



Teaching at UGA

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The School of Environmental Design Develops a Collaborative Model for Teaching and Learning

Conversion to Semesters: An Opportunity to Increase Collaboration

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When conversion to the semester system was approved by the Board of Regents in 1994, faculty in the School of Environmental Design (SED) saw the conversion process as an opportunity to reevaluate and redesign the entire SED curriculum. Rather than simply retain the current curriculum and convert quarter hours to semester hours (1 quarter class = 1 semester class), the SED decided to enhance their program and to craft a curriculum that promotes collaboration among students as well as among faculty. The curriculum redesign process began in the 1994-95 academic year and continues in preparation for the 1998 fall semester.

The SED faculty members who composed the Semester Conversion Committee include: *Leonardo Alvarez*, Chair, *Pratt Cassity*, *Ian Firth*, *Bill Mann*, and *Forster Ndubisi*. *Beth Franz*, a Graduate Assistant in the SED, assisted with research and organization for the committee.

Why Collaboration in Environmental Design?

The committee's plan for a collaborative curriculum originates from an amalgam of organizational plans of similar professional programs across the country as well as from the professional realm of environmental design itself. School of Environmental Design faculty, students, alumni, and practitioners acknowledge the importance of collaboration and teamwork in effective environmental design.

The nature of the profession requires that subject experts work as teams to solve common problems. The UGA Campus Master Plan is an example of a collaborative process in which UGA graduates will be expected to work: Architects, Landscape Architects, Engineers, and Planners are all working together with UGA faculty, students, and administrators to provide an integrated solution for the projected physical growth of the campus. This process involves numerous activities such as programming, physical facilities inventory, infrastructure analysis, designing the campus open space system, and evaluating proposed solutions.

Early in the redesign process, the committee realized that to educate students to be experts in particular areas and to be able to work collaboratively in teams to solve problems would require the adoption of a new structure of the curriculum. The

committee saw their goal clearly in the analogy that environmental design programs should be educating conductors and soloists, as well as all members of the band — including second trombonists — rather than educating only soloists (Steinitz, 1983). The SED quarter-system curriculum, like most design programs, focused too heavily on educating soloists. To better educate *all* the band members to excel not only as soloists, but also as a quality orchestra, the committee’s primary goal became that of crafting a curriculum that emphasizes a healthy mix of collaborative problem solving and thoughtful individual inquiry.

The committee realized that increased collaboration among faculty would be necessary to encourage collaboration among students. As a result, the SED’s redesigned curriculum for teaching and learning includes three key features:

1. Collaborative learning opportunities in the classroom;
2. Team teaching by SED faculty members; and
3. Measuring faculty effort with modules, rather than quantifying by whole courses.

Figure 1

Team Teaching Models

Star team: One primary professor who invites guests to lecture on particular subjects.

Hierarchical team: More senior faculty members lead regular lectures and plan courses, more junior faculty members (or graduate students with related area of expertise) meet with discussion groups or sections of class.

Generalist team: Faculty members share planning of course but teach sections according to subjective division of course content or schedule.

Specialist team: All faculty members plan course, “divide teaching duties according to

individual expertise.” Each teacher presents his/her areas. Sometimes all teachers present during another’s lecture and add their own perspectives to each others’ topics. All teachers plan and evaluate students.

Interactive model: Non-hierarchical, all faculty members involved with course are responsible for planning, testing, and grading. All faculty members present at all times. Meet outside class time to discuss the course, students, etc. Some use “observer-participant format” where one teaches and the others facilitate class discussion. Co-teaching fits in here.

Collaborative Learning Opportunities in the Classroom

The first step of the curriculum redesign process involved determining ways to increase cooperative learning in the classroom to educate students to work effectively in teams to solve problems. Cooperative learning as a specific teaching technique is “the instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each other’s learning” (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1990). One rationale for increasing opportunities for students to work together is that “good students benefit from serving as tutors to the other members of the group; less proficient students receive diagnostic and remedial help from their teammates. Students who are reluctant to participate in large class discussions are often quite comfortable contributing to small group interactions” (Goodsell et al., 1992).

Some examples of collaborative learning activities that SED plans to implement include:

- Small groups working jointly on case studies of currently designed environments;
- Team projects focused on more complex design and planning efforts (UGA Master Plan, Downtown Revitalization, etc);
- Team projects focused on inventorying existing conditions of a site/community and analyzing the findings relative to a proposed change.

Collaboration Among Faculty: Team Teaching

The second step for the committee involved determining which teaching approaches would best demonstrate to students collaborative problem solving. The committee decided that team teaching would best model the collaborative processes that students would need to adopt to be successful in the profession.

After researching existing team teaching models, a list of five models which were most applicable to the types of courses taught in the SED was compiled (see Figure 1). These models were

presented to the faculty, and the committee prepared a list of recommended team teaching models for each course.

