



**David G. Brown**

# FACULTY PRACTICE

## Computers Aid Communication

**Recently I led a faculty workshop with 200 or so faculty** from Minnesota State College and University. My theme was that the most successful teaching involves timely, intentional, quality communication between professors and their students. By increasing communication and interaction with each student, there is a strong probability that more will be taught and more will be learned.

To get the session going, participants were asked to write down ways they, in their own classes, increase communication with their students. Because I was billed as the “Dean of the International Center for Computer Enhanced Learning,” all the ideas involved the use of technology. Here are a few of the practices cited:

- Check e-mail twice a day; respond to all e-mails within 24 hours
- Use instant messaging
- Use one-to-one e-mail (especially when a student is getting lost); request a response from the recipient
- Use group e-mail
- Avoid over-participation in discussion boards: occasionally post one-word reactions
- On a discussion board during class, have students write down the most important point of a lecture, and also the questions that remain in their mind
- Use one-minute quizzes to test understanding during class
- Establish a Web board where students can leave questions
- Hold electronic office hours—a portion in chat; another portion in individual e-mails
- Post grades within your CMS

- Respond to one student’s question by sending it (and the professor’s response) to all students in the class

Recognizing that not all faculty can rely upon all of their students to have access to appropriate technology, I asked the same question but insisted that participants list only “low-tech” ways to accomplish the “increase communication with students” objective. Here again are a few of the practices cited:

- Require students to have one-on-one conferences (with you) at least once during a semester
- During multi-hour classes where breaks are built in, have students write their questions on post-it notes and stick them to the podium during break
- Near the end of each class session, have students write down (and hand in to the professor) what was, in their understanding, the most effective concept of the day
- Avoid answering your own question (wait for a student answer)
- Schedule student-faculty tutorial sessions
- Address each student by name
- Start class with an open discussion, before lecture
- During class, ask students to pro-

vide feedback on their level of understanding by the “thumbs up” and “thumbs down” strategy

- Quicken feedback
- Cancel class (perhaps once a semester) and instead meet with students individually to check in and see how things are going

From this exercise we could come to several different conclusions. We might observe that there are fully adequate “low-tech” ways to stimulate communication between professors and students: computer technology isn’t needed. Or, that the new alternatives enabled by computers can effectively stimulate computer-avoiding and/or computer-deprived professors to think more imaginatively about how they can stimulate communication in “low-tech” ways. Or, we might observe that professors and students with access to computers have more options, more learning strategies from which to choose. My own thinking is that all of the observations are true and good. Thanks, Minnesotans! ▀

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