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**New Technologies
and
Innovations
in
Agricultural Economics
Instruction**

edited by

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Innovative Teaching Methods: Discoveries By An Assistant Professor

Mary A. Marchant*

Ph.D. graduates from agricultural economics departments throughout the land grant university system usually do not obtain teaching experience as part of their graduate school training. Yet, upon graduation, typical academic appointments include a substantial teaching component. As university budgets become increasingly tight, teaching assistantships are more likely to be cut, providing even less opportunity for graduate students to gain teaching experience. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the teaching experiences of an assistant professor, transcended from being a graduate student to teaching university courses at the undergraduate level, in an effort to lessen teaching anxiety of others. This paper is not a treatise about teaching; instead, its intent is to share experiences with future graduates faced with a similar situation, recognizing that there is much left to be learned. What I have learned, and present in this paper, is based on my experimenting and listening to colleagues' successes in teaching.

Background of Course and Philosophy of Teaching

This paper presents teaching tips at the undergraduate level. (See also McKeachie, Wick, and March 1992 *NACTA Journal*.) The undergraduate course referred to throughout this paper is entitled "Principles of Agricultural Marketing" (AEC 301) and is a service course to the College of Agriculture. It enrolls about 50 undergraduate students, mostly non-agricultural economics majors, i.e., it is a *required course* and students do not necessarily want to be in class. Also, since students come from different disciplines throughout the College, they do not necessarily know each other. Given this setting, my philosophy of teaching is to create a learning environment which is receptive to student needs, and is fun, as well as educational.

First Day of Class

The first day of class is a very important day, since it sets the tone for the semester. It is a very busy day, packed with activity. I begin by introducing myself, discussing my farm background, educational credentials, and work experience in agriculture. This establishes credibility, i.e., not only do I have the educational background to teach this class, but I also have "hands on" agricultural experience.

The syllabus (Figure 1) is reviewed on the first day of class. I believe it is important that the syllabus be specific, by not only including the typical items such as course text, class meeting times, and grading policies, but the syllabus should also include policies on absences (including the definition of an "excused" absence), disagreements with grades, and rules on plagiarism. In addition, a calendar specifying due dates for homeworks and test dates is included. Thus, students know on the first day of class when they will be tested and when assignments will be due.

Concurrent with the syllabus discussion, student photos are taken. The photos are later mounted on poster board and students sign their picture. Student photos aid in learning student names and are a useful reference.

Also, "expectations" are identified during the first class meeting--students' expectations of me, as their professor, and my expectations of them, as my students.¹ Specifically, students are asked to write down their expectations of professors. These "Expectations of Professors" are then collected, tabulated, and a summary sheet is developed, listing

*Assistant Professor in the Department of Agricultural Economics at the University of Kentucky.

