

To: Lynette Cook-Francis, Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs

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CC: Albrecht Classen, Professor, German Studies
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Date: June 24, 2010

Re: Centennial Hall Faculty Interviews

Throughout April and May of 2010, I conducted one-on-one interviews with each of the nine faculty members who had taught in Centennial Hall during either the Fall 2009 or Spring 2010 semesters. These interviews were conducted at the request of Lynette Cook-Francis to hear faculty reflections on teaching in this unique space, better understand how the University can support these classes, and prepare new faculty to teach in the Centennial Hall.

The following questions served as a guide for each conversation which lasted approximately forty-five minutes to an hour:

1. *Prior to teaching in Centennial Hall what was your experience teaching in large venues?*
2. *What interested you about teaching in Centennial Hall?*
3. *What sort of changes, if any, did you need to make to your curriculum in order to teach in Centennial Hall?*
4. *What sort of changes, if any, did you need to make to your typical teaching style in order to teach in Centennial Hall?*
5. *What prior experiences helped prepare you to teach in Centennial Hall?*
6. *How did you incorporate technology throughout the course?*
7. *What were the three greatest challenges you experienced teaching in Centennial Hall?*
8. *What were the three greatest benefits of teaching in Centennial Hall?*

9. *How has your view of students changed as a result of teaching in Centennial Hall, if at all?*
10. *How has your view of the University of Arizona changed as a result of teaching in Centennial Hall, if at all?*
11. *In what ways were Lynette's team (Student Affairs support) and Ron Landis's team (technical support) helpful to you throughout the semester?*

The nine faculty members' higher education teaching experience ranged from five to 37 years and all had at least two or more years of experience teaching 200+ seat courses.

For the majority of the faculty interviewed, they deemed their Centennial Hall teaching experience a success. Few changes, if any, needed to be made to their teaching style, but classroom management, assignments, testing procedures, and teaching assistance/staff all had to be reevaluated. These and additional themes raised in the faculty interviews are outlined below:

Benefits to teaching in Centennial Hall

- Only preparing/presenting one lecture a week rather than multiple presenting of multiple lectures
- Reaching a very large number of students at once
- Centennial Hall is a very unique venue to teach in. "Sell" the high capacity classroom as a traditional part of the UA experience
- Ability to podcast lectures

Challenges/disadvantages of teaching in Centennial Hall

- Do not have opportunity to get to know as many students on a one-on-one basis; difficult to learn names and "connect" during lecture; concerned about loss of "personal touch" where student becomes a number and "professor is a video rather than a human"
- Logistics of dealing with such a large class: increased incidents of cheating; disrespectful classroom behavior ("herd mentality" and engaging in behaviors they would never consider if in a smaller venue); high volume of graded assignments and email communications; and keeping attention of students (especially upperclassmen)
- Faculty tripled or quadrupled their course load by teaching in Centennial Hall but some did not have teaching staff/assistance adjusted accordingly. This increase in teaching load coupled with the economically imposed reduced personal compensation through furlough felt particularly unfair to some faculty.
- Some faculty have experienced negative feedback from faculty peers who criticize Centennial Hall courses of not being as rigorous; Some perceive that hard work is not acknowledged or appreciated by the UA administration and faculty

Classroom management/logistics

- Overall, the class sizes in Centennial Hall are not an issue as faculty feel any class over 100 makes it difficult to have direct faculty-student dialog
- The logistical considerations are significant though as a faculty member "can limp along with a lot of bad processes with 200 students but it all falls apart when you get larger numbers"

- Important to take time in first few classes to outline very specific classroom expectations and build classroom culture; create an attitude shift from the onset as do not want to be responding to behavior, but rather building reminders of classroom expectations into each class
- Emphasis on importance of providing numerous feedback mechanisms throughout each class and the course as a whole; need this for faculty to know if students are understanding the material and students need this to monitor their grades

Best practices for classroom management

Examples of attendance/participation techniques employed

- Take attendance via clickers at beginning and end of class – receive no attendance points if not present for both
- Posted 30 names per class at random. Posted students must come down and sign in. If student does not sign in, have 2 points taken off their final grade
- Multiple content questions asked via clicker throughout lecture – students must get one of the questions correct to receive their participation grade for the day; initial questions are harder and get progressively easier to encourage students to remain in classroom
- Students send text messages to faculty throughout class with questions they have regarding the lecture
- Varying philosophies on internet and cell phone usage during class from allowing no technology during class to indicating computer specific zones in the hall

Examples of management of seating/movement throughout classroom

- Laptop only section
- Students cannot sit in back rows or side sections which creates feeling of fullness; when emptier, students wonder why are they showing up to a class when many are not? Fullness affirms that student is making the right decision in attending class as they see their peers are there as well
- Use radial mouse to walk around hall while lecturing; allows for more eye contact with students
- Closed off every fifth row so faculty and teaching staff can walk between student groups while doing small group work/discussion

