

2009 Seminars

4/15/2009

Uri Treisman is professor of mathematics and of public affairs at The University of Texas at Austin. He is the founder and executive director of the University's Charles A. Dana Center, an organized research unit of the College of Natural Sciences. The subject of his talk will be:

Title: On Innovation in Urban Mathematics Education

Abstract: Higher expectations, as reflected in state and federal accountability systems, have led to dramatic improvements in mathematics student performance in most, but not all, urban districts. Fifteen years ago, only one-half of urban high school graduates completed Algebra 1; today, most urban districts require four years of mathematics including at least Algebra II. Urban districts have responded to these new pressures by creating new approaches to such difficult problems as serving children with special learning needs in high school mathematics courses, academic language development in populations with high linguistic diversity, and in strategies for motivating students to persist in courses that present high levels of challenge. Professor Treisman will describe the work of the Urban Mathematics Leadership Network in surfacing these innovations and in re-engineering them for use at scale. He will share examples of new instructional strategies and will discuss new structures for supporting research and practitioners seeking to solve urgent problems of educational practice.

3/25/2009

Dr. Robert Bjork, Distinguished Professor, Cognitive Psychology, UCLA
Dr. Elizabeth Bjork, Professor, Cognitive Psychology, UCLA

The Bjorks lead the Bjork Lab at UCLA. Research in the Bjork Lab focuses on principles of human learning and memory and on applying these to enhance instructional practices.

Title: How we learn versus how we think we learn: Implications for the design and evaluation of instruction

Abstract: Paradoxically, certain manipulations that promote forgetting and impair performance during instruction actually enhance long-term recall and transfer, whereas conditions that retard forgetting and enhance performance during instruction frequently fail to support long-term understanding and retention. From a theoretical standpoint, such findings have implications for the functional architecture of humans as learners. From a practical standpoint, they

point to reasons why instructors are susceptible to choosing less-effective conditions of instruction over more effective conditions; why students are prone to illusions of comprehension; and why real-world instruction is seldom as effective as it might be.

2/26/2009

Biologists, Dr. Nigel Atkinson and Dr. Ruth Buskirk of UT Austin will speak on the topic "Scientific Teaching."

Nigel Atkinson and Ruth Buskirk, UT Austin School of Biological Sciences, report on their participation in the National Academies Summer Institute for Undergraduate Education in Biology, ideas for implementation of Scientific Teaching, and the institute's major themes of active learning, assessment and diversity.

2008 Seminars

11/12/2008

Dr. Ron Douglas, Distinguished Professor of Mathematics at Texas A&M University, works closely with the Education Advancement Foundation (EAF).

The EAF is a philanthropic organization that supports the development and implementation of inquiry-based learning at all educational levels in the United States, particularly in the fields of mathematics and science, and the dissemination of the inquiry-based learning methodology inspired by Dr. R. L. Moore (1882–1974), famed professor of mathematics at The University of Texas at Austin.

Inquiry-Based Learning in Mathematics

Abstract: Using an inquiry-based learning (IBL) approach to teaching mathematics can be quite effective. I will explain the role IBL has played in my mathematics career. I will follow that with a description of efforts over the past five years by the Educational Advancement Foundation to foster and develop its use at campuses around the country with an emphasis on five research universities including the University of Texas at Austin. I will begin with a focus on what inquiry-based learning means in mathematics.

The facilitator and moderator of the discussion was Professor Michael Marder.

10/17/2008

The presenter for this seminar is Ray Bareiss. Professor Bareiss holds a Ph.D. in computer sciences and a B.S. in communications from the University of Texas at Austin. He has worked on academic e-learning courses for Columbia University in the fields of ESL, information technology, economics, physics, and psychology, and on courses for Northwestern University. Ray is the author of a number of books and articles relating to the cognitive aspects of teaching and learning. Ray is currently Professor of the Practice of Software Engineering and Software Management, Director of Educational Programs Carnegie Mellon Silicon Valley. He will discuss the following topic:

A Story-Centered, Learn-by-Doing Approach to Undergraduate Education

Carnegie Mellon's Silicon Valley campus has made a commitment to a unique approach to teaching and learning, the Story-Centered Curriculum, for its programs in software engineering and software management. In a Story-Centered curriculum, students work in teams in a fictional but realistic context, performing complex, authentic tasks, learning the required knowledge and skills just in time as they work, and being evaluated on what they produce. My talk will explain our motivation for adopting this pedagogy, provide details of the educational experience, discuss the roles faculty play and the teaching approaches we have employed, and provide additional examples of employing Story-Centered curricula, ranging from college level down to middle school.

9/11/2008

A panel from the UTeach Institute in charge of the dissemination of the UTeach Program Natural Sciences discussed the following topic:

What starts here changes the world! The UTeach Institute was created in 2006 to support the replication of UT Austin's UTeach

mathematics and science teacher preparation program at universities in the United States. Tracy LaQuey Parker, Melissa Dodson, Kim Hughes, and Michael Marder will discuss what the Institute has accomplished in the past 2 years, specific activities of the Institute including curriculum development and adoption, evaluation approach, data collection plans, future directions in research, and the implications of UTeach replication for mathematics and sciences faculty.

