A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF THE DESIGN INFLUENCES AND ROLE OF STUDENTS’ NEEDS ON THE SELECTION OF COURSE CONTENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

College faculty are recognized as experts in their academic disciplines with a wide range of knowledge about their disciplines. As a manifestation of their academic freedom, they have assumed responsibility for folding that discipline knowledge into course design. Generally untrained as teachers, however, they have followed circuitous routes into the realm of course design. While scholars, peers, administrators, legislators, and the public have examined their delivery strategies in the classroom, little consideration has been given to the processes faculty use to select appropriate course content for their students.

Focusing on those selection processes, this study sought to describe (1) how faculty learn to choose content, (2) the place of students among the influences on their content selection, and (3) the processes they undertake in their decision-making about course content. The study involved a questionnaire and interviews.

The results of this study indicate that some faculty, albeit a minority, do focus on students as they choose content. They consider students to be a primary influence, and they collect data in an informal, intuitive manner about students. They may not know current principles of learning theory, but they seem to have a sense of what works for students. This sense has led to a practice of course design which is unique to individual professors, fluid, and isolated.

The majority of faculty are concerned with students, but are discipline-centered in their content selection. Across types of institutions and disciplines, their first loyalty is to the furtherance of the academic discipline. They do report an interest in learning about topics related to students, especially learning theory.

Faculty and administrators who are interested in enhancing the focus on students in higher education should find the study useful. They will want to search out those student-centered planners and begin to document their processes as a first step in identifying and transmitting effective steps in the content selection practice. They will want to plan development activities, perhaps rooted in the disciplines, and find ways to support faculty as they learn and practice relating needs assessments to content selection for their courses.
To Edward, Channing, Kate and Patton
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Faculty recognize, prioritize and integrate numerous influences as they design their courses. They make complex decisions about how their courses will meet the needs of a variety of internal and external stakeholders. Traditionally the assumption has been made that faculty, as masters of particular disciplines, accurately identify the content a course should cover. However, this often unexamined aspect of their planning bears consideration as increasing emphasis is placed on teaching in higher education. This vital decision about content is made very early in the planning process—the content to be covered, the learner’s task, the skill, the knowledge, the concepts which will constitute the focus of the course. Yet Shulman (1986) refers to questions about content as the “missing paradigm”:

In reading the literature of research on teaching, it is clear that central questions are unasked. . . What we miss are questions about the content of the lessons taught, the questions asked, and the explanations offered. (p. 8)

Faculty planning processes are complex because they have a multitude of choices. If professors consider “covering” 20 possible topics in a semester which allows “coverage” of only 15, do they choose the 15 they prefer? the 15 which will lead to a publication? the 15 that will serve society’s needs? the 15 most obviously reflected in the text? the 15 prescribed by the academic discipline? or the 15 which tie most closely with students’ needs and goals? Or do they present the 20 and encourage students to choose the 15 topics which interest them?

Another issue related to content selection concerns the focus and depth of the instruction. Does the biology professor need to teach biology? biology careers? critical thinking? group discussion? biology and societal problems? Is the professor trying to produce a biologist? a teacher? a researcher? a citizen? a problem-solver? Should the professor expose students to content or lead them to mastery?

Identifying the ways in which they integrate the influences, especially student needs, into that complex decision-making about content is crucial to an understanding of current practice in higher education. Recognizing the influences affecting content selection and faculty attitudes toward those influences can be useful to faculty and administrators as they work toward the following goals:

(1) identifying practices associated with student-centered content selection
(2) prioritizing and balancing the influences so that students achieve or maintain prominence among those priorities
(3) identifying the influences about which faculty would like more information
(4) determining the instruction design tools necessary for faculty faced with these content decisions

This study is designed to examine the ways faculty prioritize the factors which influence their course content selection. It includes (1) a review of the research on faculty content selection, focusing on the influences and their effect on course design; and (2) a study of faculty at three types of institutions to determine how their attitudes about the importance of these factors, especially student-centeredness, related to their selections of course content. This study has two components, one based on a questionnaire and the other based on interviews. This examination of faculty descriptions of their own course planning reveals the influences that affect them the most, the process of design that brings the influences to bear on selection of learning tasks, their development of design skills, and the aspects they identify for improvement. The study also reveals the place of student needs in the whole mix of faculty considerations.
Literature Review

Whether initiating or revising courses, faculty members brew up a mix of expertise, discipline demands, institutional demands, student needs, societal needs, and somehow—whether formally or informally, with or without theoretical framework—make choices about the subject matter of their courses. Their actual processes may be hidden because the notion of academic freedom supposedly guarantees faculty the autonomy to make whatever content and text selections they deem appropriate in particular courses (Markie, 1994). Their area of expertise is the academic discipline; surely they should be the best judges of appropriate course content. Colleagues and even administrators may be reluctant to intrude in this professorial domain (Cahn, 1986).

While much of the literature about higher education classrooms deals with delivery of instruction and the ways in which students can be involved in the classroom, the attention to content selection has been less abundant. If, however, content selection is fundamental in the course-building process, then delivery strategies should at least in part be an outgrowth of those content choices. What the student experiences in and takes away from the class results from those initial decisions faculty made about content.

This review focuses on the literature relevant to content selection in higher education: 1) a consideration of terminology; 2) the complexities of content; 3) the various influences which affect faculty as they make content decisions, and especially the place of students among those influences; 4) recommendations from instructional designers and the college-teaching literature about the design processes faculty should use; and 5) the processes faculty do use as they select course content.

Terminology

Content Selection

As faculty design their courses, they are faced with many decisions about what to teach and how to teach it. The “what” to teach is the subject matter, knowledge or skills which students must learn during the course.

