Using Media Materials to Set the Stage for Learning—A Strategy for All Disciplines

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“Teachers can capitalize on the role that affect plays in learning. There is no reason that academic subject matter needs to be dry and emotionless. On the contrary, students will probably remember more if they have feelings about the things they study” (J.E. Ormrod, Human Learning, 2004, p. 451).

Humanities and social sciences instructors have long borrowed from media communications to drive home concepts. For example, a business instructor might clip a magazine article pointing out how inappropriate attire can negatively influence the outcome of an interview with a company. Philosophy professors might motivate a classroom discussion on hedonism by discussing the antics of popular young superstars as reported in the tabloids. Writing professors can cleverly illustrate the concept of compare/contrast by analyzing the Dunkin’ Donuts billboard that announces the addition of bagels to the product mix. The ad—“It’s round. It has a hole. Yeah, we can do that”—compares these two very different products, implying that since the company has mastered doughnut making, surely it can produce bagels.

But are media materials that set the stage for learning and motivate students effective only in the humanities and social sciences? Absolutely not! Educators in fields such as mathematics, nursing, computer technology, and engineering can effectively incorporate media offerings into their presentations as well. The only requirement is the will to hunt out and gather lively prose—in print ads, newspaper and magazine articles, commercials, signs, and even cereal boxes—that relates to the course concepts and to the students.

Why should instructors venture beyond the reliable information provided in textbooks to teach their lessons? As teachers know firsthand, students are afraid of certain subjects and disinterested in others. Students are, however, knowledgeable about and interested in various products, services, celebrities, and trends. Teachers can channel this familiarity and enthusiasm to nudge students into mastering difficult or seemingly irrelevant concepts.

Basic math courses that rely on word problems are known to generate fear in students who doubt their math abilities. Help might come in the form of a lowly tear-off coupon that offers $25 off a $75 dollar purchase at some clothing store. If the instructor rewrites the coupon in the form of a word problem, he or she can illustrate the relevance of those problems in everyday life: “Stacy became excited while shopping in her favorite clothing store when she saw a sign promising a $25 discount on purchases of $75 or more. How much will Stacy save if she buys an $82 sweater? What will her percentage of savings be if she makes the purchase?”

Students might be more inclined to solve such a real-life problem, and with that success under their belts, they may be more willing to tackle textbook percentage problems dealing with lesser-known issues.

Would-be nursing students often fear the difficult nomenclature contained in pharmacology courses. Perhaps the instructor could refer to a current ad featuring the creator of an artificial heart, who promotes a cholesterol-reducing drug. The good doctor-scientist is a middle-aged, soft-spoken father figure who says he too must eat properly, exercise, and take the featured drug in order to avoid having his heart replaced by his own invention. Analyzing this ad, which includes the chemical makeup and the indications and contraindications for the drug in layman’s terms, one notices that not only is it reader-friendly, but it also speaks to viewers about their health and that of their loved ones. Using a message that hits close to home might make learning long lists of drugs and their uses more meaningful for students.

I have read several humorous essays that focus on technophobia. Saturday Night Live writers picked up on this unfortunate workplace phenomenon with their long-running skit featuring a sadistic
Excellent Undergraduate Education: Student Views

Ed’s note: Sometimes we forget how much we can learn from students. Maybe that’s because we’re the teachers and when it comes to the content we teach, we do know much more than they do. But students experience education firsthand. As this article and the next one illustrate, there is much to be gained by asking them about those experiences.

If students were asked for their views on excellence in undergraduate education, what might they say? The case in point here is specific to one particular major, but the model has wide applications and the findings should prompt other disciplines to explore the same question.

Two faculty researchers decided to find out how engineering students at their institution would answer the excellence question. Via ads and emails, they solicited 47 volunteers (30 males and 17 females) who participated in an hour-long focus group discussion. Researchers recorded the discussion and used a content-analysis method to analyze the results.

Participants first responded to four individual queries. They were asked to write 10 words or phrases that came to mind when they heard these four phrases: excellence in engineering education, educational technology, student’s role in the engineering college, and professor’s role in the engineering college. The phrases were given to the participants one at a time. After this individual activity, the students were assembled in a group and were asked to discuss 10 different questions.