Tracy LaQuey Parker is Director of the UTeach Institute, Dr. Melissa Dodson is Manager of Program Replication, Kim Hughes is Manager of Knowledge Development. Dr. Michael Marder is co-director of the UTeach program.

The facilitator and moderator of the discussion was Professor Michael Marder.

3/25/2008

Dr. Kathy Schmidt, director from the Faculty Innovation Center, Cockrell School of Engineering, and Kris Wood, Cullen Trust Endowed Professor in Engineering No. 1 and University Distinguished Teaching Professor made a presentation on Journeys in Hands-on, Active Learning:

In recent years, several pedagogical themes and approaches have been touted in engineering education. These pedagogies seek to address a number of fundamental educational questions. How often have you heard that you need to get your students involved in active learning? Or that your students need to develop critical thinking skills? Have you ever been challenged with the thought that passively listening to lectures, completing well-constrained homework problems, and studying for scheduled exams does not necessarily promote a student's deepest thinking? In this Discovery Lunch Seminar, we considered hands-on, active learning as seen through the lens of a set of active learning products (ALPs). We have developed an extensive set of ALPs that reinforce difficult technical concepts and improve overall comprehension of course materials. We have also created a systematic, efficient methodology to assist faculty in devising ALPs for their classes, in addition to appropriate assessment methods, ties to learning styles and personality types, and methods for strategic project-team selection. With NFS funding and collaboration with the United States Air Force Academy, we have tested and validated a range of active learning products across K-16 education.

2/8/2008

Mitchell Nathan, Professor of Educational Psychology, Chair of the Learning Science program in the School of Education at the University of Wisconsin–Madison and Anthony Petrosino, Associate Professor, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, College of Education at University of Texas spoke on:

Expert blind spot: How content knowledge can eclipse pedagogical content knowledge.

A series of studies was discussed in which the relationship between teachers' (both inservice and pre-service) subject-matter expertise in mathematics and their judgments of students' algebra problem-solving difficulty were examined. The contrast between instructors' predictions and the students' actual difficulties is an instance of a more general phenomenon called "expert blind spot". As predicted by the expert blind spot hypothesis, teachers with more advanced mathematics education tend to view symbolic reasoning and mastery of equations as a necessary prerequisite for the development of algebraic reasoning. This view is in contrast with students' actual performance patterns that shows an advantage for algebra word problems. An examination across several subject areas, including mathematics, science, and language arts, suggests a common pattern: Teachers' content area expertise may have a disproportionate influence on teachers' beliefs about the conceptual develop experiences of novices. Consistent with this notion, instructors with the most experience are the most likely to make the incorrect prediction. This talk considers how instructors' developmental views may influence classroom practice and professional development, and calls into question policies that seek to streamline the licensure process of new teachers solely on the basis of their subject-matter expertise. It also calls into question some of the implicit assumptions that regard theory and mastery of formalisms as gatekeepers for access to disciplinary knowledge in mathematics, the natural sciences and engineering.

2007 Seminars

11/2/2007

Dr. Lynn Jones Eaton and a team from the Division of Instructional Innovation and Assessment (DIIA) discussed ways that DIIA supports innovative instruction at UT. Below is an abstract of the presentation topic.

The Division of Instructional Innovation & Assessment (DIIA)

provides campus-wide support for teaching and learning, by offering services that focus on the use of emerging technologies, appropriate forms/tools of assessment, and best practices for engaging students in learning. This informative and interactive session will primarily feature the latest in virtual world teaching (with the use of Second Life) and ways to gather feedback from students BEFORE the semester ends. An overview of DIIA's services will also be presented.

10/19/2007

Dr. William Cliff (Department of Physiology and Biophysics) from the University of Buffalo built upon the idea of 'concept mapping' that was introduced by Dee Silverthorn at the last Discovery lunch. Below is an abstract of the presentation topic.

Understanding Made Visible
Using Concept Maps for Student Learning and Assessment

Concept mapping enables students to graphically represent their understanding of significant interrelationships between concepts within a knowledge domain. This workshop presentation will provide one with practical ways for using concept mapping to 1) help students to achieve more integrative learning and 2) assess the depth and breadth of the meaningful understanding they achieve.

9/25/2007

Dr. Dee Silverthorn (Biological Sciences) from UT discussed the following topic and questions related to undergraduate instruction: Interactive teaching in many forms is being more widely used in college instruction. But what happens when one takes students who are successful in traditional didactic lectures and asks them to change their behavior in an interactive classroom? And what happens to traditional lecture professors who decide to change their instructional style? This talk presented data from two studies that investigated these two questions.

Dr. Michael Marder was the facilitator and moderator of the discussion.