University of Kentucky Agricultural Economics 301	Department of Agricultural Economics Fall 1991
"Principles of Agricultural Marketing"	
General Information:	
Professor:	Dr. Mary A. Marchant
Office:	Room 314 Agricultural Engineering Building
Phone:	257-7260
Office Hours:	No prior appointment is necessary if you wish to drop by to discuss course work or other problems. However, to save yourself a trip, it is wise to telephone in advance to be sure that I am in my office.
Teaching Assistant:	Eric Jessup
Office:	Room 338 Agricultural Engineering Building
Phone:	257-1172
Office Hours:	Eric will offer office hours prior to due dates for homework assignments and exams (these hours will be announced in class). You may also see Eric by appointment.
Course Time:	M-W-F: 9:00 a.m.-9:50 a.m.
Course Location:	Room A7 Agricultural Science Building-North
Texts:	Required--No texts are required. A series of handouts from a variety of sources will be used throughout this course. Most handouts are included in this binder, although you will get additional handouts in class. References on reserve in agricultural library include Dahl and Hammond, <u>Market and Price Analysis-The Agricultural Industries</u> , McGraw-Hill (Rose Press), 1982. Nicholson, <u>Microeconomic Theory</u> , Fourth Edition, The Dryden Press, 1989. Cramer and Jensen, <u>Agricultural Economics & Agribusiness</u> , John Wiley & Sons, 1991. Blank and Carter, <u>Futures Options Markets: Traded Commodities</u> , Prentice-Hall, 1991. Kohls and Uhl, <u>Marketing of Agricultural Products</u> , Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1990. Rhodes, <u>The Agricultural Marketing System</u> , John Wiley & Sons, 1988. Branson and Norvell, <u>Introduction to Agricultural Marketing</u> , McGraw-Hill, 1983.
Prerequisites:	GEN 101, ECO 201 (I assume that you have these prerequisites and will <u>not</u> lower the standards or the pace of this class for students who are unfamiliar with basic economic theory concepts.)
Course Overview:	This upper division course emphasizes the application of <u>economic theory and statistics</u> in the marketing of agricultural products. Major topics to be covered include the principles and methods of marketing farm products and inputs with attention to marketing systems and functions extending from agricultural producers, processors, and consumers.
General Learning Objectives:	After instruction, students should be able to:
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Demonstrate the ability to apply basic economic principles learned in previous courses to marketing problems. These principles include: (a) the consumer's problem with respect to the optimal choice of goods consumed, (b) the producer's problem with respect to the optimal choice of inputs used and goods produced in the production process, (c) the interaction of producers and consumers through market supply and demand; (d) elasticity; (e) production costs; (f) firm behavior in competitive or noncompetitive situations, (g) marketing margins; (h) markets over space; (i) futures markets; (j) product quality; (k) the impact of agricultural policy on markets; and (l) international trade. (2) Explain how the food system is affected by deviations from open market conditions because of government policies, monopolistic business practices, collective bargaining, etc. (3) Describe accurately the role of price in coordinating production and consumption activities in U.S. agriculture. (4) Apply marketing principles to specific problems in order to isolate causes and suggest possible remedies. Problem areas include: (a) marketing decisions of producers; (b) operational problems of marketing firms; (c) consumer decisions and attitudes towards agriculture and its marketing system, and (d) marketing and food policy problems and the roles of participants, government, and citizens in their solution. (5) Explain differences in marketing strategies for international markets relative to domestic markets.

Figure 1. Course Syllabus

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<u>Work Required:</u>			
(1)	<u>Readings:</u>	Assigned readings in handouts.	
(2)	<u>Examinations:</u>	There will be three tests during the course—two midterms and one <u>comprehensive final</u> .	
(3)	<u>Homework:</u>	Homework assignments will be made to reinforce learning in areas which experience has shown to be most difficult. They will be graded. <u>No late homework assignments will be accepted.</u>	
(4)	<u>Quizzes:</u>	Five fifteen-minute quizzes, announced and unannounced, will be given in class throughout the semester.	
<u>Grading:</u> Your grade in this course will be determined by performance on three one-hour examinations, homework assignments, and quizzes with the following distribution:			
		Midterm #1 =	20%
		Midterm #2 =	20%
		Final =	30%
		Quizzes =	15%
		Homework =	15%
Final grades for each student will be calculated based on the following scale:			
	<u>Grade</u>	<u>% of Total Points</u>	
	A =	90-100 percent	
	B =	80-89 percent	
	C =	70-79 percent	
	D =	60-69 percent	
	E =	0-59 percent	
<u>Course Policies and Procedures:</u>			
(1) The class will meet three times a week on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. Regular class attendance is expected. However, if you are unable to attend class, make sure you obtain lecture notes and handouts from someone, since materials will be covered that are not in the readings.			
(2) No one will be allowed to take an examination (midterm, final or quiz) at any time other than at the scheduled time. <u>One make-up examination (for either a missed midterm and/or quiz) will be given at the end of the semester for anyone who has a legitimate reason for being absent from one of the scheduled exams.</u> Valid excuses for missing an exam are: (a) illness, (b) serious illness or death in your immediate family, (c) a University-sanctioned field trip, or (d) major religious holiday. In accordance with UK's academic offenses and penalties policy, notification of absence for reasons (a) and (b) may require verification. For anticipated absences related to (c) and (d), it is your responsibility to notify me prior to such events.			
(3) Most exam and quiz questions will come from lecture notes and homeworks.			
(4) If you disagree with your grade on exams, homework or quizzes, <u>written justification</u> shall be submitted to me.			
(5) University rules on plagiarism and cheating will be enforced.			
<u>University of Kentucky Rules--Academic Offenses and Penalties:</u>			
<u>Plagiarism</u> - All academic work, written or otherwise, submitted by students to their instructors or other academic supervisors, is expected to be the result of their own thought, research, or self-expression. In cases where students feel unsure about a question of plagiarism involving their work, they are obliged to consult their instructors on the matter before submission. When students submit work purporting to be their own, but which in any way borrows ideas, organization, wording or anything else from another source without appropriate acknowledgment of the fact, the students are guilty of plagiarism.			
Plagiarism includes reproducing someone else's work, whether it be published article, chapter of a book, a paper from a friend or some file, or whatever. Plagiarism also includes the practice of employing or allowing another person to alter or revise the work which a student submits as his/her own, whoever that other person may be. Students may discuss assignments among themselves or with an instructor or tutor, but when the actual work is done, it must be done by the student, and the student alone.			
When a student's assignment involves research in outside sources or information, the student must carefully acknowledge exactly what, where and how he/she has employed them. If the words of someone else are used, the student must put quotation marks around the passage in question and add an appropriate indication of its origin. Making simple changes while leaving the organization, content and phraseology intact is plagiaristic. However, nothing in these <u>Rules</u> shall apply to those ideas which are so generally and freely circulated as to be a part of the public domain.			