In answer to a group question asked about interaction between students and professors, “many participants expressed that they had limited interactions with professors, and they hesitated to ask questions and had interactions only if professors were approachable.” (p. 260) The researchers point out how this confirms other recent findings that are even more specific, revealing that “at public doctorate-granting universities, 53 percent of first-year students and 35 percent of seniors ‘never’ discussed ideas from their readings or classes with a faculty member outside the classroom.” (p. 260)

When asked about the methods used to present information, the use of the board or writing on overhead transparencies in the classroom was preferred over PowerPoint presentations, since using the board showed the progression of ideas and gave the professor the opportunity to write down all the steps in the classroom, showing the process. (p. 260)

As for what skills an undergraduate education in engineering should develop, these students reported that the most important included critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, organization, and teamwork. (p. 261) They also placed high value on communication, self-discipline, responsibility, interpersonal relations, time management, and writing skills.

Students repeatedly stressed the importance of examples and of being able to apply content in meaningful ways. Across responses to both the individual and group questions, “the word ‘example’ was the one word that seemed to be most important to the participants of this study, other than the word ‘students’.” (p. 261)

The researchers found that students would like to have more opportunities to provide input about educational experiences. The students pointed out that they are an important part of the system, causing the researchers to conclude that “much can be learned from involving students in the process of educational/instructional development.” (p. 261)

These findings show how much can be learned by asking students about their experience in particular programs of study.

Students on Learning in a Major

Has anyone in your discipline ever systematically asked students to describe their learning experiences in the major? Kathleen McKinney notes that no literature or research reports on how students majoring in her field, sociology, learn the discipline—from their perspective. She decided to remedy that omission and used three different studies “to explore how sociology majors believe they learn the content and skills of [the] discipline.” (p. 112)

Based on analyses of data acquired from focus groups and group interviews, learning logs, and face-to-face interviews, McKinney identified “three pathways of learning on which students are located and need to progress.” (p. 114) Those pathways can be explored by reading the article. Here, space permits a brief discussion of the five types of “connections that plug students into learning.” (p. 114) and some suggestions McKinney offers that might enhance their effectiveness.

Connections to others—Those connections that helped students learn were to other students and to professors. McKinney recommends more use of teamwork and peer review in courses. “For example, we could facilitate a buddy system in class so that each student has a partner for peer review or other assistance.” (p. 118) She also writes about the importance of faculty being accessible to students, be it through office hours, emails, online discussions, phone calls, or study sessions outside of class.

Connections among related ideas or skills—These connections relate to the review, repetition, and rewriting strategies students use to learn the material. Here, faculty ought to be proactive in suggesting those effective strategies that work best when the objective is to learn sociology content.

Connections to student lives and the real world—Students pointed out how much easier it is to learn new material when it can be connected to the real world and their lives. Faculty can promote learning from these kinds of connections by using more authentic assignments and out-of-class learning experiences.

Connections across courses—Sometimes it seems as though students never remember what they have learned in other courses, but in these studies, students did report seeing how something learned in one course helped with learning in the next course. To further promote learning from these connections, McKinney suggests, “We should work to develop and require one or more cross-course or multi-course assignment in the major.” (p. 118) Maximizing learning from these connections also involves more integration of content in courses across the major.

Connections to the discipline—Here, students reported on their discovery of and interest in the discipline, of finding a field where they “fit.” Faculty can make the discipline appealing to students by giving them choices in types of assignments and in grading schemes, as well as by making available a variety of different course options. McKinney also notes, “We must not be afraid to show the passion we have for our discipline and class material.” (p. 118)

McKinney concludes by pointing out that even though some faculty may already use these suggestions to enhance learning-related connections, there is much more the field can do to make learning in the major successful. Her inquiry begins the exploration of how students learn content in this one discipline; it raises many questions that only further research can answer.

Do students learn in other fields the same way they learn in sociology? Not likely. Different approaches and strategies for learning make it all the more important for each discipline to consider how students develop the content knowledge and professional skills required for success in that field. After all, isn’t teaching effectiveness compromised by the absence of this knowledge?


Using Media Materials

From Page 1

“computer guy” who berated employees who asked simple computer questions. If instructors were to confront the sometimes tunnel-visioned technology majors with such confessions, these students might be more inclined to design materials and use methods that help the technology-challenged more easily learn new software.

Even engineering classrooms can be enriched by media sources. Say that a question-and-answer column in the Home section of a newspaper features a reader’s lament about the excessive heat and glare generated by his skylights. The “expert” who replies to his question suggests replacing the existing skylights with those that have “low solar gain coating” in order to diminish glare. Fledgling engineers who are exposed to consumer issues such as this one may well take those types of concerns into consideration when charged with product design.

