Math: The Bridge to Success

Polk State College's

# Quality Enhancement Plan

December 2012 Newsletter

Thank you for your continued support of Polk State College's Quality Enhancement Plan. We continue to focus on professional development to incorporate learner-centered teaching into our classes and enhance the learning environment. With the next QEP phase, we begin extending our efforts to Developmental Math classes as well as Intermediate Algebra. QEP principles are also being applied in other areas of the College as part of our college-wide strategic plan.

Kaye Betz
QEP Director

Classroom Enhancement Grant

Congratulations to Paul Carbonell and Cherry Olds on being awarded the Classroom Enhancement grant for 2012-2013. Sponsored by The Polk State College Foundation and administered by the QEP Implementation Team, a $1,000 grant is awarded to the faculty member to purchase materials for learner-centered activities in the classroom.
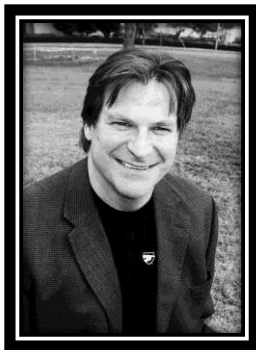
Paul Carbonell has been implementing learner-centered strategies into his theater and communication classes for several years. Paul uses strategies such as deep-breathing, mirroring activities, theater games, and students' imaginations to engage students and focus on learning. Paul plans to use the Classroom Enhancement Grant to purchase an iPad to streamline technology demonstrations as well as purchase theater props and award-winning plays to bring the world of theater alive to students.

Cherry Olds employs many learner-centered strategies in her programming and technology classes both with the College and the Collegiate High School. Cherry is able to extensively use learner-centered practices with a Collegiate High School class that meets for two semesters. The students are engaged in active learning strategies through the use of robots, service learning, and projects. Cherry plans to use her award for the purchase of additional computer and robot supplies for her students.

Cherry Olds' students actively learn about robotics.
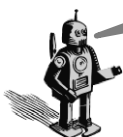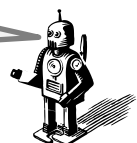
Gyomar Robles

Brent Collins

Le'jarius Dunlap

Gregory Rouleau

Sam Donahue

With math, the possibilities are infinite.

You are right!

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Lunch and Learn ~ Breakfast and Learn

Sharing among colleagues is one way of learning and keeping current about new instructional strategies and technologies to support instruction. Here are a few topics planned for the spring sessions. A flyer with dates, times, and locations will be distributed in January.

- Developing Responsible Learners
- PAL With Pizzazz!
- Global Ambassador Leadership: Polk State College's First Study Abroad Program
- Internationalizing Our Curriculum: Helping Our Students become Global Citizens
- Incorporating Writing
- The Big Bang Theory of Learning Styles
- PAL Roundtable
- PTSD and ADA

If you would like to present a Lunch and Learn or a Breakfast and Learn for spring term, please contact Courtlann Thomas, cthomas@polk.edu.

Meet the Professors

Three additional mathematics faculty members, Ken Rosever, Megan Cavanah, and Joy D'Andrea, will begin participating in the QEP in the spring term.
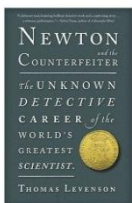

Ken Rosever
Winter Haven/JDA

Megan Cavanah
Lakeland

Joy D'Andrea
Lakeland

	4-1-1	The math-related book selected for the 4-1-1 reading program this year is *Newton and the Counterfeiter: The Unknown Detective Career of the World's Greatest Scientist* by Thomas Levenson.
	QEP Book	
	• **4 books**	
	• **1 college**	
	• **1 reading world**	

Creating a Supportive Learning Environment

(Bridge Building Thoughts by Kaye Betz)

One of the main components of the Quality Enhancement Plan is ensuring a supportive learning environment both in the classroom and throughout the College.

What is a supportive learning environment?

A supportive learning environment is a positive and encouraging classroom atmosphere where students feel comfortable, valued, and secure enough to ask questions, seek help, and respond to questions even if they are unsure of their responses (Brophy, 2004). Faculty are accessible and responsive to students both inside and outside the classroom and are engaged with other areas of the College such as the library, Teaching/Learning Computing Center, academic advising, and counseling as partners in student learning.

How can we create an environment so that students feel comfortable about learning?

An environment for learning is created the first day of class. Hopefully, it will be one that supports student learning. Some of the characteristics students value in an instructor are respect, responsiveness, knowledge, approachability, communication, organization, engagement, professionalism, and humor (Delaney, 2010). In addition to demonstrating all these characteristics, here are a few specific strategies to use:

- **Begin to learn students' names the first day of class.** Know at least five names by the end of the period. Start calling students by their names as soon as you know who they are or even if you just think you know who they are. Do not hide behind a statement such as "I am not good with names" because, as an instructor, that is not an acceptable excuse. Students need to be thought of individually, not just as a sea of faces that you know as "the class."

- **Arrive early to class every day.** It shows that you care about doing a good job and you care about the students. It allows you to get to know students and answer students' questions. It also allows you to lay out your materials so you can start on time and be organized during the class.

- **Be encouraging.** Speak in a positive manner all the time rather than a negative, accusatory, or punitive way. Be careful of word choice when speaking with students. Avoid blatant references to their lack of knowledge.

- **Avoid setting up a fake supportive learning environment.** Have you ever said something similar to: "Because I am in a good mood, I am going to let the class out an hour early tonight" or "Because you all have been nice, I am going to add ten points to everyone's grade"? Those statements might make quite a few students happy, but they do not help to develop a supportive learning environment nor do they help students to develop responsibility.

- **Give students opportunities to take ownership in the class.** Some of the best techniques seem small and insignificant, but they are actually some of the most effective. When you start to use the projector, call a student by name and ask him or her if he or she would mind turning off the lights, please. Make sure you genuinely thank that person. Ask someone to hand out papers for you. Again, call them by name and thank them. Ask a student if they would mind erasing the white board or writing something on the white board. Starting the first day of class, let students be a part of helping the class to function. This can be extended to more challenging tasks, but always use a friendly, nonchalant way of asking and then genuinely thank the student.

Think about additional ways you can help to create a supportive learning environment.

References

Brophy, J. (2004). *Motivating students to learn*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Delaney, J.G., Johnson, A.N., Johnson, T.D., & Treslan, D. L. (2010). Students' perceptions of effective teaching in higher education. St. John's, NL: *Distance Education and Learning Technologies*.

For updates on the QEP, visit the QEP web page: www.polk.edu/qep.