3/29/2007

Dr. Elwood Parker of Guilford College presented a talk titled "Discoveries and Inquiries about D/IBL (Discovery/Inquiry Based Learning)." Reflecting on 40 years experience – or, more accurately, experimentation with – D/IBL, after a brief description of the context

(undergraduate only, small liberal arts college) of that experience, Dr. Elwood Parker, explored what he and his colleagues discovered about D/IBL by discussing inquiries he uses in deciding how to apply D/IBL. Attention is paid to writing in D/IBL, to undergraduate research as part of D/IBL, to forays into inter- and cross-disciplinary D/IBL teaching, and to D/IBL influences on college-wide pedagogy and curriculum.

2/6/2007

Physicist Dr. Ramon Lopez, from the Florida Institute of Technology, presented "A personal perspective on why cognitive science is important for the teaching of undergraduate physics." Physics is widely considered to be a difficult subject by students. Things that may seem very evident to physics professors are often very mysterious to students. This problem has led many physicists to do research in the area of the teaching and learning of physics, and physics education research (PER) is a generally accepted part of the physics community. Members of the PER community are essentially engaged in cognitive science research from a physics perspective. Dr. Lopez gave a brief overview of some results from cognitive science broadly, and PER specifically, that have influenced his practice in the classroom. He presented a sample result from his own research in visualization and made the case that all faculty should have some familiarity with the results from cognitive science that might directly impact undergraduate instruction.

2006 Seminars

11/9/2006

Dr. Eric Hooper, an astronomer at the University of Wisconsin (and former NSF Astronomy & Astrophysics Postdoctoral Fellow at UT who also taught courses in the UTeach program), returned to Austin to discuss the application of teaching practices learned from previous Discovery Learning Seminars (DLS) to a large non-majors survey course in astronomy. He designed the course with these practices in mind and set out to mindfully use the subject matter to address some broad goals for the students, including making them more astute consumers of science, providing them with a better understanding of how science and scientists operate, enhancing their scientific communication skills. He discussed practical issues, including the large impact classroom layout and university policies have on implementing DLS practices, use of discussion sections, allocation of personnel resources (instructor, teaching assistant, grader), and executing field experiences with large numbers of students.

10/27/2006

Dr. Noah Finkelstein, from the University of Colorado, presented a talk titled "A Scientific Approach to Science Education."

The presentation reviewed a variety of effective classroom practices and surrounding educational structures. The talk also examined why these practices do (and do not) work. Dr. Finkelstein presented a survey of physics education research (including some of the exciting theoretical and experimental developments within this field) that is being conducted at the University of Colorado. Throughout, Dr. Finkelstein considered research and practices that are likely to be of value in all of the sciences.

9/26/2006

Our first Discovery Learning luncheon seminar for this academic year brought together a panel of CNS faculty who have taught the _398T SUPERVISED TEACHING course to graduate students. Topics discussed included:

--- Inquiry or discovery-based teaching methods that are discussed with students as part of the 398T course curriculum.

--- The pressure that is placed upon faculty, in the role of a 398T instructor, to emphasize inquiry or discovery-based teaching methods to graduate students.

The panel will include Dr. Ruth Buskirk, Dr. Robert Duke, Dr. Mona Mehdy, Dr. Roger Priebe, Dr. Ruth Shear, and Dr. Don Winget. Each member of the panel was asked to address the two topics mentioned above and then to respond to questions from other Natural Sciences faculty and a representative group of graduate students selected from the various departments in the College of Natural Sciences. The facilitator and moderator of the discussion was Dr. Michael Marder.

4/20/06

How to teach politicized science topics, such as evolution, was the theme of this meeting. Do you teach the facts with little consideration for the politics of the outside world, or do you take into account the biases of your students and teach in a way that attempts to force your students to confront their misconceptions? Proponents of each side of this issue stated their case - Andy Ellington and Sahotra Sakar promoting "just the facts" and Michael Marder and Peter Rispin describing how one could use Discovery Learning teaching strategies to confront the students' biases.

3/22/06

Dean Rankin led this seminar; a continuation of our discussion of the Report of the Task Force on Curricular Reform. At this session we worked in small groups to examine the report and highlighted those changes that we felt will improve undergraduate education at UT Austin and in the College of Natural Sciences.

2/23/06

The presenter was Dr. James Bower, currently a Professor of Computational Neuroscience at the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio, and previously director of the Caltech Pre-college Science Initiative, a hands-on inquiry-based curriculum reform effort in California. Dr. Bower introduced us to Whyville.net, a science, math, and technology educational gaming-based web site designed from principles learned at CAPSI. Whyville has been particularly successful in engaging young women ages 9 – 14. This presentation came highly recommended by several members of the UT Computer Sciences department and especially by the chair, Dr. J Strother Moore.