Media materials can never, of course, take the place of meticulously written textbooks. However, if ads, articles, commercials, informal essays, tabloid newspapers, gossip columns, and even coupons elaborate in a reader-friendly way on real-world experiences, and if our students’ perception and reception of these materials is positive, why not let these free, nonthreatening materials enliven and enrich the education process?
A Guidebook for Instructors with Multitudes

The headline of this article is the subtitle of a new book on teaching large classes, authored by a biology professor. In the preface, author Frank Heppner reports that he has been teaching large classes (and he considers 300 students a "small" class) for 38 years. He stopped counting the number of students taught once it reached 20,000. He confesses to having made "every horrendous teaching error you can make" and explains how these mistakes led to his book: “Once I passed my 50th semester of introductory biology, I began to regret that my profession doesn’t have a real apprenticeship for teaching—why should every young professor facing his or her first big class...have to make the same mistakes I did and, perhaps more important, why should they not know that everybody...has the same problems? I couldn’t think of a good reason, and that’s why I decided to write this book.” (p. x)

The book covers a host of topics related to large classes, including testing, grading, managing TAs and graders, using media effectively, and devising activities to use when the classroom is an auditorium. In the first chapter, he describes the large-class teacher as a course manager and then suggests how that should affect the teacher’s thinking about the large class. Here’s a sample of points illustrating how these courses should be approached, from a section aptly titled “Why Your Class Could Belong to the Chamber of Commerce.” (p. 3)

Sooner or later, everything that can happen, will happen, and you need to think about it and be ready for it. The point here involves the law of averages and, given the number of students in the class, the likelihood of something unusual happening. Heppner reports a student experiencing a grand mal seizure in class, a female student going into labor during a final exam, and a student emailing from prison to ask what he should do about the final, as he was being held without bail. Obviously, events like these don’t happen regularly, but as Heppner points out, managers are the ones everyone turns to when the unusual occurs.

Large courses can’t be ad-libbed. Heppner thinks it’s a whole lot easier to “wing it” in a small class. In a large class, saying one thing and then deciding on a change can be a logistical nightmare. This advice is also based on the inability of most people to ad-lib in front of a large audience. In large classes, instructor preparation matters a great deal.

A bad policy is better than an inconsistent policy. All students, but especially beginning students, need consistency in courses. It helps them manage the anxiety that college-level learning experiences provoke. The masses quickly become negative if an instructor starts fussing around with a course policy, especially if that policy pertains to evaluation or grading criteria. Things go much more smoothly if changes are implemented between semesters rather than midsemester.

Put it in writing. This bit of advice relates to the previous suggestion. It makes students accountable even if they weren’t in class when something was discussed, even though “a classmate said” that they only needed three references, even though a student is “sure” the teacher said chapter five would not be on the exam. Besides giving the instructor a way to deal with the plethora of student excuses, this practice helps the instructor because it forces decisions about policies and procedures before problems emerge.

Start like Attila the Hun; finish as Mr. Rogers. “Whatever your teaching personality, it will be easiest for both you and your class if you start out the semester at the most extreme form of your personality, and then if things seems to be working out okay, you can relax a bit... On the other hand, if you start out cozy and friendly...and the class gets the idea that you aren’t really serious about things like deadlines, if you get tough later on, they will feel like you have turned against them and aren’t really as nice as you seemed to be.” (p. 10)

Don’t try to teach them as you would have liked to be taught when you were their age. College professors aren’t like today’s typical college students, especially those beginning students who take the large classes. Generally, students in large courses aren’t as motivated as professors were when they were students. And generally, students in courses do not have the same learning style as their professors. It is far smarter for teachers to find out about the students they are teaching rather than make assumptions about them.

Heppner ends his book with this observation, “Teaching large classes well is the most difficult and challenging task in academia and offers the fewest tangible rewards. Knowing, however, that you have a real, positive, and inspiring effect on hundreds or thousands of young people will more than compensate for the liabilities. Do it right, and you will have former students all over the world who will be grateful to you for the wisdom you gave them.” (p. 150)

From the Future: A Brief History of Pedagogy

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A bespectacled history professor sits with a small group of students. He says, “Students, you may not know this, but today marks the 100th anniversary of the brain port. Do you have any idea how students learned in the past, before people had memory chips? People haven’t always had DirectAccess ports in their heads. They used to spend a tremendous amount of time learning small pieces of information.

