*Joe Cuseo*

**Content of an Instructor Training Program for**

**First-Year Seminar Instructors**

The *content* of the instructor-training program should relate closely to the actual content to be covered in the course, including discussion of the course’s (a) course purpose and primary goals or objectives, (b) major topics and their “infrastructure” (key components or subtopics), (c) topic sequence, (d) student assignments, and (e) student evaluation (grading) procedures. Participants could gradually build their course syllabus as they experience these sessions, and the final product could be completion of the syllabus, which would save them some time and give them some sense of accomplishment.

Four topics are recommended as major components of a comprehensive instructor-training program that would make the experience relevant for new-student seminar instructors in particular, and for college faculty in general:

(1) understanding *first-year students*

(2) understanding the *institution*,

(3) implementing engaging *teaching-learning* strategies.

**Understanding First-Year Students**

This component of the instructor training program would focus on promoting instructors' knowledge of contemporary first-year students, both as learners and as persons. The importance of this topic for effective teaching is underscored by William Perry, path-finding researcher on college students' stages of cognitive development, who argues that, "Faculty development begins with an understanding of student development; students are our common purpose" (quoted in Knefelkamp, 1980, p. 24). At the University of South Carolina, where its 25-year old instructor training program serves as a national model, the first step is to "start with the learner" (Gardner & Hunter, 1994).

Angelo (1993) has also argued that focusing instructional development on the learner will serve to increase the quantity and quality of faculty participation, as well as build a sense of campus community:

Shift the focus from improving teaching to improving learning. Making improved learning

the goal of instructional development focuses *everyone's* attention on the desired outcome

and encourages a wider range of approaches to achieve that goal. A focus on learning can

bring together administrators, student affairs personnel, faculty, and students in a common

enterprise--rather than singling out faculty for "development" (1994, p. 6).

**Understanding the Campus**

This component of the instructor training program would have two related objectives: (a) increasing *faculty awareness* of campus resources and support services that are available to promote student development, and (b) increasing *student utilization* of these support services (e.g., via more frequent and effective faculty referrals of students to appropriate support services).

To most effectively realize these objectives, it is strongly recommended that an *orientation to student support services* be included as a major component of the instructor training program. Reporting on the University of South Carolina's week-long instructor training program, John Gardner notes that one beneficial byproduct of the training experience is that faculty "learn much more about the institution. This is especially helpful for new faculty who join the university and have some orientation problems not at all dissimilar to those of students" (1980, p. 7). Thus, new-faculty orientation and development may represent an unprecedented opportunity not only to facilitate the adjustment of first-year faculty, but also to *proactively* promote the development of a new faculty "culture" on campus–one that is more student-centered and *initially* equipped to engage in effective teaching. One way to capitalize on this opportunity may be to offer an intensive and comprehensive new-faculty orientation and development experience—delivered as part of, or in conjunction with, the seminar’s instructor training program.

**Engaging Pedagogy: Making the Key Connections**

1. The *Student-****Teacher*** Connection: Connecting Students with the Course Instructor

2. The *Student-****Course*** Connection: Connecting Students with the Course Content (Subject

Matter)

3. The *Student-****Student*** Connection: Connecting Students with Classmates

4. The *Student-****Campus*** Connection: Connecting Students with Campus Resources & Student

Support Professionals

5. The *Student-****Community*** Connection: Connecting Students with the Local Community

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1.

The *Student*-***Instructor*** Connection

**1. *Initiating* the *Student-Instructor* Connection: Establishing Rapport with Students**

**during the First Weeks of Class**

\* Key Strategies:

- Knowing *Who* Our Students Are: Learning Names & Affirming Individuality

- Knowing *About* Our Students: The “Student Information Sheet”

**2. *Sustaining* the Student-*Instructor* Connection: Maintaining Rapport with Your**

**Students throughout the Term**

\* Key Strategies:

- Sharing Relevant *Personal Experiences* (e.g., success strategies and stumbling blocks)

- *One-Minute Papers*: short written reflections completed by students in class that take

little class time (and grading time), and allow for personalized instructor-student

dialogue throughout the term.

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2.

The *Student-****Course*** (Subject) Connection

**1.*****Initiating* the Student-Course (Subject) Connection: Igniting Student Interest**

**and Involvement in the Course during the First Weeks of Class**

\* Key Strategies:

- Intentionally Build a Case for *Course Relevance*

- Allowing Students Opportunities for *Personal Choice* & *Decision-Making*

2. ***Sustaining* the Student-Course Connection: Maintaining Student Interest and**

**Involvement in the Course throughout the Term**

\* Key Strategies:

- Posing *Open-Ended Questions* (*Divergent-Thinking*) Questions during Class

Presentations

- *Reality-Based/Reality-Simulated* Learning Activities (e.g., case studies, problem-

based learning exercises)

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3.

The *Student-****Student*** (Classmate) Connection

***Initiating* Student-Student (Peer) Connections: Creating a Sense of Community**

**among Classmates during the First Weeks of Class**

\* Key Strategy: *Icebreakers* (a.k.a., “Community Builders”)

- Paired Interviews (a.k.a. “Three-Step” Interview”)

- “Classmate Scavenger Hunt”

**2. *Sustaining* Student-Student Connections: Maintaining Peer Interaction and Class**

**Community throughout the Term**

\* Key Strategies:

- Small-Group *Discussion*: Pairs, Triads, Quads

- *Collaborative* Learning: students reach *consensus* in small groups

- *Cooperative* Learning: *intentional, instructor-created* learning teams whose work task

is explicitly designed to ensure *collective responsibility* (positive interdependence)

and *individual accountability* (personal responsibility).

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4.

The Student-***Campus*** Connection:

Igniting Interest in and Continued Involvement with Key Campus Resources

\* Key Strategies:

- Connecting Resource Agents to Students via *In-Class Visits* by *Guest Speakers*

- Connecting Students to Campus Resources via *Out-of-Class* *Assignments*

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5.

The Student-***Community*** Connection:

Involving Students in the Local Community

\* Key Strategies:

- Whole-Class Involvement in a Unified Community Service Project

- Student-Selected Community Service Experience for Career Exploration & Preparation

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