2/2/06

This seminar provided an opportunity to examine the “Report of the Task Force on Curricular Reform” and, with Dean Mary Ann Rankin, to consider the reaction of the College of Natural Sciences. Many people think we need constructive alternatives to the suggestions of the Task Force, that now is a particularly opportune moment for ambitious new plans, and that we should consider new classes that introduce students to research through inquiry.

2005 Seminars

11/18/05

Our presenter was Dr. James Bryant from the Integrative Biology department at The University of Texas. Dr. Bryant’s presentation was entitled “Simple Steps Which Can Help Boost Student Performance”. Dr. Bryant addressed the question, “What factors are significantly related to student performance?” He noted that sections of his biostatistics class performed better than others. Dr. Bryant determined the factors that accounted for these differences in student performance. He found that there are methods of encouraging performance by limiting some of these factors. In addition, he has shown that these methods do not weaken assessment, are not difficult to implement by the instructor, are positively received by students and, most importantly, appear to work for a large proportion of students. His findings also highlight the importance

of not just educating students in the subject material, but also educating students on how to be professional scholars.

10/7/05

Dr. Diane Ebert May from Michigan State University discussed her research on scientific teaching -- "Scientific Teaching: What is the Evidence that Students Learn?" (also published in Science, April 23 2004) In this article and during her talk, Ebert May and her co-authors state that "...reform in science education should be founded on "scientific teaching", in which teaching is approached with the same rigor as science at its best. Scientific teaching involves active learning strategies to engage students in the process of science and teaching methods that have been systematically tested and shown to reach diverse students."

9/22/05

Dr. Michael Marder, and other instructors of an undergraduate Research Methods course developed for UTeach in the College of Natural Sciences at The University of Texas, discussed the challenges involved in developing a structured course whose aim is to introduce students to unstructured research.

4/21/05

The speaker for this seminar was Dr. J Strother Moore, chair of the Computer Sciences Department at UT Austin. Dr. Moore talked about his use of the Moore Method (no relation) to teach Computer Science. He has used these teaching strategies in his graduate classes since 1981.

3/10/05

Dr. Michael Starbird from the Mathematics Department here at UT Austin spoke on "Developing Independent Thinkers". As was noted at last month's session with Dean Rankin, one goal of education is to make our students able to think for themselves. We hope to move them from being consumers of knowledge to producers of knowledge and insight. We can accomplish this transformation systematically by using methods of instruction designed for that purpose. Dr. Starbird discussed some successful models.

1/28/05

Dr. Mary Ann Rankin, Dean of The College of Natural Sciences at The University of Texas, led a discussion concerning change in undergraduate

natural sciences instruction. The following questions were considered:

- * What do you believe are the main opportunities to improve undergraduate instruction in the College?
- * What new teaching strategies do you believe should be implemented in existing College courses?
- * What new resources, support, and incentives would be needed to implement these new teaching strategies in existing courses?

Copies of three articles that stimulated our thoughts on change in natural sciences undergraduate instruction were distributed and discussed.

New York Times, January 16, 2005 "101 Redefined"

If some educators have their way, however, the lecture course will soon occupy the same dustbin of history as the chariot race. "I don't think the solely lecture-based course will survive," says Carol A. Twigg, director of the Center for Academic Transformation at the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in upstate New York. "And," she adds, "it shouldn't."

Science, Vol 304, 23 April 2004 "Scientific Teaching"

Scientific teaching involves active learning strategies to engage students in the process of science and teaching methods that have been systematically tested and shown to reach diverse students.

Nature, Vol 425, 18 September 2003 "Spare me the lecture"

Rather than lecturing to 200-plus students at a time, McCray divides them into 'cooperative learning teams' of about a dozen people, throws problems at them over the Internet, and then uses the lecture hall to discuss their various solutions. He did not innovate for the sake of it – he was deeply worried about the poor teaching performance of America's leading research universities.

2004 Seminars

12/2/04

The seminar featured one of the founders of the Discovery Learning group, Dr. Austin Gleeson. Dr. Gleeson addressed the following questions:

Why Discovery? Discovery is a technique to develop student engagement in the material. Why not try to develop engagement directly? I regularly teach a required Plan II course in Modern Physics in a rather large enrollment section. Why do I teach what I teach and what are the techniques that I use to bring the students to the subject, not one that they would ordinarily deal with?

10/28/04

Improving Learning in Chemistry and Other Science and Math Courses
David Hanson, Department of Chemistry
Stony Brook University, Stony Brook, NY

Research on learning suggests that most students learn best when they are actively engaged, working together, and given the opportunity to construct their own understanding and have it validated. In contrast, science and math classrooms in colleges and universities often appear to be based on the ideas that teaching is telling, knowledge is facts, and learning is recall. This presentation will identify and address the challenges in moving to a more research-based classroom, and provide a research-based design for classroom activities that participants can use in their own classrooms. These ideas have been shown to increase student attendance and engagement in class, lecture, and recitation sessions; enhance performance on examinations; and reduce attrition in courses and course sequences.