Figure 1. Course Syllabus (cont.)

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University of Kentucky Rules--Academic Offenses and Penalties cont.:

Cheating - Cheating is defined by its general usage. It includes, but is not limited to, the wrongfully giving, taking, or presenting any information or material by a student with the intent of aiding himself/herself or another on any academic work which is considered in any way in the determination of the final grade. Any question of definition shall be referred to the University Appeals Board.

Penalties - The instructor and department chairman may impose one or more of the following penalties in the event they determine an academic offense has occurred. a. Assign a grade of E for the course in which the offense occurred (the minimum penalty). b. Recommend to the Dean of their college or to the Dean of the Graduate School, if appropriate, that the student be suspended, dismissed or expelled.

University of Kentucky Rules--Excused Absences:

The following are defined as excused absences:

- (1) Illness of the student or serious illness of a member of the student's immediate family. The instructor shall have the right to request appropriate verification.
- (2) The death of a member of the student's immediate family. The instructor shall have the right to request appropriate verification.
- (3) Trips for members of student organizations sponsored by an academic unit, trips for University classes, and trips for participation in intercollegiate athletic events. When feasible, the student must notify the instructor prior to the occurrence of such absences, but in no case shall such notification occur more than one week after the absence. Instructors may request formal notification from appropriate university personnel to document the student's participation in such trips.
- (4) Major Religious Holidays. Students are responsible for notifying the instructor in writing of anticipated absences due to their observance of such holidays no later than the last day for adding a class.

Students missing work due to an excused absence bear the responsibility of informing the instructor about their excused absence within one week following the period of the excused absence (except where prior notification is required), and of making up the missed work. The instructor shall, if feasible, give the student an opportunity to make up the work missed during the semester in which the absence occurred, if feasible. The student shall be given the opportunity to make up exams missed due to an excused absence during the semester in which the absence occurred, if feasible. In those instances where the nature of the course is such that classroom participation by the student is essential for evaluation, the instructor shall, if feasible, give the student an opportunity to make up the work missed during the semester in which the absence occurred. If, in the opinion of the instructor, excused absences in excess of one-tenth of the class contact hours or the timing of excused absences prevents the student from satisfactorily completing work for the course, the instructor shall counsel the student about the options of an I grade or withdrawal from the course for that semester.

COURSE OUTLINE:

<u>DATE</u>	<u>TOPICS</u>	<u>ASSIGNMENTS DUE</u>
8/28	Introduction	
8/30	Overview of Agricultural Marketing	
9/2	LABOR DAY HOLIDAY !	
9/4	Overview of Agricultural Marketing	
9/6	Consumption & Demand	
9/9	"	
9/11	"	
9/13	"	
9/16	Production & Supply	
9/18	"	
9/20	"	HOMEWORK #1 DUE

* Lecture dates are approximate; test dates are fixed

Figure 1. Course Syllabus (cont.)