In preparing to teach a specific course, a professor needs to consider the following subject-based questions: What are the learning objectives? What is the place of this class within the curriculum? Is the knowledge at the level of facts, application, or synthesis? In what ways does this class build an understanding of and interest in the discipline? (Richlin & Cox, 1994, p. 2)

Simply described by Smith and Ragan (1993) as “the things we want students to learn” (p.7), these learning tasks are fundamental to the design of the course. Those learning tasks are divided by Gagné (1985) into categories from which faculty may choose: verbal information, intellectual skills, cognitive strategies, attitudes, and psychomotor skills. Determining what will be taught also involves deciding the depth and quantity of material to include.

Student-Centered Content Selection

As faculty choose content, they can engage in processes which are student-centered in nature by employing decision-making about course content based on student needs and contemporary learning theory. McDaniel (1994) describes as one “instructional megatrend,” the move toward focusing on the students as “... individuals to be empowered instead of graded, as responsible associates or colleagues, not as empty pitchers or blank slates, as part of a group that cooperates rather than as individuals who compete, and as intrinsically motivated and talented contributors to a process of education instead of passive receivers of already determined content” (p. 28). This student-centered approach to teaching may cause some faculty to redefine their sense of student needs: “As faculty we have always tried to place our students first, but we have also assumed that we knew their needs and objectives better than they” (Plater, 1994, p. 24). Now
faculty may be trying to shift their perspectives to include student perception of student needs and objectives.

Dressel (1988) discusses the need to humanize higher education so that students have more active roles in a full range of activities moving them into fuller knowledge not only of particular disciplines but also of life skills, including communication, cooperation, and the ability to pursue knowledge independently.

Felder and Brent (1996) point out that student-centered approaches work, but they can be difficult: “The problem is that although the promised benefits are real, they are neither immediate nor automatic. . . Student-centered instruction may impose steep learning curves on everyone involved” (p. 43). Students may resist shouldering more responsibility for their learning, and faculty may feel uncomfortable as they experiment with sharing control for course content and activities with their students.

### Instructional Design and Student-Centered Content Selection

Instructional design is the “systematic process of translating principles of learning and instruction into plans for instructional materials and activities” (Smith & Ragan, 1993, p. 2). With design tools, especially needs assessment, faculty can match content to students’ needs. After the completion of a needs assessment, “the substantiation of a need for instruction in a certain content area” (Smith & Ragan, 1993, p. 27), faculty designers can determine if a gap exists between “what learners should know. . . and what learners are currently able to do” (Smith & Ragan, 1993, p. 28). Later faculty designers can begin to identify content to address those gaps.

Unfortunately, faculty are generally untrained in course design. Shulman (1986) explained, “A century ago the defining characteristic of pedagogical accomplishment was knowledge of content” (p. 7); however, today’s faculty also need expertise in two other areas: pedagogical content knowledge (knowing how to teach the content), and curricular knowledge (understanding the full range of curriculum alternatives).

### Influences Affecting Content Selection

Many factors influence faculty, and the ways in which those influences are prioritized affect their decisions about content. Boyer (1990) suggests that faculty might consider their roles in the light of four functions: the scholarship of discovery (research); the scholarship of integration (making meaning from isolated facts, interdisciplinary considerations); the scholarship of application (applying knowledge to the solution of social problems); and the scholarship of teaching (sharing knowledge). Although he has attached a scholarship component to each of the functions, he has drawn these functions from the fields of influence which are commonly identified.

Some descriptions of those influences suggest the equality of the influences. For example, Connelly and Clandinin (1988) suggest that teachers must identify the stakeholders and must make use of their input by hearing and actually learning from the four “commonplaces” that influence personal design: subject matter, milieu (institution and community), learner, and teacher.

Some suggest that those influences are inter-related. For example, Kaufman and English (1979) identify external forces (society, business) and internal forces (institutional goals, students) as the sources of influence, which should be investigated as part of a needs assessment during course planning. They suggest that the needs of the learner, the community and the educator should be examined through the external filter before decisions can be made about course content. While the internal forces may seem most immediate, most tangible, the external forces may reflect the ultimate measure of success, including funding and legislation.

Lowther, Stark, Genthon, and Bentley (1990) discuss a “contextual filters model” which suggests that faculty are influenced most by their background, discipline, and their attitudes about the purpose of education (which they lump together as content); they are less influenced by the situation surrounding their teaching (referred to as context). Kozma (1978) would add a fifth
element to the influences: the medium through which the content will be delivered, including the setting and the delivery techniques.

Fenstermacher and Amarel (1983) focus on the student, humanity (social forces), and the state (political forces) as the main forces affecting curriculum. They express concern about the conflict which may arise among the competing forces: “Though there is, in principle, no necessary conflict between the ultimate interests of students, the democratic state, and humanity, in practice, the situation may be otherwise” (p. 398). Faculty may feel caught among these sometimes oppositional forces if, for example, budget constraints cause class size to balloon while attention to individual students diminishes.

The Professor and Student Needs

The Ideal.

Faculty should be influenced by information about how students learn. Ignoring that information may cause teaching to become “inefficient, ineffective, and sometimes even counterproductive” (Angelo, 1991, p. 5). The more contemporary learning theories, whether cognitive or constructivist or both, attend to the ways in which students process (Bruer, 1993) or appropriate (Moll, 1990) information so that it becomes part of their long-term memory and is internalized. Such student-centered teaching, according to Dressel (1988), may be cognitive or affective, usually a combination of the two, avoiding artificially separating the two.

Once faculty embrace these more contemporary theories, they begin to deal with questions about prior knowledge (Tobias, 1994), assisted performance (Gallimore & Tharp, 1990), collaborative learning (McKeachie, 1990), critical thinking (Terenzini, Springer, Pascarella & Nora, 1995), situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991), multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1991), learning styles (Schroeder, 1993), expert-novice differences and discourse communities (Bruer, 1993); they build on the “what” is learned with the “how,” the “why,” and the “with whom” it is learned. All of these concepts are related to the concept of student-centeredness.

They must also consider whether or not students have the tools with which to learn the content -- research and technology skills? collaborative learning skills? These once peripheral skills may need to become content for the course in addition to subject matter listed in the course catalog (Plater 1995). Faculty may have to teach research skills before students can research concepts related to the actual focus of the course.

