Re: The Lab and Lecture Problem
Submitted by Ted Crowell, Philosophy (& AFA Adjunct Negotiator)

Any one with even a slight familiarity with Socrates' famous attempt to define concepts will appreciate Lara Branen-Ahumada’s attempt to define lecture and lab classes. But as Socrates befuddled his victims with cross-examination, we may have the same unsettling feeling after reading her efforts. This is not to fault her efforts. It is because the project itself may be doomed. It is only recently, and not with universal approval, that the attention has shifted away from a Socratic/Platonic definition to a reexamination of the territory. Many of us have now come to accept the idea that concepts do not lay themselves out to neat maps of definition. Instead, we now examine the family resemblances among the various examples grouped under a concept, with guideposts provided by paradigm examples and further examination of borderline cases and puzzles over criterial paradoxes. I hope to show how some of this applies to Ms. Branen-Ahumada’s discussion and then follow this trend in the direction she starts.

In the first place, it is never a good idea to mix concepts from one area when there is some confusion with the original subject of puzzlement. Unfortunately, she does this when she says, “...any definition we might formulate will inevitably be flawed unless these definitions include workload components.” Well, if we are trying to get clear about lab and lecture, it is best to see what we can do there first and, then, if possible, think about the relation to workload issues.

Official College documents are of little help here. From the SRJC Curriculum Development Guide:

Lecture

Lecture or discussion. A session conducted under immediate supervision (line of sight) or the instructor of record in a laboratory, computer-laboratory, studio, shop or other activity setting with students engaged in various scientific, technical, artistic, athletic, vocational or other instructional activities. (Code 02)

Then there is Code 03 which is a mixture of the preceding two.

A definition of a term where the same term appears in the definition is not going to help much. And, as if the genus, lecture, is clear, we see the following species.

• The expository lecture is the traditional lecture that treats a single question or problem.
• The demonstration, Laboratory, Studio, Activity. A session conducted under immediate supervision (line of sight) or the instructor of record in a laboratory, computer-laboratory, studio, shop or other activity setting with students engaged in various scientific, technical, artistic, athletic, vocational or other instructional activities. (Code 02)

• The project lecture is a single question or problem, various media, site visits, etc. at the instructor’s discretion. (Code 02)

Laboratory

Laboratory activity. A session conducted under immediate supervision (line of sight) or the instructor of record in a laboratory, computer-laboratory, studio, shop or other activity setting with students engaged in various scientific, technical, artistic, athletic, vocational or other instructional activities. (Code 04)

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Hi Michael,

Your analysis in the October 9th “AFA Dialogue” of the adjuncts’ role in California community colleges was right on the mark, and applies to the CSU as well. I can say this without having to be here for decades; it was apparent to me even before I was hired.

My experience as a student, especially at Sonoma State when I was getting my TESL certificate, made it clear: I only met one full-time faculty member during three semesters taking a full load. Later, in the M.A. program at San Francisco State, I observed that the English department there also relies heavily on adjuncts for both ESL (now called “Multicultural Composition”) and the two required college writing courses. In my experience in private industry, temporary workers are most often used for load-leveling; that is, in peak times (for example, the “Internet boom” of the late ’90’s), large numbers of temporary workers, both professional and production, were hired while management waited to see whether this growth would be long-term or not. As we now know, the growth was only temporary, and the use of temporary workers had some rational basis.

In contrast, in the community colleges we know full well that in ESL, for instance, the FTES load is not going to suddenly drop to, say, 50% of today’s level. Yet adjuncts carry more than 50% of the teaching load. Adjuncts are going to continue to be at the heart of the teaching team, barring the disappearance of the department. No doubt this scenario is repeated in many departments.

It’s clear that, in California at least, public higher education is predicated on the willingness of people like us to do the work under these less than optimal conditions, and on our dedication to providing quality teaching, other than provision to the compensation. The system could not function at its current level of funding without the underclass of which we are a part.

For me, as for most others in the ESL department, teaching at SRJC is the main income, and it’s the work that I spent three years of full-time study preparing to do. I’m in with both feet.

It’s thanks to you and others who represent our needs and interests that it’s possible for us to survive doing the work we value most.

Re: The Lab and Lecture Problem
Dear Lara,

Thank you for writing such an informative and eye-opening article for the AFA Dialogue. Your assessment helped to clarify questions I’ve always had and left me infuriated but hopeful that your words will create the necessary space needed for change. I appreciate the time you took to look into this matter and would like to support any further discussion of this topic. Please let me know how I can help.

