and the final score was the average of their attempts. There were two reasons we gave them multiple attempts to take the quiz: (a) Research suggests that providing students with multiple opportunities to respond leads to higher achievement (Carnine, 1976); and (b) the quiz function on Carmen allows for not only immediate feedback but also an immediate opportunity to practice correct responses for which there is also support in the literature (Heward, 1994). The two reasons we took the average score instead of the highest score were to prevent them from (a) taking the first attempt unprepared in order to preview the questions, and (b) practicing errors by guessing at answers.

Although we believe this quizzing strategy was effective in helping them learn the content, several issues arose over the course of the quarter. One problem perceived by the students was that taking the average score instead of the highest score was unfair. When presented with this complaint, we referred them to the aforementioned reasons. Specifically we noted

that setting up the system to encourage preparation and thus reducing the likelihood of practicing errors is considered best practice in special education. Another interesting outcome of this quizzing strategy (not just that quizzes were online but that there were multiple attempts) was students inappropriately emailing or posting, asking for answers to quiz questions. We concluded that students were probably bolder in this online environment, so we had to redirect them to the text, notes, presentation slides, and podcasts. We did evaluate quiz questions for which we received complaints and corrected, clarified, or eliminated ambiguous ones.

### General Recommendations and Conclusion

The following bulleted items reflect our recommendations for a smoother online delivery of content.

- Give students advance notice that the course will be delivered as a web-course; consider emailing the classlist on Carmen or, at the very least, activating the Carmen site as early in the previous quarter as possible
- Consider a hybrid course in which some face-to-face meetings are scheduled but content and quizzes remain accessible only online, thereby freeing up class time for discussion, review, demonstrations, and application activities
- Have open and close dates for all discussion boards and quizzes—and stick to them
- Provide friendly “warnings” about potential technology issues (e.g., “Don’t wait until the last minute to take a quiz in case your computer crashes or Carmen shuts down.”)
- Provide tip sheets with screen shots on how to access all Carmen elements (an example can be provided by emailing any of the authors)
- Provide OIT contact information in syllabus

Though the instructors see the many benefits of online delivery of content, we also feel strongly that the face-to-face element be maintained when possible; after all, for many of us, in-person student contact is something that we hold in high esteem. When in-class instruction is either not possible or not preferred, we feel that the above recommendations can lead to more meaningful course presentation and student participation.

**(reference list available upon request)**



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To become more involved in the initiative,  
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PAES TEACHING INITIATIVE WEBSITE:  
[HTTP://EHE.OSU.EDU/PAES](http://EHE.OSU.EDU/PAES)  
THEN, LOOK UNDER FACULTY,  
THEN "INSTRUCTIONAL ENHANCEMENT"

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## **The Importance of Teaching Diversity: Recommendations and Barriers for College Campuses**

### **Ebony Merchant, PAES Diversity GAA**

As the population of the United States expands, the prevalence of ethnic minority populations is vastly increasing. Some call it the "The Browning of America". In addition to the demographic changes, politically viewed minority groups are engaging in social reforms. One of the positive reform movements is occurring in higher education. More minority groups are teaching or attending universities. As the increase in diversity occurs on college campuses, so does the need for teaching diversity.

Numerous research studies have been conducted regarding diversity and teaching at higher education institutions. Smolen, Colville-Hall, Liang, & Mac Donald (2006) studied faculty's perceptions and commitment to teaching diversity at four urban universities. They found that most of the faculty felt acceptance and teacher diversity training are directly related to the specific institution's support of the implementation of diversity initiatives, a focus on racial sensitivity, and a comfort level with issues of diversity. There were significant correlations between the faculty's perceptions of diversity and the institutions commitment to multicultural education. Colleges can influence faculty and student's perceptions by determining the amount and content of diversity exposure.

Another barrier identified was the lack of required general education courses. Many institutions fail to recognize the need for a mandatory curriculum. In existing diversity courses, many instructors lack knowledge in diversity, while highly qualified teachers are restricted to teaching other subjects (Simoni, Sexton-Radek, Yescavage, Richard, Lundquist, 1999). In a study of APA Division 2 members, teachers ranked barriers to teaching diversity as: lack of resources, lack of departmental support, professor inadequacy, and heightened tension. Faculty respondents identified collaboration among colleagues, books, workshops, funded diversity projects, a multicultural center, and a faculty exchange program as ways to improve diversity.

There are many recommendations for teaching diversity on college campuses. Many solutions center on the idea of modifying typical curricula. Teachers can encourage students to become aware of their own cultural background and unique history. Exploring one's own ethnic heritage and family traditions can lead students on a road to self-discovery and self awareness. Teachers also can play a bigger role in bringing diversity into their classrooms. But they first must feel comfortable with discussing diversity and have the ability to facilitate a discussion on the topic.

Institutions often fail to see the importance of diversity related issues, thus teaching diversity must be the responsibility of faculty. Zeichner (1996) found that many faculties preparing teachers for diversity are as lacking in interracial and intercultural experiences as students. Melnick and Zeichner (1997) suggested that lack of cultural experiences is related to the drawback in meeting multicultural agendas. To solve this problem, teachers must decide on a solution. Sleeter (2001) suggests teachers go through an extensive cultural immersion process. An example is to travel outside the U.S. Of course, not all faculties have the resources or time to travel overseas for cultural immersion. In these cases, being involved with diverse communities is the next step. Institutions also should investigate and try to implement programs in which faculty can train for a specified time in other countries.

Institutions should keep in mind that their graduates need to be ready for a global society beyond their campus. While required diversity courses are starting to be included in institution's general education curriculum, the area of teaching diversity still falls short. The responsibility now falls mainly on the faculty to be advocates for diversity.