Designing Activities that Enhance Student Learning

Please use this form to describe a teaching activity that you have modified or developed (or will modify or develop) in response to the working group sessions.

Name: Jennifer Breckler
Role (*circle one*):   Faculty Member

Home Department(s): Health & Medical Sciences Program, School of Public Health

Course(s) in which you would use this teaching activity: HMS 200

Activity Title: Grade predictions and student motivation in a problem-based-learning course

Description:
        Please give a short synopsis of the activity and its learning goals, maximum 100 words.

In our course, we ask students at the beginning of the course to state the grade they would like to get in this course in a document known as the 'Learning Contract'. I question whether this practice is reinforcing students who are motivated primarily by grades. In fact, this practice may be having a negative impact on many students' innate curiosity or desire to learn, even though most of the students in the class are generally highly motivated because they are enrolled in a highly competitive graduate program. I would like to open a discussion with the faculty and students about this practice and consider eliminating it in the future.

If this is an activity you have used in the past but now will modify in response to the Working Group sessions, please describe the activity as you previously conducted it:

Students are asked at the beginning of the course to state their desired grade in a document known as the 'Learning Contract'. We will open a discussion to eliminate this practice.

Describe the changes you made or will make to the activity and the reasoning behind these changes.

As mentioned above, I hope to eliminate the grade motivator from the student learning contract by no longer asking students to state their desired grade. I intend to give a short survey question to the current students at the end of the course to see what students think about this potential change in future classes. I will then discuss my results with the faculty at a regular faculty meeting and with the students as well.

Which session(s) of the Working Group influenced the changes you made or will make to this activity? How so?

Dr. Martin Covington's speech on student motivation was very powerful for me personally. He was also the most articulate and intelligent person on the panel, in my opinion. I only missed one day of the workshops so far, and I was most impacted by him. His study on Psychology student motivation by grades achieved was sobering. His interpretations of the two case studies on motivation were also very interesting.

How will you assess the effectiveness of this activity in enhancing student learning?

If successful, we will eliminate the grade prediction practice on the learning contract. I will then monitor student performance on exams to see whether eliminating the practice had any impact.

If this is a new activity developed in response to the Working Group sessions, please describe the activity:

Which session(s) of the Working Group influenced your development of this activity? How so?

Have you used the activity in the classroom yet? If so, please describe its effectiveness. If not, how you will assess its enhancement of student learning.