“As you know from your ancient history chip, we used the mind meld for centuries. You will find this hard to believe, but it was actually a huge improvement over the previous method, called ‘active learning.’ With that method, students were responsible for reading their assignments and coming to a classroom where they would work in groups to solve problems. Believe it or not, active learning was considered a tremendous advance over the methods used before it. Next week when you receive your ultra-ancient history chips, you are going to be in for a shock. You see, people used to try to learn by listening to others talk.

“It was the invention of the photocopy machine that made active learning methods possible. Before the photocopier, students had to sit in a class and listen to someone try to transfer knowledge verbally! That person, the teacher, would talk, essentially reading from notes prepared for the class. Students were supposed to learn the information by listening to the teacher talk.

“The teachers who read their notes and talked to students were the knowledge experts of that era—remember, there were no memory chips at that time. In those days, teachers and students did have books with all of the information written in them, but for some reason, students did not use the books, even though the books were relatively cheap and most students had purchased them. They came to class without having read relevant material, even though the teachers told them to read it. Because they were unfamiliar with the material, the students felt that to understand, they needed to copy down every word the teacher said.

“It was a crazy system. Obviously, people trying to learn something can’t write down answers to those great questions.”

Cooperation and Competition

Successful professionals need to be able to both cooperate and compete. Educational experiences need to help students develop both skills. Attle and Baker, authors of an article on the subject, cite survey data from employers indicating that 80 percent of all employees in America work in teams or groups. But competition continues to be the way to succeed in the global economy.

Attle and Baker have developed learning experiences that combine the two. They outline an instructional strategy that brings together “components of cooperative learning with the positive aspects of motivational competition through intergroup competition between collaborative teams” in sport management, the field in which they teach. (p. 79) Specifically, they assign students to groups; within those groups, students participate in a grant development project. The instructors work to make the project as “real-world” as possible. They contact a local organization and find out what that organization might need. The groups then develop grant proposals that seek funding for the project. Each group presents its proposal to a panel, and that panel “funds” the proposal of only one group. The article also contains other examples of courses and content where these faculty members have used this cooperative-competitive model.

The authors make a number of important points about activities that combine cooperative and competitive elements. They note that cooperation and competition are neither “inherently good or bad in supporting the learning process how instructors employ these strategies in order to enhance student learning determines their value in preparing well-educated soon-to-be professionals.” (p. 77) They say that the exercises’ design must be undertaken carefully, with the instructor attending to how the groups will be formed, their composition, the dynamics that affect how they will interact, and how work completed by the groups will be assessed. In the case of this project, the authors recommend that the instructor form the groups and that, even though the panel awards the
Conceptions of Teaching: The Specifics

Since the early '90s, researchers (mostly outside the U.S.) have been exploring different conceptions of teaching. At this point a number of different researchers, using different faculty cohorts and different methods to analyze findings, have identified a continuum of conceptions. Not all of them agree as to the points along the continuum, but they do agree about what anchors each endpoint.

On the one end are the teaching-centered conceptions, those beliefs that focus on the teacher and on the act of teaching and see as the primary objective the transmission of information to students. On the other end are the learning-centered conceptions, those beliefs that put the student and his or her learning at the center and maintain that the goal is to develop conceptual understanding of the material.

Most researchers portray the teaching-centered conceptions as being the simpler of the two. Some research has shown that this orientation compromises learning outcomes. Students with teachers who focus on information transfer tend to use learning strategies that do not result in long-term retention or the ability to apply what has been learned. (We have highlighted related findings, most notably those of David Kember, in previous issues.)

An article by Samuelowicz and Bain contains hypothetical descriptions of two faculty members who represent these two different approaches to teaching. The stories make real the differences between the two conceptions, and they also show how practice (what the two faculty members do in the classroom) reflects these underlying beliefs about the role and functions of teachers.

As the faculty member who is teacher-centered describes about the role of teaching, “the teacher is the main character [in his story] who tries to get students to understand, and who contributes much effort to make it happen.” (p. 312) This teacher explains that he is the one to provide the structure—in a variety of different ways, if necessary—that students need to gain an understanding of the content. He gives examples that aid in understanding, and he tests student understanding by “dragging” answers from them. Asking questions to gauge understanding is the role he sees for interaction with students.

Students need to understand and reproduce the content the way the instructor understands it or the way it is explained by the textbook. In other words, knowledge is defined by the discipline, and there is no room or reason for students to find their own way to this knowledge. Why have students spend time reinventing the wheel?

