

UPDATE WORKSHOP

FROM THE 1992 HAPS CONFERENCE IN SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA

OLD TIMER'S TEACHING TIPS

presented by
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Gil Desha has been in the teaching business for 36 years and has had many interesting experiences. Still there are times when he feels like it's his first year, just repeated 35 or so times. Gil's teaching load consists of nine lecture hours and four lab sections per week.

His students are usually older students in a nursing program. Their background knowledge in such areas as chemistry is minimal, so they are scared at first. Since registration at Gil's institution is on a first come, first served basis, and since Gil has become so popular over the years, students sleep out overnight to be the first in line for his classes. Gil is very proud of this, and he believes that you only get one chance to make a good impression.

Gil believes in motivating, not intimidating. He recommends not passing out the whole year's syllabus as this makes the class look too daunting. One semester at a time is much easier for the students to handle. His philosophy which he conveys to students is, "If they try and fail, he'll take part of the blame, but if they fail to try, then they take all of the blame."

Gil provided the following tips for successful teaching. 1) He puts his class notes in the library where students can copy them if they wish. Videotapes of lectures are placed there as well. Copies of his notes can be purchased in the bookstore. Sometimes less detailed notes are given out in class so students

can fill in details as the lecture progresses. 2) He suggests rewriting lecture notes, either by hand or on a computer, because you learn as you rewrite. 3) To keep students aware of the objective at hand helps them know where the discussion is going. Material should be designed specifically for the class. Canned material that doesn't agree with what the instructor is saying won't work well in class, and it will turn students off to the topic. 4) In using the overhead projector, he shows only one line at a time to prevent students from focusing on the rest of the material until he is ready to discuss it.

Gil followed his conference presentation with a question and answer session where the audience responded to his suggestions and offered suggestions of their own. A few of those ideas and comments are contained in the following list.

-The audience had concerns about competency exams and the tendency for teachers to teach to the exam.

-Gil was asked if he felt it was worthwhile giving handout sheets when there was so much information already in the textbooks? His comment was that notes may not be as fancy, but they are still useful to students.

-It was suggested that at the end of the discussion of a particular system, instructors have students summarize what they felt they needed to know about that system. Students are amazed at what they really do know.

-For difficult topics such as mitosis and meiosis, members of the audience recommended having students work together to set up mini-practicals for quizzing each other. Make each lab table a group of experts on a given topic and have them teach others.

-Include a few sample practical-type questions on the weekly quizzes to get students used to this type of test.

-Don't give timed lab tests, and include more stations than the number of students in the class. One member of the group commented that grades improved once timed tests were eliminated from her/his class.

-Hand out lists of analogies. Discussion of those analogies and the places where they aren't true help students understand the material. Some analogies recommended were: an old rolled up toothpaste tube or an empty balloon wrapped around a pencil to represent the myelin sheath. Lego blocks used to represent the lock and key model for enzymes. Hills and valleys used to represent gyri and sulci.

-Mnemonic devices were also suggested as aids to help students memorize material. For example, All Dogs Eat Kalcan can be used to remember the fat soluble vitamins-A, D, E, and K.

Gil gave us some information about his background and how he ended up in anatomy and physiology. When he came out of the service, Gil wanted to go to school, get married, have children, and get his golf handicap down to 10. Although Gil attended several colleges and universities, he never completed his Ph.D. He just never had the time to take off for a year or more to pursue it. Still, he was nominated for the Piper Award for Teaching Excellence in 1990. Gil is justifiably proud of his teaching accomplishments.

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