

2009-2010 Seminar Participants

"Exploring the Role of Student Expectations in the Learning Process"

Erica Tucker

I am applying to participate in the Teaching and Learning Strategies Seminar in order to carry out a project that I have designed on student expectations and their role in creating a community of learners. Participating in the TLSS will give me the opportunity to engage pedagogical literature on the topic during seminar meetings as well as the chance to examine students' expectations in other fields of studies and how they are addressed by my colleagues who are coming from different disciplinary perspectives. This would contribute positively to my learning and any changes that I can make to improve the quality of the learning community in my classrooms. Ultimately, this research will result in an article, which I plan to submit to *Teaching Sociology*, or some similar pedagogically oriented publication. Moreover, my hope is that it will enhance the overall classroom experience for my students and me.

Project description:

This study is designed to investigate the role of student expectations in creating a community of learners. It is inspired by the observation, garnered from reading student course evaluations and noticing that students' often fail to articulate their difficulties with course materials, lectures, etcetera during the course of the semester and often times only do so at the end of the semester. In an effort to address this problem, I started using a very simple questionnaire about students' expectations for the class at the beginning of the semester. Through this study, my aim is to study in a systematic way the role that consciously reflecting on students' expectations for the course, instructor, their peers and themselves on the learning environment.

On the first day of class students will be asked to fill out a short questionnaire about their expectations for the course, for the instructor, for themselves as students in the course and for their peers in the course. Questionnaires will be collected by the instructor and used as data. This will be followed by a discussion about these expectations, which will be tape-recorded and later transcribed for analysis. At midterm, students will be asked to reflect on their expectations again in writing. The written questionnaire will be followed by a discussion, which will again be tape recorded and later transcribed. At the conclusion of the semester, students will be given a final questionnaire about course expectations. This will be followed by a discussion of the impact of discussing expectations has had on the learning process, which will be transcribed.

Benefits:

The benefits of my participation in this project are three-fold. For students taking my courses open discussions about students' expectations potentially function to create an environment where students feel more comfortable exchanging ideas about other subjects as well. Additionally, this study will give

students the opportunity to participate in a study comprised of some of the same methods they will be learning about in their classes with me. For myself, the benefits are in maintaining my overall excellence in teaching by trying a new approach while at the same time engaging in research that will lead to publication.

Community Outreach Plans:

I have already led a Brown Bag discussion on this topic, which was attend by faculty from a number of disciplines and received favorable reviews. I would be happy to do so again or to participate in a breakout session at Academic Development Day. I also have plans to submit this to a conference, possibly North East Sociological Association or the meetings of the America Sociological Association.