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<u>DATE</u>	<u>TOPICS</u>	<u>ASSIGNMENTS DUE</u>	
9/23	Production & Supply		
9/25	Market Prices		
9/27	"		
9/30	"		
10/2	"		
10/4	Marketing Margins		QUIZ #1
10/7	"		
10/9	"		
10/11	Markets Over Space		QUIZ #2
10/14	"		
10/16	"		
10/18	Markets Over Time		HOMEWORK #2 DUE
.....			
10/21	"		
10/23	"		
10/25			MIDTERM #1
.....			
10/28	Product Quality		
10/30	"		
11/1	"		QUIZ #3
11/4	Market Information		
11/6	"		
11/8	"		QUIZ #4
11/11	Market Structure Analysis		
11/13	"		
11/15	"		HOMEWORK #3 DUE
.....			
11/18	Marketing & Pricing Institutions		
11/20	"		
11/22			MIDTERM #2
.....			
11/25	Agricultural Policy		
11/27	"		
11/29	THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY!!!		
12/2	Agricultural Policy		
12/4	International Marketing and Trade		
12/6	"		QUIZ #5
12/9	"		
12/11	"		
12/13	AEC 301 Summary		HOMEWORK #4 DUE
.....			
12/18/91	8:00 a.m. Room A7 Agricultural Science Building-North		FINAL EXAMINATION
.....			

Figure 1. Course Syllabus (cont.)

their expectations in priority order (results are discussed below). This summary is later distributed to students. In addition to obtaining students' expectations of me, I specify my expectations of them, e.g., to be courteous, attentive, and ask for help when needed.

Finally, the first class session concludes with a fun activity. Students team up in pairs (with a person they have never met before) and introduce each other to the rest of the class, specifying their partner's name, where they are from, and their favorite activity or hobby.

Classroom Mechanics

I begin each class session by writing two key outlines on the chalkboard which specify (1) announcements, e.g., due dates for future assignments, College of Agriculture events (Phone-Athon, Job Fair, etc.) and (2) "today's" lecture material. The announcements are written on the left hand side of the board and will be erased shortly thereafter, while the "today's" outline is written on the right hand side of the board and stays up throughout the class period so that students have a comprehensive view of the lecture.

In terms of the flow of the lecture, lectures follow the standard format for presentations: (1) introduction (i.e., tell them what you are going to tell them); (2) the body of the lecture (i.e., tell them); and (3) a summary (i.e., tell them what you told them). In addition, my lecture introduction recaps highlights of the previous lecture as a means of getting students reoriented to the course. The lecture summary closes with key points of today's lecture, i.e., the concepts that I want students to know, at a minimum.

In regards to visual aids, both overheads and computer graphics² are used in class. Practicing the lecture is important for new professors, especially during the first week of the semester. A run-through of the lecture helps one become familiar with the audio-visual equipment and helps one's timing, i.e., to get the feel of a 50 minute lecture period and to determine where natural breaks occur in the material. Also, for first time teachers, a dry run is a great confidence builder. Finally, voice is important, i.e., can the students in the back of the room hear you?

Course Materials

Course materials used in AEC 301 include the course syllabus (Figure 1), readings, handouts, learning objectives³ for each course topic (Figure 2), as well as past examinations, and a glossary of terms. The learning objectives are "results oriented" and specify what the student is expected to know from each section of the course, e.g., definitions, specific concepts, etc. (see Figure 2 for an example). Items in the learning objectives are used to base future questions for homeworks, quizzes, and exams. Past examinations are included in course materials so that students can see the type and way questions are asked. This also lessens student anxiety.

Grading and Examinations

In an undergraduate, required class, frequent feedback is important. Within a 15 week semester, AEC 301 students complete 4 homeworks, 5 quizzes, 2 midterms and a comprehensive final. Thus, they are actively involved in a work assignment nearly every week. This forces students to keep current on the material throughout the semester, rather than cram for an examination. Frequent knowledge checkpoints (e.g., quizzes, tests, etc.) have been identified as one of three crucial features of highly respected courses (Light).

Grading policies are specifically identified in the course syllabus (Figure 1). No late homework assignments are accepted. No one is allowed to take an examination (midterm, final or quiz) at any time other than at the scheduled time. One make-up examination (for either a missed midterm and/or quiz) is given at the end of the semester for anyone with a verified legitimate absence, which are defined. It is the student's responsibility to notify the professor of anticipated absences prior to the event. Student grades are based on flat percentages rather than "on a curve;" this reduces competition among students.

