

## Enhancing Student Learning at Florida Atlantic University

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Faculty at Florida Atlantic University have been active in a number of different projects aimed at incorporating active learning pedagogies into courses and programs. In the past year, the main thrusts have been through curriculum development, through professional development workshops and the introduction of new technologies in the classroom. Some of the initiatives are listed below.

The Political Science Department has agreed to implement a redesign of its required foundation courses. The principal features include developing content modules that will be incorporated in all sections of the courses, embedding common test questions in exams and incorporating teaching technology, e.g., Blackboard and electronic classroom response systems, in order to enhance interactive learning and improve assessment. In February, Dr. Tim Lenz described the agenda setting, the deliberations and implementation stages in a paper entitled “Doing “More/Better” with Less: Meeting the Quality Challenge in Public Urban Universities” at the American Political Science Association Teaching and Learning Conference in Washington, DC. At that meeting the ASPA agreed to support the development of a master “Introduction to American Government” course and test bank; a course that virtually all universities teach.

Three years ago the Dean of the Charles E. Schmidt College of Science established a group of “Master Teachers” – consisting of one faculty member from each of the seven departments in the College – who are responsible for mentoring new faculty, introducing and developing programs that improve instruction and carrying out regular peer-reviews of faculty. The Master Teacher’s run a mandatory annual workshop before the Fall semester for all new faculty in the College - with sessions on “Your Students”, “Teaching Styles”, “Writing a Syllabus”, “Designing a Course Website”, “Other Technologies”, and “Test Writing Tips” – in which the underlying focus is on instruction that enhances student learning by establishing an active learning environment.

In the past year, FAU committed itself to the use of classroom performance systems campus-wide and some 15 of the largest classrooms (>100 seats) were hard-wired with multiple receivers. As part of the introduction of the system across the University, two of the Master Teacher’s from the Charles E. Schmidt College of Science (Drs. Robin Jordan and Jerome Haky) presented a comprehensive, 3-session workshop to introduce and train faculty and instructors at FAU on the use of such systems and how they might adapt the technology in their teaching in order to enhance active learning; some 25 faculty from several different colleges took part. Participating faculty will be encouraged to meet on a regular basis, to exchange ideas and experiences and examine the effects of classroom performance systems across disciplines.

The Dean of the College of Arts and Letters has created the position of a “Special Assistant for Teaching Initiatives”. Teaching is an essential component for promotion and tenure at FAU but junior faculty, in particular, are wary of introducing “new” approaches because of possible negative student reactions. So, recent initiatives in the College of Arts and Letters include workshops on “Best Blackboard Practices”, where faculty discussed how they were using Blackboard in the classroom and “Teaching and the Tenure Track”, where junior faculty discussed various teaching initiatives and the role of teaching in personnel evaluation.

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