Consideration of those types of student needs moves the student to the center of the content decisions. If students are to understand, build on, and make meaning about content, they need to have some interest, prior knowledge, motivation--all of which are related to the affective aspects of student needs.

The affective component of student learning is another segment of student needs which faculty should consider in their planning. If students’ attitudes about their classroom environment and the subject they’re studying are positive, they will have a more productive learning experience (Walsh & Maffie, 1994). Since motivation and relevance have been correlated with learning (Angelo, 1993; Katz, 1985; Katz & Henry, 1988; Tobias, 1994), faculty should increase the impact of those factors as they affect content selection.

In discussing what students want, Eble (1972) describes their demand for relevance, admittedly a difficult issue for students and faculty to agree on, and participation in decision-making, not only about the class but also about the wider university issues. “The specific demand may be for the teacher who can draw out the learner’s own sense of who he is, help dignify it, enlarge it, and keep before him the possibilities of who he might be” (p. 90). Eisner (1979) discusses personal relevance as an “orientation to curriculum that emphasizes the primacy of personal meaning and the school’s responsibility to develop programs that make such meaning possible” (p. 57).

With interest (related to prior knowledge), shared planning and investment by the student, the student is more likely to pursue and retain the material. Such intrinsic motivation (McDaniel, 1994) leads to greater satisfaction and longer-term retention of material.
Magolda (1987) uses Perry’s framework for intellectual development as a basis for understanding the affective component relative to those states. As students move from a “black and white” view of knowledge through various stages of knowledge, they need support and interaction as their view of the world changes. Magolda cautions against a move to merely please students, but indicates that student satisfaction does enhance intellectual growth. However, Magolda’s focus on the professor-student relationship in and out of the classroom relates more to the atmosphere than to the content selection.

This aspect of student-pleasing taking precedence over content is a concern for faculty. Dressel (1988) stops short of advocating intimacy with students:

The obligations of a professor to a student neither require nor justify intimate and dominating relationships, but anyone who presumes to be a teacher has an obligation to become familiar with the students’ backgrounds and with their hopes and aspirations. (p. xiii)

Walsh and Maffei (1994) also discuss the student-professor relationships:

These behaviors need not (and must not) compromise the integrity of the teacher and teaching. We are talking about establishing an appropriate social context for learning, not pandering to unreasonable whims of students or employing some fashionable, but misguided version of “the customer is always right.” (p. 43)

A final aspect of student needs concerns the physical setting of the learning situation. Although many faculty have little control over the course times and locations, they should consider how this aspect of their students’ needs might be reflected in content selection. Faculty may seek opportunities to teach in settings reflective of the course content, either by creating a simulated environment in the classroom or by moving the class out of the classroom to an environment well suited to the study.

The entire issue of student needs may be seen as an issue of caring for students. Noddings (1992) states that “caring is the very bedrock of all successful education” (p. 27). She points out that students need to be cared about just as they will learn to care about other people and ideas. Faculty can model caring for their students and caring for their academic disciplines by choosing content that brings them together. Thayer-Bacon (1993) laments the fact that some theorists have attempted to divorce thoughts and feelings instead of recognizing their dependence on one another: “Caring is necessary to be sure ideas have been fairly considered and understood” (p. 323). Additionally, Noddings (1995) suggests that the “themes of care” should be included as content for students to study.

The Reality. Considering student needs may be difficult for faculty if they have little experience with or training in student-centered approaches. According to Stark, Lowther, Ryan, and Genthon (1988) in their study of faculty planning, faculty report being unfamiliar with learning theory. Consequently, they may feel squeezed by a demand they have limited resources (either background or opportunities/time for training) to meet. That report indicated, however, that student characteristics influenced faculty selection of content to include in their courses. Faculty also reported being strongly influenced by student ability, not students’ career goals.

In addition as Pintrich (1988) points out, faculty may need translators to make the learning theory accessible. Andrews and Goodson (1980) suggest that the array of theories and the jargon can be confusing to educators.

Finally, in determining student needs, faculty may be concerned about how much they really need to know about students and how many options they will then be obligated to provide! Plater (1994) expresses concern that demands for student-centered teaching for an increasingly diverse student population will even further erode a professor’s limited time unless faculty are relieved of other responsibilities.
The Professor and the Influence of the Academic Discipline

The Ideal. Certainly one way in which a professor should attempt to reach a student is through the content springing from the academic discipline. This influence may seem the most obvious; faculty are experts in their respective disciplines or they wouldn’t have been employed. Tate (1993) suggests that distinguishing between the student and the content is not as important as connecting the two so that the student is engaged: “Good teaching is doing this so well that the learning which occurs is sound, useful, and long-lasting” (p. 27).

Tate (1993) suggests, “Professors do not have to give up their concentration on content to become good teachers. Instead, their love for and understanding of their subject gives them a head start in dissolving the dichotomy between teaching and research” (p. 27). Any partnership with their students as it relates to research in the area of a faculty member’s expertise can be beneficial to both.

The Reality. Faculty who are most influenced by their academic discipline will probably engage in discipline-centered planning, in which “the professorial obligation is to assure that each segment of the discipline covered by the course is presented in a sound scholarly manner” with lectures in a formal setting (Dressel, 1988, p. 4).

Additionally, as Weimer (1990) points out, faculty may find that “teaching content, with its straight-forward delineation of facts and details, its establishment of principles and propositions, is easier [than teaching students]” (p. 9).

Unfortunately, faculty may be assigned to teach classes that don’t exactly match their fields of expertise (Eble & McKeachie, 1987). In that case, their lack of facility with managing the influences may become a grievous problem. Although Markie (1994) suggests that faculty are obligated to decline such assignments, the reality is that faculty may feel pressured to accept them in order to please a department head or facilitate the operations of an underfunded, understaffed department.