Graded assignments are returned the next class meeting in order to give students rapid feedback. Immediate and detailed feedback is another crucial feature of highly respected courses (Light). (I have been fortunate to have a grader each time I have taught this course, Clemen Gonzales and Eric Jessup, respectively). The grader reviews assignments

<p>AEC 301 Dr. Marchant</p>	<p>University of Kentucky Department of Agricultural Economics</p>	<p>Agricultural Marketing Fall 1991</p>
<p>CONSUMPTION AND DEMAND ANALYSIS LEARNING OBJECTIVES</p>		
<p>Recommended Readings: Dahl and Hammond, Chapter 4 Supplemental Readings: Nicholson, Walter, <u>Microeconomic Theory</u>. Choice and Demand chapters. (On reserve in Ag. library.)</p>		
<p>Upon completion of this section you should be able to</p>		
<p>1. Define the following terms or concepts and contrast them where appropriate:</p>		
<p>a. Demand c. Change in quantity demanded e. Derived demand g. Marginal utility (MU) i. Normal good k. Substitute good m. Elasticity of demand o. Inelastic demand q. Price elasticity s. Utility u. Indifference curve w. Substitution effect</p>	<p>b. Shift in demand d. Consumer demand f. Market demand h. Law of diminishing MU j. Inferior good l. Complementary good n. Elastic demand p. Unit elastic demand r. Income elasticity t. Marginal rate of substitution v. Budget constraint x. Income effect</p>	
<p>2. Given an appropriate set of data, correctly calculate the following elasticities:</p>		
<p>a. own price elasticity b. cross price elasticity c. income elasticity</p>		
<p>3. Define a behavioral relationship for demand which identifies six variables that influence the quantity demanded for a good, including five variables which can shift the demand curve and one variable which relates to a movement along the demand curve. Also, specify whether the relationship between the quantity demanded and each of the above six variables is positive or negative (i.e., does an increase in the level of income increase or decrease the quantity demanded?).</p>		
<p>4. Present the consumer problem, graphically and mathematically, by identifying the consumer's objective and constraint. Also, identify the conditions which must exist in order for the consumer to obtain the optimal consumption bundle of goods.</p>		
<p>5. Given a consumer's preferences and income constraint for two goods (X and Y), graphically identify the substitution and income effects</p>		

Figure 2. Topic Learning Objective Example

initially. Then, the two of us make a second pass through each individual students' assignment, discussing vague and misconstrued answers. Individual comments are written (both positive and negative), when appropriate. An answer key is selected from the students' answers, xeroxed (concealing the student's name), and distributed to all students at the next class meeting. Assignments are reviewed during the next class session, focusing on questions missed most often.

Examination dates are clearly specified in the syllabus (Figure 1). In an effort to lessen test anxiety, an in-class comprehensive review session is held. This session is used to cover the material in a comprehensive manner, encouraging students to just sit back and listen. An out-of-class question and answer review session is also offered. This session is used to answer students' questions and to review concepts and class material.

Student Learning Methods

It is important for students to use as many of the physical senses as possible (Bonwell and Eison; and Wetzstein), including (1) seeing--computer graphic images projected from a "big screen" TV, built into the lecture room to explain economic concepts (Debertin and Jones), overhead transparencies, and the chalkboard; (2) hearing--listening to lecture; (3) speaking--encouraging students to talk about the material via in-class group problem solving sessions culminating with student presentations, student questions (both in-class and out-of-class), and study sessions. The in-class group problem solving sessions encourage student creativity and student interaction (Anderson and Wetzstein). Students comment that they provide "hands on" applications of theoretical concepts to current events in their own discipline. Examples include "Identify a key issue or problem confronting agriculture today and use the analytical tools from AEC 301 to analyze impacts on producers and consumers."

Treatment of Students and Student Feedback

Students are vulnerable and should be treated with respect, especially in regard to in-class student questions. It is important for professors to be accessible to students and make time for students; often the best time to meet is immediately after class or by appointment. Professors should be flexible, especially in the case of excused absences (e.g., field trip in another class), when makeup quizzes and examinations become necessary. Finally, students always appreciate treats, e.g., coffee and doughnuts brought at least once during the semester, on a non-stressful class day.

