

# Essays on Teaching Excellence

## *Toward the Best in the Academy*

Volume 6, Number 6, 1994-95

A publication of The Professional & Organizational Development Network in Higher Education ([www.podnetwork.org](http://www.podnetwork.org)).

## Emerging Trends in College Teaching for the 21st Century

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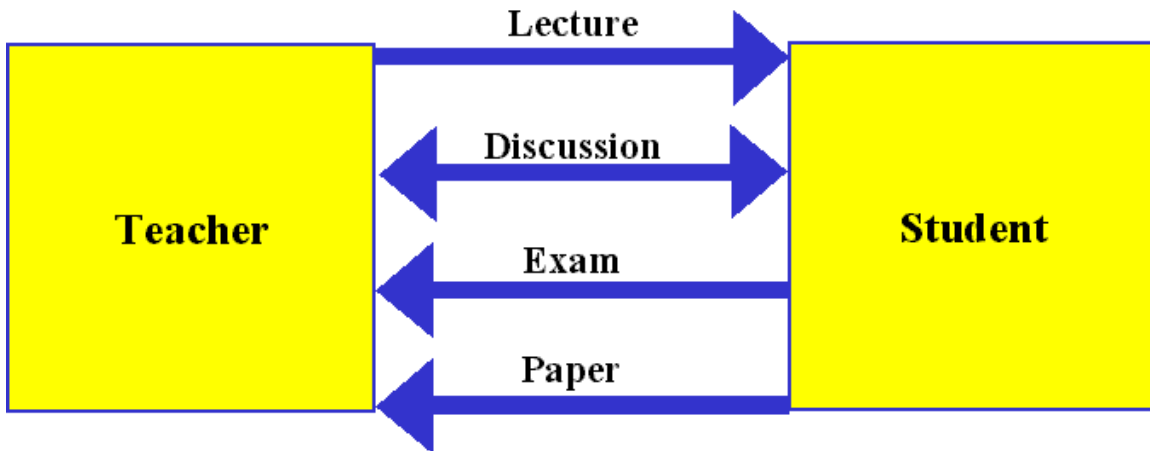
After national calls for the reform of undergraduate education were made a decade ago, students, parents, and legislators began to apply pressure to reestablish the importance of student learning. More recently, central administrators have begun to change reward structures. University-wide community is beginning to be built around teaching. New disciplinary journals that publish the scholarship of teaching are being started, and established ones are gaining respect. National teaching conferences and journals that provide a forum for the scholarship of teaching are expanding. With these emerging opportunities, faculty are going public about their interest in teaching and learning. Over the last five years, this pent-up desire has given rise to a rush of ideas and theories for improving the teaching-learning connection, which now can be tried and studied as we move toward the 21st century.

I have read and listened to faculty voices, including those in the *Journal on Excellence in College Teaching* and the hundreds of topics volunteered for presentation at the Lilly Conferences on College Teaching over the past 14 years. The emerging trends in college teaching reflect a growing realization and acceptance by faculty of the complexity of college teaching and learning. A helpful perspective from which to classify and discuss these trends is to look at this complexity as change in the communication process.

**Communication Paths.** In the past, communication between teacher and student has consisted mostly of a few traditional one-way

paths (Figure 1).