Examples of testing techniques

- Daily/weekly quizzing or more frequent testing (most often via clickers); advantage to this is it encourages students to learn material rather than “banking” information via cramming and allows to drop a determined number of low scores eliminating the need for make-up testing
- Four versions of paper tests, each in a different color
- Swipe ID to enter and exit on test day

Examples of lecture techniques

- PowerPoint slides only have very top level information so students are forced to take notes
- Publish class notes in a book which is sold at bookstore; notes will be in outline form so students must come to class or watch podcast to get important parts; notes book will eliminate need for laptops so will no longer allow laptops in classroom to reduce overall classroom distractions
- Do not lecture longer than 10 minutes at a time without a video, activity, clicker quiz, etc

Misc

- Optional flex labs offered 4 days a week
- Grade appeals via TA "help desk"; involves filling out an appeal form on D2L within one week of receiving grade. TA will process/comment first and turn in under grade mark so student gets feedback. If student wants to appeal further, goes to faculty member but the whole process thus far has been documented via D2L

Teaching assistance/staff

- Faculty used a wide variety of staffing combinations which were based on differing levels of Provost and departmental financial support. There was variation in satisfaction of the staffing arrangements ranging from very pleased with the assembled teaching team to feeling the team was woefully inadequate
- In some cases, communication between the administration and faculty regarding resources for teaching assistance was spotty and needs to be improved
- Those who co-taught with another faculty member felt they had a huge advantage in relation to dividing work and teaching responsibilities.
- Examples of teaching team models included:
 - 3-4 TAs: TAs were excellent for "technical and pedagogical" assistance, but the team was "drowning in grading - it was a disaster"
 - 8 GA graders and 8 student preceptors: GA graders only had to proctor exams and collect/grade papers, a model that maximized funding to assist with grading where the most help was needed
 - 8 TAs and 30 honors student preceptors: preceptor were enrolled in the course but taught an hour study session; honors students receive honors credit for serving as preceptors and in the future will earn an extra unit of credit
 - 5 TAs and 10 SIs (previously took class, earned an A, have 3.0 GPA; advantage of SI's is that they can lead a dialog that is more complex than preceptors, are being paid so are more accountable, and were able to hold office hours
- Suggestions for improvement:
 - Writing emphasis courses need more TAs or graders
 - Allow SIs to have grading privileges
 - Hire a full-time class coordinator specifically for Centennial Hall. This person could create continuity over time by assisting with coordination of exam technology, grading, working with TAs/SIs/graders/preceptors, etc.

Unique assignments and teaching techniques for high capacity courses

- Book report from a predetermined reading list; provide chapter by chapter summary and analysis based on course-related content
- Think Pair Share questions: Teach on a topic for 15 minutes and ask a concept question via clicker. If 80% or more answer correctly, continue teaching; if 30-80% correct, have students discuss with classmates – try to convince classmates why you think their answer is correct or if student is guessing at answer, they listen to arguments of others to try to determine their answer; poll full class again and reveal answer
- Had different student services set up tables outside of classroom every week including Residence Life, the Think Tank, Cats Academics, and the Multicultural Center. Allowed students to ask questions and receive immediate assistance on various issues.
- Create unique assignments so each student has individual answer (example of Star Reports)
- In-class presentations for extra credit on anything related to the course topic (example in oceanography course - had Polynesian students singing to the ocean and presentations by students working or doing internships for companies that work in ocean-related businesses
- Create longer homework assignments with multiple sections but teaching team only graded one section. Students had to look to posted solutions to know if the remainder of their answers were correct or not
- Create a computer-based testing center on campus where students take their tests during a designated period. Would allow for faculty to regain class periods that they sacrifice to testing, allow for randomization of question and response order as well easier reading of essays since will be typed.

Issues and suggestions for improvements to Centennial Hall facility

- There are “dead spots” in the hall where it is difficult to hear and in other areas it is extremely loud
- Clicker issues in the first semester – all devices used were not consistent and reliable although it appears the technology improved somewhat in the second semester
- Many faculty members requested the use of the large sound system on a regular basis even if it requires having a tech person present – feel the smaller sound system is insufficient
- Difficult to see the students when on stage due to the stage lighting
- Utilize the headset to move around the hall while lecturing
- Suggestion of having a camera on the speaker and use separate screen or split screen to project image of professor. Believes it would assist with engagement if can see the professor clearly

Comments on technology and student affairs staff

- Student affairs staff was extremely supportive and helped with funding special projects
- Technology staff was thought of as going above and beyond their duties to assist the faculty
- In particular, multiple faculty members raved about Paxton as he built on the expertise gained from working with multiple classes

- Some faculty suggested creating a permanent technology position be created for Centennial Hall. One faculty member stated, it's not a position like Paxton's that needs to be created, but it's Paxton who needs to be given the position." He "gets it" technology wise and pedagogically. The class cheered Paxton at the end of the term and considered him a critical in executing the course. "He fulfills beyond your wildest imagination what that position would have been filled by. You've already got it. Don't go looking for someone else."