In regard to student feedback, the "Expectations of Professors" questionnaire filled out the first day of class provides good feedback regarding the characteristics students want of their professors. Listed in priority order, students' expectations of professors were

<p>AEC 301 Dr. Marchant</p>	<p>University of Kentucky Department of Agricultural Economics November 11, 1991</p>	<p>Agricultural Marketing Fall 1991</p>
<p>MIDSEMESTER EVALUATION What do you think?</p>		
<p>Please take a few minutes to express your opinion about AEC 301. This is your opportunity to give me feedback and help me make this a better class for the remainder of the semester. Comments are most appreciated. Note, many of the questions below relate to the criteria which you said were most important in "Expectations of Professors" questionnaire filled out during the first week of class.</p>		
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Fairness--Do you feel that the grading of midterms, quizzes, and homeworks is fair? If not, please discuss why. 2. Accessibility--Have you ever tried to meet with me? If yes, please elaborate. 3. Helpfulness/Understanding/Openness to Questions--If you do not understand the material, do you feel comfortable asking questions either in class or outside of class? Do I create an environment which facilitates learning? Please comment. 4. Real Life Examples--Although the material in the initial part of the course focused on theoretical economic concepts, do you feel that examples in lectures/group discussions/homeworks/quizzes/etc. related it to agriculture? Please comment on ways to improve this area. 5. Presentation of the material--Are lecture materials organized, understandable and given at a comfortable rate in order to achieve a basic level of understanding? Are course/section objectives clear? Do I convey to you a sense of priority, i.e., identifying important material? Do I convey to you that I am knowledgeable in the subject and prepared for class? Constructive comments are most welcome. 6. Class Tempo--Is this class upbeat, enthusiastic and fun? 7. Assignments--Do you have ample time to complete assignments? Are answers explained? 8. What is your favorite part of this course? 9. What would you most like to change to improve this course? 		

Figure 3. Midsemester Evaluation

- Fair exams and fair, consistent grading
- Accessible to students outside of class
- Understanding and helpful when students are uncertain of material
- Be open to questions and encourage group discussions
- Use "real life" examples to illustrate concept
- Present the material in an organized, understandable manner, and lecture at a comfortable rate in order to achieve a basic level of understanding
- Keep the class upbeat, enthusiastic, and fun
- Be knowledgeable in the subject
- Convey a sense of priority, i.e., identify important material
- Be prepared; don't waste class time
- Have clear course objectives
- Give ample time to complete assignments and remind students of due dates
- Explain homework thoroughly

In addition to determining what students expect of their professors, a midsemester evaluation was conducted (Figure 3). Midsemester evaluations provide the professor with the opportunity to obtain feedback during the semester and to make appropriate changes before the semester ends and before the "official" student evaluations are administered. The results of the above "Expectations of Professors" questionnaire were used in the midsemester evaluation, e.g., fairness, accessibility, etc. In addition, open ended questions were included, e.g., "What is your favorite part of this course? What would you most like to change to improve this course? Given that I'm fairly new at teaching, how am I doing? Comments are most appreciated."

Teaching Rewards

Although there are many rewards from teaching, three come to mind immediately. (1) Knowledge exchange--learning from students about agriculture from the perspective of their discipline and teaching them from the agricultural economics' perspective. (2) New friends and future professional contacts--it is a pleasure to encounter former students. (3) Current undergraduates may become future graduate students--we are seeing more and more of this, with our best students staying at the University for graduate work.

Conclusions

I started teaching with little experience and only two weeks to prepare my courses (a high anxiety situation, potentially detrimental to both myself and my students). In talking to recent agricultural economics graduates, my experience of being thrown into the fire of teaching is not unique. In fact, several peers arrived at their new university job with their courses already underway and no time to prepare for them. The motivation for this paper was to share what I have learned about teaching from the perspective of an assistant professor, recognizing that there is much left to be learned. I have learned much through experimenting and listening to my colleagues' successes in teaching. I hope that this paper will help to relieve teaching anxiety for future graduates.

Endnotes

1. Identification of students' "expectations of a professor" was suggested by Dr. Joe Davis.
2. Computer graphic visuals were provided by Dr. David Debertin.
3. The use of "learning objectives" for each course section was suggested by Dr. Loys Mather.

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