This faculty member is concerned when students do not understand. He uses an example of how he offered 10 different examples to illustrate one concept. He read the lack of student response as boredom and decided that next time he would use only three examples. In other words, he did not investigate why students did not appear to understand, but instead concentrated on finding better ways to communicate his understanding.

The second faculty member, whose story is recounted as an illustration of learning-centered teaching, believes that students must become independent learners and that her job as a teacher is to help them achieve this goal. “It is students who take center stage when she talks about teaching and learning... She does not see teaching...as a simple affair where knowledge is dispensed to the students by the teacher. Rather, it is a challenging two-way process.” (p. 315)

She cares about the process of learning and thinks students come to understand the process when they are given authentic tasks, those tasks that enable them to begin to “feel” how a professional in the field works. She sees the ability of students to judge their own work and that of their peers as part of what it means to be a professional, and gives students opportunities to develop these skills.

In her view, students are expected to develop their own knowledge. They are “the ones who unpack and repack it, the ones who analyze and synthesize it, the ones who transform it, the ones who make it their own.” Her role, then, is to work with the students, not doing the learning for them but creating an environment that is conducive to learning, one with clear expectations and high standards. She interacts closely with students and sees those exchanges as vital to the learning process.

In sum, the researchers write, “Although in both cases the academics want their students to gain a thorough understanding of the subject matter, their beliefs about the nature of understanding and learning and roles in knowledge organization and teacher-student interaction differ substantially. In the first case the academic provides ready made understanding and methods for students, shows them how to apply knowledge, and interacts with them to ensure that the understanding has taken hold. In the second case, the teacher assists the students, through extensive interaction, to personalize their understanding of the material and to use their new understandings to interpret the world in an altered way.” (p. 320)

Teaching Masks

That persona we don when standing before students is what Jay Parini refers to as a “teaching mask.” “What I want to suggest here is that teachers…need to invent and cultivate a voice, one that serves their personal needs as well as the material at hand, one that feels authentic. It should also take into account the nature of the students who are being addressed, their background in the subject, and their disposition as a class, which is not always easy to gauge.” (p. 58)

Parini does not think the creation of teaching masks makes teaching inauthentic. He says, “Authenticity is, ultimately, a construction, something invented—much as a particular suit of clothes will feel authentic, or inauthentic, given the context.” (p. 59)

How do teachers arrive at a mask—or a set of them—that serves them, their content, and the students well? Parini says they must try on different masks. He recounts some his own attempts as a beginning teacher: “Sometimes I played the pipe-smoking, genial ‘man of letters’ who just happened to walk into the classroom, almost by accident. I would sit on the edge of the desk, my tweed jacket frayed at the collar, my elbows covered in leather patches. I offered jocular (though learned) remarks instead of organized lecture notes, and replied wittily to student questions.” (pp. 60–61) But he was not altogether happy with this representation of himself. He felt as though his teaching persona needed a bit more “fire,” even some “occasional madness.” Donning this new mask, he paced vigorously across the classroom. Sometimes he shouted; other times he whispered. Some days he threw chalk. But this disguise was too extreme and made him feel like a fool. Ultimately he settled on a teaching persona somewhere between these two extremes—one that integrated some elements of both.

Parini believes that previous teachers and mentors play important roles in the development of individual teaching styles. Most teachers begin teaching by trying to emulate a favorite teacher, or several of them. In the beginning, this feels awkward and uncomfortable. The favorite teacher’s persona may not be at all like the new teacher’s sense of self, or the collection of favorite teachers may represent different and incompatible personae. What the new teacher must do is construct a totally unique mask, but one that should incorporate bits and pieces taken from others. Parini writes about coming to terms with these prior voices and about “the long evolution of a particular and effective teaching voice.” That process “involves periods when you are barely in possession of a singular voice, dark days when you question your ability to teach at all.” (p. 68)

Donning the teaching mask and heading to class takes courage, even after years of teaching. Parini elaborates, “I always feel a little frightened as I leave my office and begin the long march to the classroom, my arms loaded with notes and texts, my head crammed with ideas I have not quite properly formulated. I wonder what the hell will happen when the class begins. Will I make sense? Will the students respond in sympathetic ways? Will I look and sound like an idiot?” (pp. 68–69)

Ed.’s note: Parini teaches English at Middlebury College, and this book contains his reflections and beliefs about teaching. It is a sort of teaching autobiography that’s engagingly written. Parini has written a biography of Robert Frost, and this book on teaching contains an interesting section on how Frost approached teaching and what he believed about it. The book ends with a letter of advice that Parini offers to new teachers.


