

Fall 2008 • An Open Forum for Faculty at Santa Rosa Junior College • November 5, 2008

THE AFA DIALOGUE HAS BEEN CREATED TO AIR CONCERNS OF ALL FACULTY. THE AFA UPDATE WILL CONTINUE TO BE THE FACTUAL VOICE OF THE AFA, WHILE THE AFA DIALOGUE WILL ENCOURAGE CONVERSATION AND PUBLISH OPINIONS ABOUT WORK PLACE ISSUES AND POLITICAL CONCERNS. WE INVITE ANY FACULTY MEMBER TO SUBMIT LETTERS, ARTICLES, OR OPINION PIECES. AFA RESERVES EDITORIAL PREROGATIVES.

## FACULTY WRITE BACK

*With their authors' permission, we have reprinted some letters and e-mails we have received from faculty in response to recent articles in the AFA Dialogue.*

### 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 definition = Lecture and/or discussion. A session conducted under immediate supervision (line of sight) of the instructor of record using, lecture, discussion, collaborative or experiential learning that may also include incidental use of visual aids,

various media, site visits, etc. at the instructor's discretion. (Code 02)

Laboratory definition = 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 04)

Then there is Code 03 which is a mixture of the preceding two.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

- The *expository lecture* is the traditional lecture that treats a single question or problem,

<sup>1</sup> SRJC Curriculum Development Guide "Method of Instruction," 1997.

<sup>2</sup> Tools for Teaching; Barbara Gross Davis, Berkeley California, <http://teaching.berkeley.edu/bgd/largelecture.html> April 2002.

*(cont. on page 2)*

### 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,

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, out of proportion 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 event. It amounts to about 75% of my 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.

typically with a hierarchical organization of major and minor points. This approach allows you to present broad concepts and factual information efficiently but runs the risk of reducing students to passive spectators.

- 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 during the class period, with students actively or passively anticipating or pointing toward solutions.
- The *case study method* follows a realistic situation step by step to illustrate a general principle or problem-solving strategy. Depending on the level of the students, either the instructor takes the lead or the students themselves generate the questions and principles.
- *Short lectures framing discussion periods* allow an instructor to shift the energy to students. The instructor begins with a twenty-minute lecture setting the stage for some issue, then opens up a fifteen-minute discussion of implications and effects, and closes with another short lecture that pulls together the major themes or issues. In large classes, the discussion segment may be turned over to students working in trios or small groups.

On the laboratory side we see:

Hands on application of course content that reinforces or expands theories, hypotheses, practices, and procedures resulting in a level of competency defined by the course outline.<sup>3</sup>

In another attempt we see:

"Laboratory course" means a course in which a minimum of twenty-five percent (25%) of the total instructional time is devoted to laboratory activities. Laboratory activities are those activities in which the pupil personally utilizes appropriate procedures and equipment in accomplishing that learning task.

From the above, let me start where I think there might be some progress

toward clarity. The lecturer possesses knowledge of a conceptual, abstract nature that is to be imparted to a group that at best has only a vague notion of the topic. They acquire this knowledge in maybe an outdated way, (see the above worry about "passive spectator") by conceptual grasping. The lecture is for a prescribed period of time sufficient to allow for grasping of the essentials by the hearer, who is thought to have the capability, at least, at an average level of assimilating the concept essentials. At the end of a prescribed period, a test is given where many are expected to attain an average understanding with a few above and the unfortunate below.

We might call this the paradigm of the lecture class. Examples abound in English Literature, Mathematics, and Philosophy. In general, it falls under "knowing that . . ."

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.<sup>4</sup>

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 "knowledge 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 defy 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.

<sup>3</sup> From College of the Sequoias Curriculum Committee Minutes 2002

<sup>4</sup> Barbara Gross Davis; op. cit.