Another reality is that a textbook may be the primary organizer of a course. Faculty may, however, be disappointed with some aspects of texts provided. Robinson (1994) points out three main problems with textbooks: 1) the outdated information, 2) emphasis on facts and straight recall, and 3) ineffective structure.

Although one might think that the content decisions drive the text selection, the process may actually be the reverse. In their study of faculty planning, Stark and associates (1988, 1989, 1990) found that the context was less important in faculty planning than the academic discipline. Faculty reported being most concerned about selecting materials to enhance disciplinary knowledge, not for students’ enjoyment; they admitted being influenced by textbooks in their selection of content.

The Professor and Institutional Influences

The Ideal. The campus community structure is an influential system which can also affect content selection. The institution sets the standard (either formally or informally) for a professor’s attention to service, teaching, and research (Flood, 1990). This statement of institutional mission should direct faculty time and attention. For example, many faculty in a research-oriented institution will juggle their time and resource constraints to match the strong research focus of the employing institution (Seldin, 1990).

The academic department may represent the most immediate manifestation of the institution and the discipline. According to Paulson and Feldman (1995), “One of the most critical characteristics of institutional and departmental cultures that value teaching is the presence and activities of supportive and effective department chairs.” It’s the department chair who most concretely allots the resources of time and money; the influence of that chair can lead to the creation of a departmental culture which is fertile and collegial or isolating and barren. That influence may also direct faculty time more toward research or teaching.
This attempt to meet institutional and professional needs even in teaching may result in an instructor-centered approach to course content selection: “Course content is based upon personal preferences and may include practical application of interrelations with other disciplines the professor finds interesting and complementary (also complimentary) to his or her personal insights and scholarship” (Dressel, 1988, p. 5).

A final institutional influence may be the availability of faculty development programs so that faculty have more resources for assistance with course development (Eble & McKeachie, 1985). Faculty development initiatives may include demonstrations, conversations with colleagues, incentives for change (institutional support), and easier access to pedagogical information. While such programs are intended to support faculty, they may also be interpreted as a reflection of institutional pressure to change. The technology initiatives invading many campuses work well as an example of an institutional pressure (Plater, 1995).

The Reality. Stark and associates (1988, 1989, 1990) found that faculty often misunderstood or took for granted the local resources and contexts. They also reported that promotion and tenure were not strong influences in faculty planning, which the authors admit seems contradictory to common perceptions about faculty.

Although Astin and Chang (1995) identified some private liberal arts colleges that managed to emphasize research and teaching, they found that if an institution had a strong research orientation, it is generally below average in its orientation toward students. Their results showed that usually a campus culture was strong in one type of orientation and weak in the other. The campus culture includes written and unwritten expectations for “exemplary” practice. Similarly, faculty at community colleges will attempt to fit with the culture of a particular department or institution, which demands a focus on preparing students for work or transfer to another institution, with no time, funds, or encouragement for research (Preston, 1994).

Faculty may find that meeting professional needs may be compromised by the lack of time and resources. Smith, Anderson and Lovrich (1995) documented stress among faculty members based on “the proliferation of tasks, too many demands, too little time, and in general the overall lack of direction” (p. 278). Blackburn and Lawrence (1995) concur that faculty want time to redesign courses and support if innovation in course design doesn’t work to remove the probable penalties for failed experimentation.

In conjunction with this lack of blame for failures, faculty also need professional recognition from peers within the employing institutions for their efforts related to teaching. As Terenzini and Pascarella (1994) point out, good researchers are not necessarily good teachers, despite their current knowledge of the subject matter. So tying institutional rewards to research accomplishments encourages faculty to move their time allocation in the research direction.

Faculty time spent planning and choosing appropriate course content may not be rewarded or even acknowledged. Teaching awards may be given primarily for innovative delivery of instruction. As Svinicki and Menges (1996) point out, for some faculty and other interest groups, teaching is equated with what happens within the walls of the classroom. However . . . many aspects of exemplary teaching may involve no student contact at all--time devoted to the design of course materials, texts, evaluation instruments, and computer-based instructional packages. (p. 110)

Thus the nature of the institutional influence on course content selection may be remote at best, and in some cases even negative.

The Professor and Societal Influences

The Ideal. The societal influences include demands for graduates who can contribute to the improvement of society. Bok (1982) discusses the responsibility of higher education to respond to society’s needs (with public service and responsive curriculum) and take a leadership role in societal reform. A stronger sense of community (McDaniel, 1994) may be one of the key reforms
needed in higher education in response to the change in society which has produced students from disjointed and mobile families. Today’s student may not have had the opportunity to learn some values and social skills which were once taken for granted among college students.

Gabelnick (1997) describes a key to creating that community: “The challenge of educating a committed citizenry is to change the societal and university strategy of competitiveness to one of collaboration” (p. 30). As students and faculty engage in collaborative learning, faculty can share the burden of selecting content with their students and with other stakeholders in the academic and civic communities. As faculty move into such collaboration, they can help to change the idea that education means “learning alone, being alone, teaching alone” (Gabelnick, p. 32).

Picturing students in an increasingly diverse culture, Fried (1993) suggests that it becomes increasingly important that students possess not only an understanding of content but also an ability to contextualize that content. He says that faculty must teach three skills: 1) the ability to separate facts from cultural assumptions, 2) the ability to shift perspectives, for example in comparing and contrasting viewpoints, and 3) the ability to recognize the difference between personal discomfort and intellectual disagreement. These skills will allow students to defend and enrich the content they have learned as they approach people with different perspectives, recognizing what aspects of decision-making are negotiable, where the line is between the intellectual and the emotional.

Aside from the need for students to solve social problems, fulfill their duties as citizens, and engage in private charitable acts, the economic arm of the society needs employees who can earn an income, produce a good product, and spend that money. Unfortunately, the business community has expressed disenchantment with the efforts of higher education (Johnstone, 1994). The demand for competent employees has often been considered the challenge of the two-year institutions (Wismer, 1994), but it affects higher education at all levels. Colleges must recognize that performance on the job is a reflection of a student’s successful education (Institute, 1995).

