

Massasoit Community College
NECIT Seminar
Overview and Recommendations

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Overview and Reflections

I found the weekly NECIT Seminars at Massasoit Community College very useful and enlightening. The sharing of our classroom experiences and our different pedagogical approaches to teaching was uplifting and reassuring. Our discussions were inclusive and inspiring. One of the clear strengths of this group was the meld of its academic disciplines which ranged from Developmental Writing and English as Second Language to Accounting and Physics. Despite this wide span of academic interests, we were able to establish as our “common ground” the challenges of teaching and learning in a diverse classroom setting. We all recognized that Massasoit Community College students bring some very interesting cultural, class, and racial perspectives to the classroom. The changing demographic profile of the Brockton Area has had and will continue to have a considerable impact the College. Also, we further recognized that the issues of race and sexual orientation continue to critically influence and affect the academic process. As a direct result of our reading assignments, we engaged in some very candid and thought provoking discussions. I found these exchanges helpful in defining another important strength of this group, namely, its commitment to diversity in academe. These diversity issues could have different meaning to different people. We should extend this discussion to the general college community.

At first, I was somewhat unclear as to the purpose of the NECIT Seminar. However, our biographical sketches helped in providing some information and focus as to how we perceived our involvement. Some of us expressed the desire to visit each other’s classes. This idea would have been a very useful; however, it never came to fruition. Realizing that the NECIT experience should, in part, be about “Transforming the Institution,” we all decided to identify and develop NECIT Projects that would in some way contribute to this goal. After we identified our individual projects, it is clear that some need further thought and refinement. I mentioned that I would like to develop, as a NECIT Project, some innovative strategies and techniques to (1) further encourage women and minorities to pursue careers in mathematics, science and engineering and (2) further encourage students work together in collaborative ways to maximize the learning process. In order to begin this project properly, there must be an initial period of research and discovery followed by an assessment and analysis period, and ending with a conclusion statement of the developed approaches and a timetable for implementation and action. Clearly, this is very ambitious and it will most probably happen over a number of semesters.

As a direct result of our NECIT Seminar Projects, we should develop some very useful resource material that should be shared with our colleagues both on and off campus. Perhaps, an MCC-NECIT Knowledge Depot could be established and it could be made accessible via a MCC/NECIT/WebCT link.

NECIT Seminar Effect on Teaching Approaches and Pedagogy:

The “Age of Information” and computer technological advancements have had a profound impact on the classroom. From floppy disks, compact-disks, graphing calculators, lap-tops, log-in passwords, virus and worm protection, to computational software, simulation software, software upgrades, Power-Point presentations, WebCT, the internet, remote access, and links, students and faculty are in a constant mode of keeping current with the latest developments. This is both exciting and rewarding. However, the integration of technology and academic interest is clearly dependant on the accessibility and reliability of the college computer network. It is not realistic to assume that all students attending a working-class institution like Massasoit Community College have a home computer. This makes it critically important for the college to provide a dependable computer service to the students attempting to complete their assignments. With relatively small classes in physics, mathematics, and engineering technology, I have had the opportunity to interact with my students in interesting and different ways. My classes have a rich meld of language, culture, and religion. Sometimes I am able to speak with and greet my students in French, Spanish, Swahili, and Arabic. Hence, my course delivery emphasizes discussions, demonstrations, recitation and illustrations, rather than formal lectures. This direct “involve-everyone” approach has resulted in very productive laboratory experiences. The “shared” approach to instrumentation and apparatus assembly and data collection and analysis has produced an inclusive learning environment. This, in turn, has resulted in improvement in the quality and scope of the student laboratory reports that are computer generated.

Our discussions about computer network failures, disappointments and frustrations have confirmed my position that course content should never be supplanted by technology. Available instructional technology is very powerful and it should remain a supplemental tool. We should not encourage our students to think that a good “buttonologist” necessarily implies a master of a given academic discipline. For example, the ability of a student to use a graphing calculator to plot a rational polynomial function does not necessarily guarantee that he or she understands the mathematics required to find the maxima and minima of same.

I find that teaching at the community college level is both very challenging and extremely rewarding. Our students come to us with relatively little academic confidence and marginal academic achievement. They have a sense of the importance of getting an education, but they are somewhat unclear as to how to optimize the process to develop their potential.

Some students test on the developmental level in reading and writing, but then they score on the calculus I or calculus II level in mathematics. Others come to us having earned degrees and having held professional positions in their countries only to test into college writing I.. Still other students come to us as referrals from other state agencies where they have been told that they can complete an Associates Degree in two years, yet they have not been tested. These scenarios result in very interesting and diverse teaching and learning environments.

The classroom remains the place of choice for me. I appreciate and enjoy working with my students in an effort to further develop their potential. It's an awesome responsibility, and I will continue to struggle with the issues of course refinement, pedagogy, inclusive teaching and learning, and the balance between course content and technology. The NECIT Seminar at Massasoit Community College has been very special. I have gained a lot from this experience. I feel that this is the beginning of a long and powerful educational journey that can only make us better at what we do. We are NECIT Ambassadors.

Suggestions and Recommendations

In order to assist in the possible improvement of the MCC NECIT Seminar, I have some suggestions that might be useful. They include the following

- current MCC NECIT participants should somehow assist in the selection and orientation process for new NECIT participants
- develop specific guidelines and requirements for the biographical profiles
- coordinated class visitations should be available to new NECIT participants
- the NECIT experience should be shared with the general faculty via some Professional Development Day on “Diversity in the Classroom--Its Benefits and Challenges”
- current and future NECIT participants should be encouraged to consider the Sabbatical Leave option to research and develop their NECIT Projects
- current NECIT participants should share their Project Abstract with New NECIT participants
- continue with the books currently used in the weekly NECIT discussions and expand the list to include other print material, films, film-loops, guest speakers and field trips
- a college-wide dialogue on “Diversity in the Classroom--Its Benefits and Challenges” should commence
- explore the feasibility of grants to assist in the effort to implement the goal to “Transform the Institution”
- use some of the digital images taken of the Massasoit Community College NECIT Seminar to create and develop large posters for informational purposes