

Teaching Improvement for University Agriculture Faculty

Poster Abstract

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Professional Development of Faculty

The College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources (CAFNR) at the University of Missouri has received recognition for undergraduate and graduate teaching excellence. This recognition has been achieved through the dedicated efforts of numerous faculty and administrators who have demonstrated a continuing commitment to effective teaching.

Learning to teach for many university faculty has been a trial and error process that requires tremendous energy to develop courses and teaching techniques. In most cases, new faculty have had little to no formal preparation for teaching or acquaintance with the principles of student learning that are important in planning educational programs. Experienced faculty continue to review and adopt new teaching techniques and integrate current technology as a continuous improvement process. In order to provide leadership on the University of Missouri campus in undergraduate and graduate teaching, the CAFNR Teaching Scholars Program was designed to support the professional development of faculty in the college.

Continuous Development

Recognizing that the process of teacher development requires time, education, and sustained effort, the CAFNR Teaching Scholars Program was initiated in February, 1997. The purpose of the program was to provide an internal support system to help faculty at different stages in their professional development as teachers. Faculty beginning their careers as well as those with an excellent teaching reputation benefited from participation in the CAFNR Teaching Scholars Program. By participating in the program, faculty were better prepared to successfully interact, motivate, and challenge students in their undergraduate and graduate classes.

Program Description

Twelve faculty members were selected to participate in the initial CAFNR Teaching Scholars Program. Retreats and conferences (both on-campus and outside the state) motivated faculty to excel in their teaching and also helped build a sense of esprit de corps among the participants.

Programs for Teaching Scholars were held on a monthly basis, and were structured to accommodate large group and small group activities and interaction. Meetings focused on development as an effective teacher and support for each fellow Teaching Scholars during the process. Discussion topics included learning styles, evaluating teaching, peer review of teaching, building a teaching portfolio, and course development. Speakers with a particular

expertise in learning, teaching, and technology conducted workshops and/or discussion sessions to assist the CAFNR Teaching Scholars.

Activity Plan

The Teaching Scholars Program was self-directed by the faculty participants. Following is a list of activities that each Teaching Scholar completed during the 15-month program:

Level 1 – Complete all activities:

- Develop a Teaching Portfolio
- Complete a Peer Review of Teaching
- Conduct Student Course Evaluations (mid-semester and end-of-semester)
- Maintain a Personal Journal of Teaching
- Be an Active Participant in Teaching Scholars Activities

Level 2 – Select at least one of the following activities to complete:

- Develop a Personal Teaching Library
- Present a Workshop on Teaching
- Write a Journal Article on Teaching

Level 3 – Select at least one of the activities to complete

- Develop a Course Web Site
- Conduct a Research Project on Teaching
- Submit a Teaching Grant

Program Benefits

Dr. Jaelyn Card, Associate Professor of Parks, Recreation and Tourism and a member of the initial CAFNR Teaching Scholars reported: “This is the most rewarding experience I have encountered in my years of higher education. My teaching has improved and the amount of energy I expend on teaching has increased tremendously. Through the CAFNR Teaching Scholars Program, I have learned that a fine line exists between the act of teaching and the act of learning. Teaching entails the process teachers and students go through to experience the joy of learning.”

Faculty Incentives and Rewards

Faculty completing the Teaching Scholars Program received a \$2,000 increase in their base salary above any other merit adjustment. Funds were also appropriated for each Teaching Scholar to spend on resources to support teaching and learning activities of particular interest. Up to \$1000 was made available for participants to purchase teacher references, classroom teaching materials, travel costs for attending teaching improvement workshops, or purchasing teaching aids for classroom use.