10/7/04

Our speaker was Dr. Rodger Bybee. Dr. Bybee is internationally known for his expertise in inquiry-based teaching strategies in the natural sciences. He promotes the concept that understanding science or mathematics is more than just knowing the facts of each discipline. Rodger Bybee helped us consider instructional strategies that will cause our students to be able to use and apply content knowledge to novel situations.

Rodger Bybee is executive director of the BSCS Center for Curriculum Development in Colorado Springs, Colorado. Before joining BSCS, he was executive director of the National Research Council's Center for Science, Mathematics, and Engineering Education (CSMEE) in Washington, D.C. At BSCS, he has been principal investigator for four National Science Foundation programs, including a college program titled Biological Perspectives.

9/17/04

Have you ever found it challenging to teach an interactive, inquiry-based "writing component" course in your area? In this seminar, we worked with an expert in writing in all content areas, Professor Joan Mullin.

According to Dr. Mullin, writing can be used not just to produce products (i.e. papers), but as a way to teach concepts and processes. Using writing as a teaching tool allows students to practice manipulating the language (verbal/written, mathematical, or visual) of a discipline so that they can integrate it into their own knowledge system in meaningful

ways, rather than memorizing others' words.

Dr. Joan Mullin directs a new Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) initiative in the College of Liberal Arts at UT–Austin. Professor Mullin is one of the country's leading voices in WAC. She has directed the University of Toledo's WAC program since 1988 and its Writing Center since 1987, and, in recent years, has earned an international reputation for her work in these areas. Currently she is collaborating on a book exploring the international implications of what were, until the late 1990s, largely American initiatives in writing instruction.

5/13/04

Our presenters were Dr. Ken Diller, chair of the Department of Biomedical Engineering and the PI of VaNTH at UT, Dr. Anthony Petrosino (College of Education) and Dr. Marcus Pandey (Biomedical Engineering). They presented work from their ongoing collaboration in biomechanics, the VaNTH project.

VaNTH is a working model for how multidisciplinary, multi-institutional groups can define an approach to developing and testing inquiry-based curricula for rapidly evolving knowledge bases. The National Science Foundation funded the Vanderbilt–Northwestern–Texas–Harvard/MIT Engineering Research Center (VaNTH) in 1999. The overall strategy is to bring learning scientists, assessment experts, learning technologists and bioengineering domain experts together into an integrated effort to develop an educational system centered on challenge-based instruction with major support from technology.

This presentation consisted of data collected on the effectiveness of the VaNTH approach both at UT and across all four universities as well as a practical demonstration of the curricula materials developed. Challenges and rewards of cross-disciplinary research and curriculum development were also be presented and discussed.

3/10/04

On February 6, the Discovery Learning group had a presentation from Robert Beichner, NCSU, that was very stimulating, but many people noticed that we would need new physical teaching space to emulate him. On March 10, Discovery Learning decided to learn about some innovative strategies for teaching large classes in large lecture halls. Someone who has been trying to take as many similar ideas as possible and use them in traditional large lecture halls is Dick McCray, who spoke on March 10. He is a professor of Astronomy from the University of Colorado at Boulder, and chairs the US National Research Council's Committee on Undergraduate Science Education. An article about his teaching methods appeared in the 18 September issue of Nature, 2003.

2/6/04

Dr. Robert Beichner, Professor of Physics, North Carolina State University, described student-centered activities for large enrollment undergraduate classes. Here is an abstract of his talk:

The Student-Centered Activities for Large Enrollment Undergraduate Programs

(SCALE-UP) Project

Robert J. Beichner, Professor of Physics, North Carolina State University

How do you keep a classroom of 100 undergraduates actively learning? Can students practice communication and teamwork skills in a large class? How do you boost the performance of underrepresented groups? The Student-Centered Activities for Large Enrollment Undergraduate Programs (SCALE-UP) Project has addressed these concerns. Materials developed by the project are now in use by more than 1/3 of all science, math, and engineering majors nationwide. Physics and chemistry classes are currently in operation, with biology, engineering, and oceanography adaptations in progress.

Educational research indicates that students should collaborate on interesting tasks and be deeply involved with the material they are studying. We promote active learning in a redesigned classroom for 100 students or more. (Of course, smaller classes can also benefit.) Class time is spent primarily on tangibles, ponderables, hands-on activities, simulations, and interesting questions. There are also hypothesis-driven labs. Nine students sit in three teams at round tables. Instructors circulate and engage in Socratic dialogues. The setting looks like a banquet hall, with lively interactions nearly all the time.

Hundreds of hours of classroom video and audio recordings, transcripts of numerous interviews and focus groups, data from conceptual learning assessments (using widely-recognized instruments in a pretest/posttest protocol), and collected portfolios of student work are part of our rigorous assessment effort. We have data comparing 16,000+ students. Our findings can be summarized as the following:

- Ability to solve problems is improved
- Conceptual understanding is increased
- Attitudes are improved
- Failure rates are drastically reduced, especially for women and minorities
- Performance in later courses is enhanced

In this talk Dr. Beichner discussed the classroom environment,

described some of the activities, and reviewed the findings of studies of learning in various SCALE-UP settings.