Thank you,
Michele Camozzi (Schmidt)
P.E. Dance & Athletics

Re: PGI for Adjuncts
Submitted by Michael Drayton, ESL

Hi Michael,

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Faculty Write Back (cont. from page 1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Faculty Write Back (cont. from page 1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>From College of the Sequoias Curriculum Committee Minutes 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Barbara Gross Davis; op. cit.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Committee Minutes 2002
From College of the Sequoias Curriculum
I think there might be some progress

- The interactive lecture evolves around orderly brainstorming in which students generate ideas in response to a question or prompt. The instructor and the class then sort the responses into categories. The flow of examples and counterexamples, generalizations and specifics, or rules and exceptions encourages students to grapple actively with the topic.
- Problem solving, demonstrations, proofs, and stories begin with the instructor posing a question, paradox, or enigma — some provocative problem that whets students’ interest:

  “What would happen if . . .?”

- The suspenseful answer unfolds
- Problem solving, demonstrations, proofs, and stories begin with the instructor posing a question, paradox, or enigma — some provocative problem that whets students’ interest: “What would happen if . . .?”

A sizable portion of the work involved in teaching a large lecture course takes place well before the first day of classes. For example:

- in a seminar you can make a spur-of-the-moment assignment, but in large classes you may need to distribute written guidelines. Similarly, in small classes students can easily turn in their homework during class. In large lectures you must decide how to distribute and collect papers without consuming precious class time. All these tasks take planning and organization.

Many of the following suggestions for teaching large classes will also work for small classes: good teaching practices apply to classes of any type.

On the other hand, there is the classic lab class. Here the time to subject ratio is not so prescribed. Nor is there the belief in so wide a gap between the student and the provider. The provider may even be an apprentice. Students are encouraged to put into practice, at their pace, the concepts or techniques covered in the “knowing that” section. The provider circulates freely either physically or verbally through the group. It is hoped that all will be brought to a certain level, but within their own individual time frame. It is “knowing how,” not “knowing that.” There may be a lab section attached to a lecture class, where the “knowing that . . .” that is acquired is applied in “knowledge how . . .” (e.g., how the lessons of the Great Depression apply to today’s economy). Or it may occur during a lecture portion (the worry about “passive spectator” again). So, let’s see where Ms. Branen-Ahumada’s discussion can get us through this issue. First, I think we can agree that her elimination of the one hour of “baby sitting” can almost go without saying. We need to start where there is an active role, be it lecture or lab, on the part of the instructor. The clue lies in her categories of preparation and assessment. So I suggest we start with these workload factors and, as I stated above, not worry about the definitional aspect. We can appeal to the paradigms as described above and let it go at that, recognizing that there will be mixed cases that will def a clear definition for the time being.

Fortunately, we have some history already to work from. I am referring to the Career Development College Preparation (CDCP) workload study that was used to adjust salary for certain non-credit courses. The initial survey asked faculty to account for time spent in three areas: preparation, assessment, and student consultation. Each category is spelled out: preparation—time spent outside scheduled class sessions, including designing handouts, writing lecture outlines, organizing activities, making sure teaching space is properly prepared; assessment—time spent assessing the work of the students, preparing reports regarding that work; and, finally, student consultation—time spent providing aid to students outside of scheduled class sessions.

If a workload study determines that a certain ratio of time spent in these ancillary activities to time in the classroom is achieved, then it is properly a lecture class. I would include student consultation because I believe this is a crucial part of a typical lecture class (see above characterization of the gap between student and instructor). The actual benchmark percentage will be determined based on the paradigms: one for the paradigm lab, where my guess is that the percentage would be less than 20%, and one for the lecture paradigm, where I would look for close to 50%. This method would also allow for the mixed class: one where there is “interactive work” as part of a formal lecture. Once we have these data, we would then look at the borderline cases and decide based on the Official Course Outline of Record where each class fell in the lab/lecture distinction.

Conclusion:
I said earlier that I thought it was not a good idea to mix concepts from one area where there is some confusion to another where you were attempting a definition. So, it now might be said that this is exactly what I have done. In my defense, I have tried to abandon at least a traditional method of definition for lab/lecture and replaced it with what I hope is a working paradigm of the two cases. And secondly, I am relying on an area where I think there can be less confusion — a workload study and the related data. This is where Ms. Branen-Ahumada’s direction is helpful. I have just tried to take it a step further.