Although it made sense to keep some courses taught by an individual faculty member, many courses easily lent themselves to one of the team teaching models.

The Module Approach to Documenting Faculty Teaching Assignments

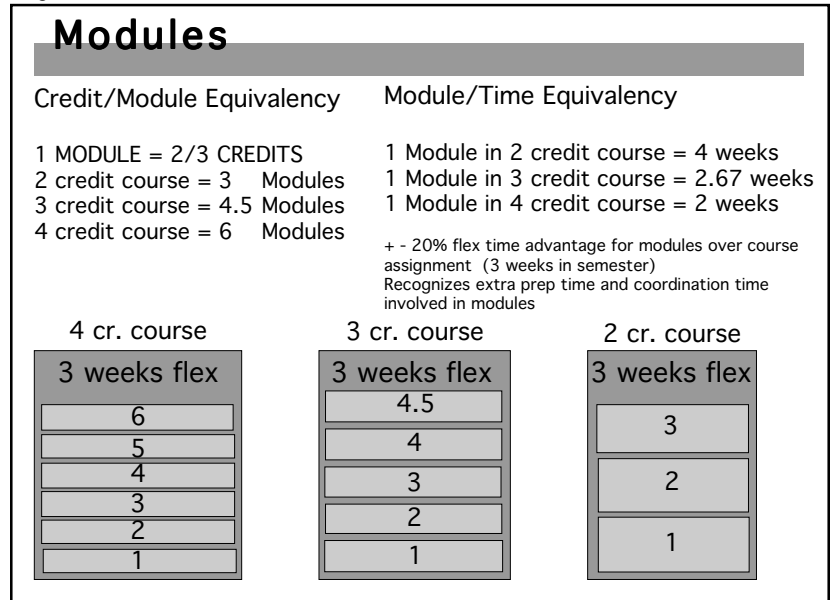
The adoption of team teaching in the SED requires dropping the traditional means of making faculty assignments based on classes; the committee needed to develop a new way of structuring and documenting a faculty member's teaching assignments. The Semester Conversion Committee recommended a Module Approach.

The committee agreed that one module would be equivalent to two-thirds of a credit. Given this equation, a course carrying two credits would incorporate three modules into the semester. Likewise, a three-credit course would have four and a half modules, and a four-credit course would feature six different modules (see Figure 2).

The amount of time spent on each module during the semester varies depending on the amount of credit each course carries. For example, a module given in a two credit course would last four weeks and thereby provide two-thirds credit for that course. A module presented in a course carrying three credits would last two and two-thirds weeks, and each module in a four-credit course would last two weeks (see Figure 2).

The committee anticipates that the use of a module approach will provide the SED with a finer-grained framework for accommodating faculty choices and expertise; a more flexible system for integrating visiting lectures, technology lectures, and nontraditional instructional techniques; a more flexible system for quantifying teaching efforts; and a means of creating an administrative vehicle where faculty collaboration is more likely to occur.

Figure 2



Semester Course Development Process

The SED has approximately 30 faculty members and about 106 courses. To design the semester courses, the SED Semester Conversion Committee identified a lead faculty member for each course. This faculty member drafted a syllabus for the designated course based on a framework of recommendations prepared by the Semester Conversion Committee. The format included:

1. Course Title and Description
2. Prerequisites
3. Theme: To help integrate the entire curriculum and model for students the interrelatedness of course material, all courses in the program are to explore a common theme each semester.
4. Course Format: Lecture/Lab, Seminar, Studio
5. Team Teaching Model: Star, Hierarchical, Generalist, Specialist, Interactive
6. Modules
7. Amount of Individual or Group Assignments
8. Opportunities for integrating technology: In the past, computer training was a separate course in the fourth or fifth year of a student's SED program. Under the semester system, computer training will be infused

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as a module into a number of courses. Computer techniques will be presented simultaneously with traditional techniques (rather than as a separate add-on as in the past).

9. A set of written objectives outlining the knowledge, skills, and values that students should acquire in the course.

Results of the Semester Conversion Process for the SED

The result of the 5-year semester conversion process for the SED is a curriculum that balances group and individual efforts of students, explores a common theme each semester, encourages and rewards collaboration among faculty members, encourages use of a variety of teaching methods, and provides simultaneous computer and traditional training.

Summary

The SED Semester Conversion Committee started with the goal of crafting a curriculum that would increase opportunities for students to experience collaborative learning and collaborative problem solving. To meet this goal, the SED believes faculty should model collaborative problem solving by team teaching courses. To successfully encourage team teaching by SED faculty, a new medium for documenting faculty teaching assignments has been proposed. By basing teaching assignments on modules rather than on complete courses, faculty members will have additional incentive to collaborate with other faculty members on course development and delivery.

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