2003 Seminars

12/2/03

Dr. Roger Bengtson, UT Austin Physics Department, and two of his graduate students, Becky Thompson and Josh Hone, presented their experiences on adding two discovery-style laboratories to the series of labs required for introductory noncalculus-based Physics. They even allowed us to try out a bit of one of the labs first hand. These discovery-style labs were implemented this semester. An evaluation of the students' response to these labs has already been administered and the results of this evaluation were shared at the luncheon.

This seminar was applicable to all disciplines in that common problems are encountered as you attempt to add inquiry-based learning to your courses. We discussed the joys and difficulties of discovery learning.

10/2/03

Our speaker was Dr. W. Ted Mahavier, Associate Professor of Mathematics at Lamar University. Ted is an experienced inquiry-based mathematics instructor, and an academic grandson of R.L. Moore, who taught at UT Austin using discovery techniques from 1920 to 1969, and for whom the RLM building is named. Ted discussed inquiry-based teaching strategies, focusing on mathematics, but with ideas that are applicable to all natural science teaching.

5/8/03

UTeach staff and faculty presented an interactive session concerning the use of inquiry-based teaching strategies in the UTeach Program. UTeach (CNS) prepares secondary mathematics, science and computer science teachers. UTeach is a collaborative program between the Colleges of Education and Natural Sciences.

Questions that were explored:

What is UTeach?

Were seeds for the future success of our College of Natural Sciences professors sown in high school?

What does it take to teach in an inquiry-based fashion to five classes of students per day?

no teaching assistant

five sections of two different courses
55 minutes of preparation time during the school day

How does instruction in College of Natural Science courses affect the way future high school teachers will teach?

3/21/03

We continued the discussion of a possible Research Component course requirement for College of Natural Sciences majors. We began this discussion at a Discovery Learning luncheon seminar about a year ago. A committee of CNS staff and faculty has continued this discussion and asked for advice on some of the details of this plan. We started with a short presentation on how the Writing Component course requirement operates and then proceeded to discuss possible Research Component course requirements.

2/12/03

A panel of University of Texas students reflected on their experiences with inquiry-based/discovery learning The University of Texas. The College of Natural Sciences continues to investigate the possible addition of required Research Component courses (a la Writing Component courses). It was valuable to hear the opinions of students who have taken courses that included inquiry elements or have participated in undergraduate research.

2000 Seminars

9/00: Dr. Michael Marder

Dr. Michael Marder, Discovery Learning Director, lead a discussion entitled, "Introducing New Faculty to Discovery Learning". The 44 faculty and staff members who attended the discussion looked at the ways in which the teaching traditions of this university can be passed on to new faculty. The new faculty mentoring program was introduced, including the agenda for the October 6 and 7 CNS Teaching Strategies Conference to which all new faculty and their mentors were invited.

5/00: Natural Science courses for Liberal Arts majors

Two undergraduates, members of the Liberal Arts Council, shared their perspectives on how well Natural Sciences courses meet the needs of the Liberal Arts students. Do the present natural science courses for Liberal Arts majors meet the needs of these students? (There are 12,000 Liberal Arts majors.)

- * What should educated citizens know about the natural sciences?
- * If these courses do not meet the students' needs, what would work better?
- * Would it be possible or desirable to offer courses involving Discovery Learning on a sufficient scale that they can become a regular part of the Area C requirement?

The assembled professors recommended a number of changes in CNS courses, but felt that it was very difficult to obtain the resources necessary to make the desirable innovations. The recommended resources/innovations included adding discussion sections to large undergraduate courses, having laboratory sections for all science courses, adding additional teaching assistants for large service courses, and changing the furniture in the classrooms that have fixed desks to moveable furniture that promotes more interactive teaching strategies.

3/00: Dr. Ed Burger

Dr. Ed Burger, Williams College, reflected on his experiences with the Moore Method. Dr. Bing taught Dr. Burger Topology in the fall of 1985. (class of 50 students) According to Dr. Burger, Bing emphasized students discovering ideas and material for themselves. Bing taught material in the following sequence:

1. - handed out terms
2. - defined the terms for a day or two
3. - handed out theorems
4. - students were told to prove the theorems themselves

The course caused Dr. Burger to learn to think on his feet and to solve problems on his own. Dr. Burger told the story of his first few days in the class. Dr. Burger solved the first theorem he was given with a geometric construction, not topology. He went to see Dr. Bing during office hours to explain that he didn't feel prepared for the class. Bing said, "If you've got a proof, that's fine." Ed then went to class where he was the first one called on. Ed leaned forward and whispered to Bing, "Remember, I am the one who doesn't know any topology." Bing answered, "I know, that's why I picked you."