A related aspect is increased interest in service learning, which helps to diminish “barriers between college and community” (McDaniel, 1994, p. 29) as students are becoming involved with social agencies. McDaniel (1994) suggests that faculty must choose course content that will allow students to balance field experiences with academic experiences: “Professors will also need to develop more flexible schedules and assignments to accommodate individual interests and to coordinate academic knowledge and skills with human relations and communication skills required in service learning” (p. 29).

Gabelnick (1997) describes numerous service learning initiatives and touts the benefits: Through these and other programs, students find themselves in a variety of field experiences, as well as undergraduate research, community service, and social/political projects. In so many campuses, students are invited to learn by doing and to reflect on their learning with faculty and other students. . . Much of the leadership and support for the new civic responsibility has come from the major American foundations. (p. 32)

This reliance on business may also be related to a growing trend in the customer-as-client mentality. Eisner (1979) refers to “educational consumerism” as one of the social influences affecting curriculum decisions. With students, their families, and their eventual employers as the customers of higher education (McDaniel, 1994), faculty may need to find new ways to approach them as consumers of a product (education).

Coldstream (1994) warns that students, however, are not the product to be “successfully shaped and constructed by educators to the specification of the demanding ‘consumer’-employer” (p. 160). He suggests that any partnership between business and higher education must move beyond mere career training to “educating for growth, for willingness to change and be changed, for confidence” (p. 162). From this perspective, faculty are asked to teach not only the course content, but also communication, lifetime learning, and thinking skills.

A subset of this societal influence is the political/legislative climate. Chickering (1990) indicates that there is “increasing hostility” (p. 147) between college administrators and governors
and legislative bodies. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the institutions of higher education reported budget cuts that were primarily attributed to reductions in state or local funding. Although the percentage of institutions reporting budget cuts was highest at 55% in 1992, the cuts continue (Lewis & Farris, 1995). The results of those cuts have included larger classes, reduction of travel and journals for faculty--two factors which may actually detract from the quality instruction demanded by the public. “Two decades of tight state budgets have constrained everything: salaries, operating funds, the library, and undergraduate education reforms. External funds, normally restricted, are the major source fueling the research enterprise” (Anderson, 1992, p. 63). This support of higher education by industry has made the business community an increasingly powerful player in the influence game.

Unfortunately, according to Sternberg and Horvath (1995), novice educators are least likely to have full understanding of the societal influences. As they indicate, teachers need this information not only to enhance their planning, but also to protect their classrooms from the untoward manipulations by administrators or politicians.

While legislators and businessmen are clearly stakeholders in higher education, Markie (1994) reminds faculty that these external factors can influence content selection but not replace faculty as decision-makers about content:

> These groups all have a great stake in the curriculum’s being well conceived--students who want to learn to design airplanes, companies that want to build them, workers who want to sell tickets on them, and anyone who plans to ride in one all have a stake in the engineering curriculum--but they all lack the requisite knowledge by which to plan it. We should keep in mind, though, that what these groups often want most is not control of the curriculum for themselves, but the appropriate exercise of that control by the faculty. (p. 21)

The Reality. One consideration related to society may be difficult or even ignored by faculty. Service to the community may even seem invisible to the employing institution and even to the community when compared with the high profile results of research and teaching (McKeachie, 1990). Unfortunately, their own lack of attention to society may be mirrored in the planning they do for their students.

As Stark and Lattuca (1997) indicate: “Academic plans are adjusted, in part in response to the broader context of the society in which the educational organization exists. . . Administrators have a special obligation to help faculty become aware of such demands and begin to screen them for suitability” (p. 392). Unfortunately without that assistance, the societal pressures may be difficult to balance.

Relating Instructional Design to Influences and Content

As faculty strive to balance the influences when choosing course content, they use some process of content selection. Information about more systematic decisions regarding content selection is found in the instructional design literature, much of which is directed to elementary and/or secondary teachers, and the college teaching literature.

Instructional Design Perspective

The instructional design literature itself offers a range of approaches, but it is geared toward professional instructional designers or at least to trained teachers. As Nelson, Magliaro, and Sherman (1988) point out, approaches to design vary across a continuum from the most specific models to ones that depend on looser structures.

One approach (e.g., Gagné & Briggs, 1974, Smith & Ragan, 1993 ) advocates a formal, sequenced method of course preparation beginning with an analysis of the factors related to the course: content/task, students, context. According to Gagné and Briggs (1974), “Designing an instructional system utilizes a kind of knowledge called educational technology. . .the process of
planning by means of which an instructional system is developed, implemented, controlled, and evaluated” (p. 210). This system is constructed to ensure alignment between all aspects of course planning and delivery. They identify 12 steps in instructional design, many of which relate to the selection of content, beginning with the analysis and identification of needs, including needs of the individual and society.

Other authors choose similar approaches to design; all include some kind of needs assessment or analysis as one of the instructional design tools. Their discussion of this analysis ranges from a chapter or more in a design text (e.g., English, 1992) to whole books dealing solely with needs assessment (e.g., Kaufman & English, 1979). Considered as a “gap analysis” (Kaufman & English, 1979), such an assessment identifies current levels of student skills, knowledge and attitudes and desired levels of performance; those desired levels might be identified by the learners, the communities and the educators. The designer/educator then identifies the gaps in an effort to determine the instructional needs.

Those gaps would then be analyzed and tied to content selection. Sherman (1980), for example, advises the building of responsive instruction by following a design sequence which begins with (1) intentions about the focus of the course, (2) assessment to collect information about students (3) the establishment of goals which are based on the relationship of the intentions to the assessment, and then (4) selection of content which must be “appropriate” to students and “learnable” (p. 43).

