

UWO faculty showcase scholarly teaching research

by Natalie Johnson - Friday, March 04, 2011

<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/9728/uwo-faculty-showcase-scholarly-teaching-research/>

School was in session Tuesday at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh's Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, complete with lively discussions and engaging research presentations.

But the SOTL (Scholarship of Teaching and Learning) Scholars Showcase differed from a typical lecture, because faculty members were both the professors and the students for this lesson about how to tackle tough classroom challenges.

"Student learning is a top priority for committed and passionate professors engaged in SOTL," said Lori Carrell, director of the Center, which fosters teaching research and a variety of professional development activities and programs for UWO's teaching community.

During the scholar showcase, the following faculty members presented their research:

- Eric Kuennen and Steve Szydlik, mathematics, Enhancing Discussion in the Mathematics Classroom;
- Lucky Mason-Williams, special education, Elizabeth Alderton, reading education, and Eric Brunsell, curriculum and instruction, Using Online Discussions To Increase Student Learning;
- Jennifer Considine, communication, What Do Students Really Do in Learning Groups?; and
- Jennifer Mihalick, chemistry, Student Reflections on Multiple Ways of Learning.

"This kind of research begins in the classroom, as professors recognize challenges and then use their knowledge of research to discern recommendations to address those challenges," Carrell explained. "Though the studies may be published in peer-reviewed journals and presented at conferences, the primary reason for conducting this type of research is practical. Professors are asking, in rigorous and interesting ways, 'What can we learn that will help us help students learn better?'"

For example, discussion in math classes often is extremely limited. Kuennen and Szydlik systematically studied their verbal and nonverbal behaviors to discern how to further engage beginning mathematics students in classroom discussion.

They found that it is importance to arrange the room in a U-shape, provide students with the rationale for the importance of discussion in math class, create an expectation of participation from the first day of class, allow students a safe place to reflect and talk in pairs before facing the whole-class discussion, and use of clickers to generate student-student interaction.

In an effort to find ways to foster more effective online learning, Alberton, Brunsell and Mason-Williams looked at the depth and quality of online discourse. "Student-led discussion really led to more interactions among students," Mason-Williams said.

Considine had students make audio recordings of their group project meetings in order to discover how best to increase students' comfort level and participation in group assignments.

She found that students try to figure out assignments or problems on their own without consulting their books, notes or instructor; they like to tell stories during group meetings, which leads to group bonding; they try to be nice to one another and avoid being critical; and they often are poor record-keepers, spending extra time going over decisions made in past meetings.

Mihalick's study considered students' perceptions of learning and their actual learning across a variety of ways to learn chemistry, including lectures, discussion sessions and laboratory assignments. She had students reflect daily on their learning progress during a kinetics unit in a general chemistry class.

"Students should be encouraged to use different learning styles," she recommended.

Learn more about UWO's [Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning](#).