2/00: Dr. William Schmidt

Dr. William Schmidt, the U.S. Director of the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), spoke at this Discovery Learning

seminar. Dr. Schmidt is at Michigan State University. The TIMSS was a battery of standardized tests given around the world. Dr. Schmidt feels that the poor showing of the United States on these tests demonstrates that there is something very wrong with the science and mathematics curriculum in the U.S. The web site that includes many of the overheads used in this session can be found at <http://ustimss.msu.edu/>

1/00: Teaching Strategies in Calculus

The January seminar focused on the content and teaching strategies used in calculus courses here at UT. In addition to mathematics faculty, the luncheon featured faculty from the departments that require calculus—professors from Physics, Chemistry and Engineering. These people shared their experiences with student understanding of and ability to use calculus topics that impact their courses. The non-mathematics faculty present generally pressed for more concept development in Calculus – rather than a straight computation focus. This was the first time in the memory of the faculty present that people teaching Calculus have come together to discuss the course. The 32 people who are teaching Calculus this academic year were invited to the discussion. 13 of those 32 were able to attend (41%).

1999 Seminars

11/99: Dr. Russ Wright

The Discovery Learning seminar/luncheon featured Dr. Russ Wright from the Montgomery County Public Schools in Rockville, Maryland. Dr. Wright is the author of Event-Based Science which is a new way to teach science at the middle school level. Newsworthy events establish the relevance of science topics; authentic tasks create the need-to-know more about those topics; and lively interviews, photographs, Web pages, and inquiry-based science activities create a desire to know more about those topics. The Event-Based Science Project is supported by grants from NSF and NASA. This seminar was helpful both to professors who prepare secondary teachers and to those seeking new teaching strategies for use in their undergraduate classes.

10/99:

Discovery Learning hosts two types of seminars. Some months DL will facilitate individual department teaching strategy sessions, while other months DL will host larger sessions open to all as we have in the past. The following seminar was the first of the departmental teaching strategy sessions.

Discovery Learning facilitated a meeting of The University of Texas College of Engineering Math–Science Committee chaired by Dr. Rebecca Richards–Kortum. Dr. Michael Marder, Physics professor, presented the inquiry–style teaching strategy changes that are being piloted in Physics 303K/L this semester. Eleven professors attended the meeting and unanimously decided to incorporate the changes into the spring semester as well.

9/99: SUNY Stony Brook President Shirley Strum Kenny and UT Provost

Sheldon Ekland–Olson

Discovery Learning, the Center for Teaching Effectiveness and the Academy of Distinguished Teachers sponsored a luncheon discussion on the Boyer Commission Report, "Reinventing Undergraduate Education, A Blueprint for America's Research Universities", with 70 people in attendance. The speakers were President Shirley Strum Kenny, President of the State University of New York at Stony Brook and Chair of the Boyer Commission that developed the report and Provost Sheldon Ekland–Olson of The University of Texas at Austin.

4/99: Dr. Vicki Almstrum

Dr. Vicki Almstrum of The University of Texas Computer Science department spoke about her Software Engineering course. It is an excellent example of active, inquiry and discovery learning. Dr. Almstrum was presented with a Natural Sciences Teaching Excellence Award this month for her terrific work with undergraduates. Dr. Almstrum has two sections of 30 students each that spend the semester simulating a real software design company. Each class breaks into five groups of six students, which are deemed development teams. The teaching assistants are vice–presidents and Dr. Almstrum is the CEO. The students bid for jobs (previously lined up by Dr. Almstrum in the nonprofit community) and then follow all the steps that would normally occur in software development. They interview the client to assess needs, they design the software, and they make a software presentation. The software becomes "freeware" available to all.

During this project Dr. Almstrum has 10 speakers from real world companies speak to the students as well as having two real world mentors for each team. The students keep a journal of the process and write a term paper. The URL for more information about her course is -- <http://www.cs.utexas.edu/users/almstrum/classes/cs373/>

3/99: Dr. John Kappelman

Dr. John Kappelman, UT Anthropology Department, demonstrated his NSF funded multimedia exam software which allows students to interact with the assessment instrument and saves class time by moving testing outside of class time. Most of the software shell that is ready at this point does not require student use of inquiry skills, but Dr. Kappelman did end his talk with a demonstration of a sequence of questions that required critical thinking and problem solving. He said that this type of question would be the focus of the next part of his NSF grant. Even as is, this exam is helpful to the discovery approach in that the content knowledge that is required in many disciplines can be effectively assessed outside of class time. This would allow more in-class time for active learning activities. Time is one of the main problems cited by professors when they are asked about difficulties in implementing discovery learning.

2/99:

The February luncheon seminar was a round table discussion. The following questions were discussed in small groups and then each group reported on the discussion.

1. What does "discovery learning" mean to you?
2. Have you ever used any techniques in class that you would consider discovery in nature? Describe them.
3. If you tried a discovery technique, what problems did you have and how did you overcome the problems or were they insurmountable?
4. What are the benefits and drawbacks of adding discovery to your teaching? Did discovery techniques assist you in reaching the goals of your course?
5. Do the benefits outweigh the drawbacks?
6. What could be done to convince more professors to focus on improving teaching or is this unnecessary or unwise?