Eisner (1979) is reluctant to assign a series of steps one should follow in planning. He discusses a more circular view in which any one of the components might lead to another. He does address content selection as one of the components and comments on the vast possibilities from which one might choose:

One possible criterion for content inclusion, in addition to whether there is some relationship between the content and the aim, is whether the content is likely to be meaningful. . .One way of dealing with such diversity is to include. . .options from which teachers and students can themselves choose. In other words, by providing different kinds of content to make the same point, the flexibility of the materials is increased. (p. 119)

This array of choices, however, equates to more time spent planning, a resource faculty may feel they cannot commit.

Faculty Design Perspectives for Untrained Designers

The models and formulae consistent with instructional design are heavy-laden with jargon (e.g., West, Farmer & Wolff, 1991), which faculty untrained in educational psychology or instructional design would hardly be motivated to access. Does a faculty member really want to construct a “curriculum outcome indicator validation matrix” (English, 1992, p. 34)? Wilson (1993) complains that some design models seem more suited for use by a computer than by real people, muzzling the content experts who can’t explain their expertise and depending on designers who achieve superficial content knowledge in order to apply their design skills. He suggests that task and content analysis should serve as a framework, a map, rather than a “leveling exercise” (p. 13).

Faculty need for design principles may be met if they depend on a single textbook and follow the teacher’s manual to the letter. In essence, that approach allows faculty to rely on the services of professional designers hired by a publishing company. Supposedly those designers made appropriate content selections, but they can only be “appropriate” insofar as stereotypical students are concerned. This text-based approach may work especially well for inexperienced faculty who need the direction, although Sawyer, Pritchard, and Hostetler (1992) warn that students may become suspicious if faculty are overly dependent on the text.

However, faculty may not be content to rely solely on one text—or even on any text. They may make numerous decisions about their course content before they even choose a text; then they
choose to cover parts of the text and add supplementary materials. Consequently, they become designers at least to some extent. Their process may be less linear and less formal than the process proposed by the traditional instructional designers. They may be conducting ongoing, informal program evaluation, which will be folded into their plans for subsequent semesters.

Much of the literature about teaching at the college level focuses on delivery of instruction and classroom management, not on content selection. Since faculty generally lack training in design as well as other pedagogical aspects, and they feel overwhelmed with other responsibilities for research, advising, committee work, no 12-step design process will seem very appealing. If one considers that one of Gagné and Briggs’ 12 steps is needs assessment and Kaufman provides a 17-step approach to needs assessment, it is no wonder that faculty may walk away from such a formal approach. Aside from its time-consuming nature, a traditional needs assessment may require obtaining information, for example about incoming students, that is difficult to access. Faculty may also believe that the process is not crucial if they can get whatever information they need if they need it, if students cannot be successful without it) in other ways. Finally, they may rightly wonder if a one-size-fits-all approach can really fit all disciplines.

Authors of texts about teaching in college (e.g., Davis, 1993; Page, 1988) have tended to dwell on such concretes as the preparation of a syllabus, the delivery of a lecture, grading tests, and managing office hours. This approach jumps right from the course description in the college catalog (which may or may not even reflect the true focus of the course) to the elements contained in an effective syllabus, apparently assuming that faculty need little direction in selecting appropriate content. Such an assumption was expressed by Kozma (1978): “An instructor’s discipline usually provides the precision needed to analyze the goals of education” (p. 37).

Another reason content selection is not emphasized is the belief that delivery techniques have more of an impact on students than the course content (Katz, 1993). This emphasis on the “how to teach” suggests that as masters of their disciplines, faculty certainly should know how to make content choices and would see more results from attention to delivery strategies.

McKeachie (1994) suggests steps in design that move from writing objectives to writing a syllabus and choosing a textbook. Such a linear sequence seems to be based on the assumption that a professor doesn’t need guidelines about matching those objectives to the content selection. McKeachie (1994) does add chapters about diversity, meeting students’ needs, identifying professorial responsibilities, and studying the college classroom; at least those chapters flag some considerations faculty may need to include in their planning. Others, such as Erickson and Strommer (1991), consider learning styles and student needs in greater depth, but again offer no concretes to tie those needs to content.

Another description of a linear process is Menges’ (1990) “Four P’s” which direct faculty to move from preconditions (faculties, subject matter, learners), to plans (objectives, goals, outlines), to procedures (exposure, practice, feedback), and products (knowledge, skills, attitudes). Again there is little information about how to match the information about student needs to content selection.

Toombs and Tierney (1991) offer a look at design that may seem palatable for faculty. In their matrix of curriculum design, they group curriculum concerns in three areas: (1) context, including social and cultural influences, direct influences (legislation, market forces) and environmental factors and organizational, institutional climate; (2) content, including nature of significant knowledge, learning psychology, student needs; (3) form, including learning resources (time, space, facilities) and instructional strategies, outcomes and assessments. Interestingly, Toombs and Tierney include student needs as a component of the content consideration, not as a separate or optional consideration. These are not steps which one must follow in a linear fashion, but rather aspects about which information-gathering could be on-going.

Faculty may also respond to a very concrete approach with the use of checklists, guiding faculty through the processes to select textbooks, determine their reading level, or examine courses (Kellough, 1990). Included along with the checklists are questions faculty might discuss with
peers or investigate on their own. The checklists may be based on the works of other authors cited here (e.g., Katz, 1985; Diamond, 1989; McKeachie, 1994) but may seem more accessible to faculty than those original sources. Again, the approach offers little help with actually matching information about the course or the students to the content selections.

