

VIEWS FROM THE SUMMIT

BYU-Idaho Faculty Association

The Spori Summit, a faculty retreat dedicated to sharing and improving pedagogy, is sponsored by the Faculty Association during Fall and Winter semesters. At each Summit, participants are asked to bring one teaching success and one teaching challenge. The following are a few of the successful teaching techniques shared during the Winter 2004 Summit at Quickwater Ranch near Victor, Idaho.

DEVELOPING A PLEDGE OF MORAL LEADERSHIP

Bruce Kusch—Department of Business Management

This approach is used in both my senior capstone business strategy course and my introduction to business course. I feel it is imperative the students have multiple opportunities to think and ponder on the behavior they will exhibit in the business world and in their communities when they leave this university, and I want them to be reminded of what has been said prophetically about them.

They are asked to read Elder Eyring's 18 September 2001 devotional address and the epilogue in *Standing for Something* by President Hinckley. The epilogue is entitled, "The Loneliness of Moral Leadership." The assignment is then to develop a pledge (this is done in teams) and their commitment of moral leadership, which each team reads aloud in class. I ask them to keep the pledge somewhere they can read it often as a reminder of what they promise to be as they leave the university. I also show the video of excerpts from Elder Eyring's address and remarks by President Hinckley when he was here for the dedication of the Hinckley Building.

This day becomes one of the best days of the entire semester. With only the rare exception, students have created pledges that are meaningful and exhibit deep thought. This activity is done on the last day of class and is, hopefully, a meaningful memory they take with them of the course experience.

TEACHING DIFFICULT MATERIAL AT THE BEGINNING

W. Les Manner—Department of Chemistry

This approach is currently used at the beginning of each semester in general chemistry (Chem 105). At the beginning of the semester, I explain to the students in my general chemistry class that the material found in the middle of the textbook will be covered first. One of the reasons

behind this strategy, at least in the beginning, is that I didn't particularly like the order of topics as presented in the textbook.

I realize that this strategy isn't different from that incorporated by many instructors and professors. What I didn't realize at first, however, was another benefit of approaching the instruction in this manner. The material that I cover at the beginning of the semester covers some difficult topics and concepts. Many students taking their first chemistry class struggle with these topics even when they are offered in the middle of the semester. By covering this material first, the students are introduced in a short time to the difficulty of the class and what my expectations are. Many chemistry classes begin with a few easy weeks that may lead students to a false sense of what the entire semester will entail. In fact, they may pass the drop deadline or may take multiple exams before the "true" course difficulty is realized.

It is true that I have a few complaints about how difficult the materials is and concerns about passing the course, but I would rather be presented with this before the semester is half over (i.e. it's too late). I have had positive feedback from the students concerning this approach and my willingness to adapt to use it. In my opinion, the students quickly gain confidence in handling chemistry concepts and solving problems.

"HOW DO YOUR PEERS STUDY?"

Casey Hurley—Department of Business Management

I print a list of students in order according to their test grade. I prepare a seating chart by putting students at tables beginning at the top and bottom of the list, working to the middle. I make sure there are A grades in every group. The first class period after the test, I have the students sit in the assigned seats. I explain that each table includes a few students who did well on the exam. I give each group a copy of the test and I put the "most missed" questions (with answers) on the overhead. I give the students about 15 minutes and ask them to review the questions they missed and to discuss study strategies that seemed to work or not work for them. Then I ask each table to share any new insights gained from the discussion.

Students don't argue with me about the test questions. When their peers explain the question, they tend to believe it's OK, not a trap set by an evil teacher.

The top scoring students have an exercise in helping others (it's a good reminder that there's no competition for the top grade—sometimes I share the parable of the laborers who all are paid the same as a reminder that it's OK for everyone to do well). The other students often come away with insights they had never even considered. I hear comments like, "I

found out that the test covers mainly things that are discussed in class, so I should pay attention in class and take notes.” Other students learn that the study guide I give them is the best way to study. Some students discover that it is helpful to read the chapter before class. They often discover that students who study in groups are more successful. Test scores improve on the next test; students seem willing to work together more; and students seem encouraged about their potential for earning a high grade. ☺