1/99: Dr. Diane Ebert-May

Diane Ebert-May is the Director of Lyman Briggs School, a residential, liberal arts science program within the College of Natural Sciences at Michigan State University, and is a Professor of Botany and Plant Pathology. She provides national leadership for promoting professional development opportunities for faculty, postdoctoral teaching fellows, and graduate students who actively participate not only in their own discipline-based research, but also in creative scholarship and research about teaching and learning. The title and abstract of her talk were:

"Active Learning in Large Group Classes"

She demonstrated how active learning can be achieved in large group classes. Even in her 600 person lecture, students are called by name

(name placards) and students interact with one another and are accountable on a daily basis. She has 95% attendance for the semester. Dr. Ebert-May's pre and post studies show that students become more confident in their own ability to solve subject matter related problems after taking her active learning style course. She and a colleague both taught two lectures on the same material in two different styles of teaching and then compared results on three types of tests. The active learning method resulted in the same amount of content learning with significantly more process learning occurring. Dr. Ebert-May's power point presentation may be reached at this link.

1998 Seminars

11/98:

Three professors from the College of Engineering, Dr. Phil Schmidt, Dr. Jerry Jones and Dr. Rich Crawford, presented an overview of discovery learning in engineering courses they teach and in their outreach to elementary teachers through DTeach.

10/98:

A panel of six University of Texas professors presented their Discovery Learning projects to the seminar/luncheon group. Each presentation was followed by questions and discussion. The six professors were:

Mike Hall – Department of History
Larry Shepley – Department of Physics
Mary Hoenecke and Suzanne Franka – Department of Nursing
Stan Roux – Department of Botany
Michael Starbird – Department of Mathematics

9/98: Dr. Louis Bloomfield

Louis Bloomfield from the University of Virginia was the guest speaker at the monthly seminar/luncheon. 33 faculty members attended the seminar and a lively discussion followed the talk. His title and abstract were:

"How Things Work: a Novel Way to Teach Physics to Non-Scientists"

How Things Work is a course for non-science students that introduces them to physics in the context of everyday objects. It reverses the traditional format of physics courses by starting with whole objects and looking inside them to see what makes them work. Because it concentrates on concepts rather than math, and on familiar objects rather than abstract constructs, How Things Work serves both to reduce students' fears of science and to convey to them a substantial understanding of our modern technological world. In the 7 years that

How Things Work has been taught at the University of Virginia, it has attracted a wide audience and has precipitated a cultural change—students throughout the University have come to recognize that they can understand physics and that it does have something valuable to say to them.

8/98: Dr. Patton

Dr. Patton, a physicist from Dalhousie University, spoke both at lunch and again later in the day on his newly developed Virtual Laser laboratory. This is a teaching tool that allows remote access to expensive equipment at another site. His talk title and abstract were:

"The Virtual Laser Laboratory"

The Virtual Laser allows students and other interested people to go to places where concerns of safety, lack of experimental skills, knowledge or distance would limit access. Over a web browser, you can enter the Virtual Laser lab to explore a 4 foot by 8 foot optical table covered with interesting experiments. By clicking on virtual buttons on the viewer's monitor, the viewer can pan, tilt or zoom a color camera to take a closer look at the laser and other optical components. You can conduct a chosen experiment using a 1 Watt argon-ion laser as the optical source. You can see the experiment in progress and download the measured data at the end of the session.

7/98: Dr. Marilla Svinicki

Professor Marilla Svinicki, The University of Texas Director of the Center for Teaching Effectiveness and Professor of Educational Psychology here at UT, gave a talk entitled:

"Cognitive Basis for Effectiveness of Discovery Learning"

Problem-based or discovery learning is based on student exploration of an authentic problem using the processes and tools of the discipline. Discovery learning encourages higher level learning, such as: the view that education is a process, not a set of facts to memorize; a set of problem-solving strategies for confronting the unknown or unfamiliar; a belief in one's own ability to learn about the subject; and accepting responsibility for one's own learning. Dr. Svinicki's overheads are available for your use.

7/98: Dr. Naomi Fisher

Professor Fisher of the University of Illinois at Chicago Department of Mathematics, Statistics, and Computer Science gave the seminar. She has also been active in MER, an acronym for Mathematicians and Education Reform, which emphasizes mathematics education at research

universities. Her talk title and abstract were:

"Recognizing Excellence in Mathematics Education Programs"

Looking at mathematics education from the perspective of the mathematics community, the speaker will consider distinctive attributes of excellent mathematics education programs. Several examples of mathematics education projects were described to illustrate the highlighted points and to suggest how excellent projects influence the mathematics enterprise. Discussion of the relevance of the mathematics community's experience to other fields was encouraged.