**Figure 1**  
**Traditional Teaching/Learning Feedback: Mostly One Way**

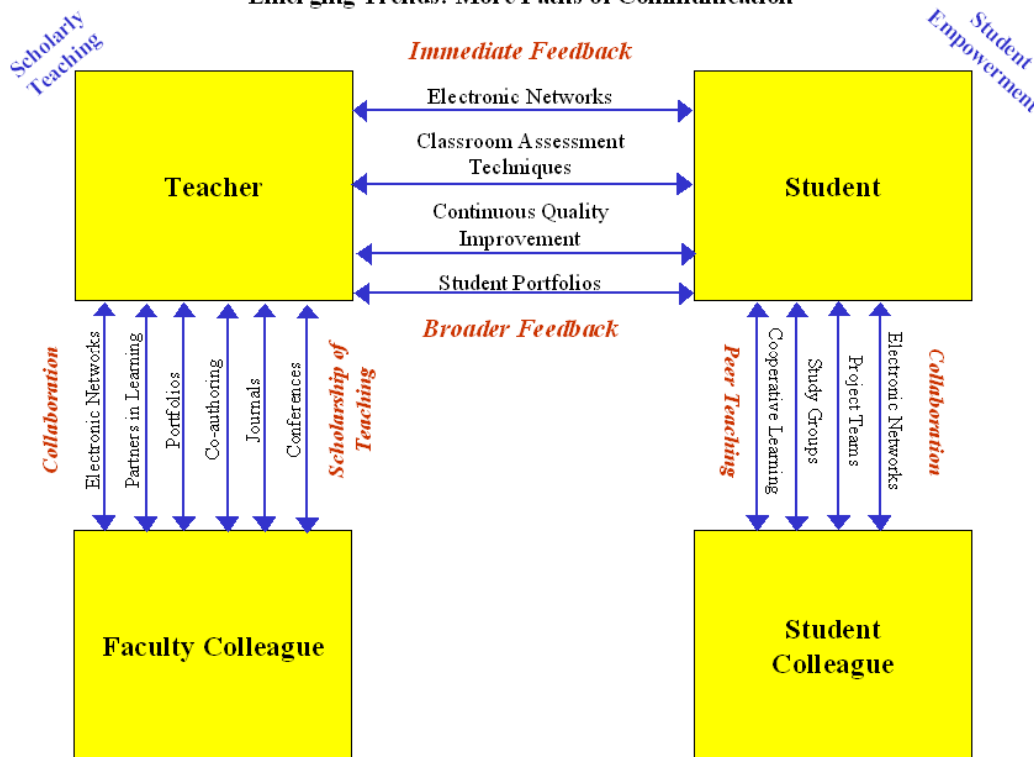


Emerging now, however, are many new two-way paths connecting not only teacher and student, but also teacher and teacher, and student and student (Figure 2, below). For example, classroom assessment techniques (Angelo & Cross, 1993) can inform teachers and students immediately of expectations and realities about learning before traditional assessment - exams or papers - takes place. Broader feedback also is an emerging trend; student portfolios can give the teacher a measure of improvement over time, and provide opportunities for students to analyze their own learning (Murnane, 1993). The faculty colleague is accepted increasingly as collaborator (Austin & Baldwin, 1991), in the role of mentor (Boice, 1992) and partner (Katz & Henry, 1988).

**Communication Levels.** In addition to the increasing number of paths of communication, there are new levels at which communication is taking place to meet emerging teaching and learning goals. In addition to teaching disciplinary content, more faculty are attempting to facilitate student intellectual development (Baxter Magolda, 1992) and ways of knowing (Thomas, 1992). There is more activity in the design of courses and curriculum to foster interdisciplinary and connected learning. Ways to teach critical thinking (Kurfiss, 1988; Nelson, 1993) continue to grow.

**Communication Methods.** Emerging methods of communication will enable teaching and learning to take place on more paths and at more levels. Technology can enhance the speed, detail, economy, and efficiency of communication, but is tempered by practical and humanistic realities. Electronic networks and journals can engage some teaching and learning styles, but not all. Case studies (Silverman & Welty, 1990), long used in teaching in business schools, are now emerging in other disciplines to connect in-class learning with the reality outside the classroom. In fact, teaching outside the classroom is an emerging trend (Kuh, 1991). Active learning methods (Bonwell & Eison, 1991) are emerging as ways to increase students' involvement in their own learning. The idea of traditional internships and co-ops (Linn & Jako) has been extended to include international (Beidler, 1990) and multicultural experiences. In the coming years, finding ways to merge these with theory in the classroom will be an important endeavor.

Figure 2  
Emerging Trends: More Paths of Communication



### Adopting Emerging Trends

Not all of these trends are for everyone. First, faculty need to learn

about the teaching approaches that are emerging. Second, they should analyze critically the value and appropriateness of these trends with respect to their disciplines, courses, students, teaching styles, and classroom experiences. What is emerging is not necessarily better for all faculty and students. Finally, each individual must place emerging trends in context and balance with successful approaches that have worked over the years. Blending these approaches bit by bit will result in a recipe whose gourmet creation will whet the appetites of students. Teaching and learning are complex and, as teachers, we must sample the many flavors - old and new - and determine the ingredients and mixture that best enhance learning.

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