Geis (1996) advocates an approach for college teachers which specifies eight “decision points”: deciding to develop or revise, clarifying purpose, determining orientation, specifying goals, deciding what to include, mapping, sequencing, fine-tuning through interaction with learners (p. 179). In his explanation of decision one, he describes a needs analysis which would take into account the external (licensing agencies, societal groups, experts in the profession) and internal influences (department, discipline, students, and professor). While student needs are considered in this step, they are revisited in the final step as faculty teach the course and make any necessary shifts in the plan. The selection of content for the courses is the fifth step. As Geis says,

Decisions to include or exclude specific content are probably the most critical and difficult ones the professor will have to make in developing the course. Sets of criteria . . .can help in those decisions, as can repeated reflection on purposes. Without a clear picture of the purpose, good course development is likely to be serendipitous. (p. 192)

What the designers refer to as needs assessment is closely related to the kinds of research faculty conduct concerning their academic disciplines. Classroom research (Angelo, 1991; Cross, 1990; Lewis, 1991) can help faculty to make informed changes in their teaching. The techniques called for in the teacher-as-researcher approach should seem very familiar to faculty who research their academic disciplines regularly; collecting and analyzing data with an eye toward evaluation and potential change are second nature to good researchers. This emphasis on data gathering (e.g., Lovell-Troy & Eickmann, 1992; Pregent, 1994; Diamond, 1989; Weimer, 1990) suggests that a faculty planner should collect information about a new or revised course and the students before preparing a content and resource list. Such data gathering and task analysis would be followed by content selection. They suggest that faculty consider the concepts students should learn rather than the concepts faculty prefer to cover by listing content possibilities, discussing them with colleagues, and enlarging the list before attempting to hone it, to match it to the information gathered about students.

Plater (1994) envisions the faculty member as pedagogical researcher who uses technology to track student needs and progress toward course goals. Such an inquiry approach (Katz & Henry, 1988) enables faculty to investigate their teaching in a more scientific manner, emphasizing the teaching-as-science approach as opposed to the teaching-as-art approach. However, Baiocco and DeWaters (1995) found that “Awareness of the recent educational thrust toward the faculty role as a ‘reflective practitioner’ who uses the classroom as an experimental laboratory for research on teaching and learning was virtually nonexistent among respondents” (p. 39).

Katz and Henry (1988) also suggest that faculty can move into a co-inquiry model with their students as a way of selecting content and energizing learning. This approach brings together the teaching and research roles as faculty teach students how to research some aspect(s) of the discipline. The student learns not only the material, but also how to pursue further investigation into other aspects. If faculty can find ways to include their students in research and service, not as mere observers, but as active participants, they may be better able meet the demands from various quarters. For example, in a conversation at Virginia Tech, Vito Perrone (November 1, 1995), Director of Teacher Preparation at Harvard, said that he teaches his students not just history, but how to do history because teaching them all the history even from a particular era is impossible. His strategy is designed to encourage students to read beyond the course requirements and after the course has ended. Perhaps he contributes more to his discipline in the way of converts than by covering larger blocks of information to students who will neither remember it nor pursue it.

An outgrowth of the National Center for Research to Improve Postsecondary Teaching and Learning (NCRIP) study is the recommendation of a design process which involves identifying student goals (Stark, Shaw & Lowther, 1989): “Course designs that accommodate a
variety of student goals can help an institution increase student motivation to learn without becoming subservient to consumer whims or educational fads” (p. 2). Student goals, which are then folded into course-level goals, are described as the “missing link” in college course planning. An inventory to determine these goals can be used as historical data on which to build future classes; it can also be used at the beginning of a semester. Student-produced information about goals can help a professor group students, reflecting types of concerns and goals typical for college students. Matching that information to course content and providing various ways to approach that content will allow students in any of the groups to find a meaningful piece of the course.

Actual Design Process

The research on teacher thinking/planning has tended to focus on elementary and secondary teachers, some of whom are stronger in pedagogical knowledge than they are in content areas (Floden & Klinzing, 1990; Connelly & Clandinin, 1988; Yinger, 1980). Regardless of this pedagogical training, Eisner (1988) suggests that a teacher’s experience is the real basis for planning, while admitting that experience is “slippery.” He suggests that background affects how people learn and in turn how they teach.

Yinger (1980) reviews studies of public school teachers’ planning and concludes that the linear, rational models of course planning are not predominantly in use. He described a process model in which a teacher moves from (1) problem finding, to (2) problem solution (design), to (3) implementation, evaluation, and routinization. Within that process,

- The selection of content and materials was frequently left open, hence requiring planning at the weekly level. . Decisions about content and materials are even more frequent for teachers whose teaching is less routinized. Except for the most highly routinized activities such decisions should always be present. (p. 124)

This level of routinization may be the greatest difference between public school teachers and college faculty. Faculty may lock themselves in to a highly predictable course plan once they choose a text and write a syllabus. In traditional college courses, the content is determined with little room for flexibility.

The factor which faculty may share with public school teachers is their reliance on experience as a guiding force for faculty in higher education as well. Over the course of their teaching careers,

- College teachers form personal, implicit theories of teaching upon which they often depend, even though they are not particularly aware of their theories. Such theories are likely to be inaccurate because they are developed more or less implicitly or subconsciously rather than explicitly and thoughtfully. (Paulson & Feldman, 1995, p. 41)

Such theories are foundations from which content selection processes grow. However, the literature about investigations of actual content selection by faculty members seems slim, especially compared to the literature concerning the influences, delivery strategies, and the recommended design.

Andresen, Barrett, Powell, and Wienke (1985) studied seven Australian faculty members to determine how they planned and adapted their courses as they progressed. The researchers discovered that not only did some faculty engage in an on-going process of planning, but they also found regular, even weekly time to consider content for their courses. Of course this study was limited by the number of participants and also by its setting.

Guskey (1988) interviewed faculty who had been identified as effective to see if they had common characteristics. Guskey found that faculty spent “considerable” (p. 19) time planning, but such planning is defined as creating detailed syllabi and determining clear evaluation criteria. Although faculty were found to be concerned about being flexible and responsive to students, that attitude was defined as shifting the content in the case of student difficulty or current events, getting to know students, and showing regard for them. Guskey does not indicate that faculty
selected content appropriate for specific students or for types of students, but rather that they considered productive relationships to be important.