“I often feel that the wildness has gone out of teaching, a wildness that pushes students to question basic assumptions about themselves and the world. It is much safer to rely on ‘content,’ to believe that if students have studied a certain sequence of texts, have taken notes and sat exams on this material, that they have somehow moved closer to being educated.

In my own teaching, I have tried to cultivate this wildness, to keep the class on edge, wondering what I will do next, what I will say. I take risks, and this means I sometimes fail miserably, saying idiotic things; but these risks have been worth taking. The classroom, for me, can become a place where sparks fly, where students confront their own best selves, thinking aloud, with me or against me, as we move toward something like Truth.”

—Jay Parini, The Art of Teaching, pp. 88–89
A Graphic Syllabus

Yes, the headline means what it says. “A graphic syllabus can be defined as a flowchart or diagram that displays the sequencing and organization of major course topics through the semester.” (p. 26) As author of a new book on this topic, Linda Nilson goes on to explain further: “Much like a concept map or mind map, [a graphic syllabus] uses spatial arrangement, connecting lines and arrows, and sometimes numbers to show the logical, temporal progression of the course through topics within the subject matter.” (p. 26) Her book also describes something called an “outcomes map,” which charts learning objectives in a course, showing the skills and abilities that students should be able to demonstrate at various points throughout the course. Here, we will focus on the graphic syllabus.

Why might an instructor consider a visual syllabus option? Because text syllabi have their limitations. For starters, many students don’t read them, which necessitates devoting the first day of class to “going over” the syllabus, basically negating any reason for a student to read the syllabus before the course starts. Nilson points out that syllabi are all text, and a great deal of research documents that students handle text poorly. They read slowly, especially when confronting discipline-based technical language, which they will encounter in most syllabi.

In a chapter that makes the case for how and why graphics enhance learning, Nilson points out that our culture as a whole is becoming more visually oriented. Information across the board is increasingly being conveyed in graphical forms. Whether it’s TV, movies, video games, or the Internet, today’s college students handle visually represented content much more comfortably and ably than they deal with text. Drawing on research from cognitive psychology, Nilson points out that those learners who most need an absolutely clear sense of structure (like that which can be provided diagrammatically) are those with little or no background knowledge of the content.

Nilson goes on to make the case for a graphic syllabus graphically. She notes that words can be used to define things such as drawing, painting, or sculpture, but “we don’t really understand what any of these things are unless we see examples of them and experience the thoughts and feelings they evoke.” (p. 26) And this book is filled with examples of graphic syllabi. The examples show how visual representation of content relationships makes course structure clearer. In addition, graphic representation allows for creativity and imagination. Pictures and icons can be added to convey the structure. For example, in the book there’s a graphic syllabus for an upper-division management course that lays our course topics within the structure of a hot air balloon. Computer software allows even inartistic teachers to construct visual representations. A list of software options is included in the book. (p. 161)

Graphic syllabi also help instructors tighten and clarify course structure as they design or redesign a course. To construct a visual representation of how the main course topics relate and interact, one must understand all those relationships. Making them this explicit deepens and makes more vivid relationships that may previously have been understood intuitively.

Given these advantages, a graphic syllabus is definitely worth considering. This book not only convincingly presents their value, but also shows interested instructors exactly how to create one.


COOPERATION
FROM PAGE 5

grant, the instructor retain control over the grading process.

In an exercise like this, students can learn much about their own performance from the other groups. To level the competitive playing field, in this example each group presents to the panel privately. However, every presentation is videotaped and played back to the class as a whole. This helps students see differences between the groups and enables the class to discuss why the panel awarded the grant to a particular group.

The instructors also note that the competitive aspect of the assignment motivates student performance. Students’ performances frequently exceed instructor expectations. There is a caveat here, though: “Our experience in using this type of assignment suggests that students will spend inordinate amounts of time on this type of project unless limits are set by the instructor.” (p. 82) The amount of time students are given to work on the project should be commensurate with the project’s value. But here as well are important lessons for students to learn—lessons about using time efficiently, delegating tasks, and asserting leadership to help a group pull it all together.

In recent years, interest in group work and learning within social contexts has been widespread in higher education. That is appropriate given the prior lack of emphasis on teamwork. But as this article wisely points out, students need to know how to cooperate and how to compete. For tomorrow’s professionals, both skills are essential. This article offers some creative ways of integrating both elements in a single, carefully designed learning activity.