The National Center for Research to Improve Postsecondary Teaching and Learning (NCRIPTAL) conducted studies of faculty planning and influences as reported primarily by Stark, Lowther and associates (Stark, Lowther, Bentley & Marten, 1990; Stark, Shaw and Lowther, 1989; Stark, Lowther, Ryan, & Genthon, 1988; Stark & Lattuca, 1997). They studied faculty planning for introductory courses, recognizing that such planning is usually individual and informal. They defined course planning as the “decisions that instructors undertake before the first class meeting” (Stark, Lowther, Ryan & Genthon, 1988, p. 221). They considered three steps in the planning process: faculty attitudes toward planning, decision-making, and implementation. They did establish the following patterns among college faculty related to content selection as described by Stark and Lattuca (1997): (1) Faculty generally plan courses continuously by fine-tuning or making adjustments. (2) Change is often undertaken to relieve faculty boredom as opposed to change in response to student needs. (3) Faculty usually begin their planning by choosing content and jump quickly to a consideration of instructional activities. (4) Faculty did not report being influenced by learning theory or pedagogical knowledge, nor did they report reading much about the educational process. (5) Discipline is the strongest influence in course planning. (6) Conversation about planning strategies enables faculty to crystallize their thoughts and consider new alternatives. These findings, again, are limited to one body of research, but they do begin to fill in some of the gaps in the literature about course planning in higher education.

Summary

Faculty approaches to content selection are a reflection of the diverse and fluid pressures influencing them and their considerations of design. Identifying those influences is much easier than quantifying them. Some combination of student needs, professor’s needs, institutional and social needs, and demands of the academic discipline affect faculty as they select content for their students. While the student needs may seem to be the logical center for these swirling influences, actually the professor and the discipline seem to take center-stage.

This arrangement of influences is relevant to design choices because the content selection will reflect a professor’s view of the priorities. Faculty will be hard-pressed to engage in student-centered planning if the student is not at the center! The literature does suggest that faculty planning may be highly individual, informal and ongoing, without the complexities of a formal instructional design approach.

Slighted in the literature, resulting in the gaps between probable/actual and the ideal are the following questions: What is the depth of knowledge about students which is sufficient for planning and/or desired by faculty? How do faculty match content to the results of any investigation they undertake about their classes and students? How do expert faculty display and share their successful balancing of the pressures as they select content? How do faculty perceive the importance of and achieve balance among the influences affecting their content selection?

The following study is designed to answer some of the above questions. Specifically one part of the study focused on the influences and their importance to faculty, whether the influences have affected their content selection in the past and whether faculty would be interested in expanding their bases of information. The study examined the place of student-centered approaches amongst the influences and identified some factors which could correlate with student-centeredness. Another part of the study focused more on the instructional design process faculty find useful, especially as they match their learners to their subject.
CHAPTER 2
FACULTY CONTENT SELECTION -- THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Introduction
The questionnaire results rendered a general representation of current faculty, including their career preparation and their attitudes, especially any tendencies to be student-centered in their view of the influences and the development possibilities. The questionnaire preceded the interviews and was used as a way to frame the interview component. The instrument was constructed, distributed, collected, and analyzed according to the procedures described in the first section of this chapter. A summary and discussion of the questionnaire results follows the explanation of the methodology.

Questionnaire Methodology
Setting
The study was conducted in Southwestern Virginia at three institutions of higher education: a private four-year liberal arts college, a two-year community college, and a research university. This cross-institutional approach was designed to reveal the perspectives of a wide range of faculty whose institutions might reflect various influences (Astin, 1995).

Participant Selection
The target population for this study consisted of Arts and Sciences faculty at the three institutions. This segment of higher education faculty was chosen because of similarities of disciplines across the institutions. Where a formal College of Arts and Sciences did not exist, faculty were surveyed whose disciplines were most similar to those represented in a traditional College of Arts and Sciences.

The systematic random sample was based on the number of Arts and Sciences faculty at each institution. Each institution’s list of instructional faculty in Arts and Sciences was considered a subgroup from which the sample size was determined mathematically to produce a size representative of that population (Isaac & Michael, 1981, p. 193).

The faculty in Arts and Sciences met the inclusion criteria as follows:
1. faculty of any academic rank at one of three selected institutions of higher education in Southwestern Virginia
2. faculty of any discipline considered arts or sciences
3. faculty who have experience teaching undergraduate students

The questionnaire was not distributed to those identified by the following exclusion criteria:
1. teaching assistants
2. fully administrative faculty with no current teaching duties
3. faculty who have taught only graduate classes

Data Sources
This portion of the study was based on the results of an unsupervised, self-administered, descriptive questionnaire (see Appendix A). The study was intended to provide descriptive data at one fixed point in time and to create a snapshot of a group (Fink, 1995).

The questionnaire was designed to meet Isaac’s and Michael's (1981) four “guiding principles underlying surveys” (p. 128):
1. Systematic: “carefully planned and executed to insure appropriate content coverage and sound, efficient data collection” (p. 128) -- The questionnaire was designed in accordance with numerous examples and recommendations in the literature and was planned with the assistance of faculty in Virginia Tech’s College of Education, Office of Academic Assessment, and Office of Institutional Measurement.
2. Representative: “closely reflecting the population of all possible cases or occurrences, either by including everyone or everything, or by using scientific sampling procedures” (p. 128)--
A random sample of faculty was used at each institution so that responses would reflect perspectives Arts and Sciences faculty, not necessarily representative of specific disciplines.

3. Objective: “insuring that the data are as observable and explicit as possible” (p. 128) -- Closed questions were used to produce data that could be scored objectively. The language of the survey was also chosen to minimize a broad range of interpretations.

4. Quantifiable: “yielding data that can be expressed in numerical terms” (p. 128) -- The use of op-scan technology was planned initially so that a numerical measurement could be analyzed by computer without the intermediate step of data entry. Although the op-scan format can be seen as impersonal, “The error rate for keying data probably far outstrips the error rate of responders due to misplaced or otherwise improper marks on the op-scan sheets” (Frary, 1991, p. 12). However, based on the pilot test for this study, participant comments led to the abandonment of the op-scan for two reasons: (1) participants could more easily record their responses on the instrument itself rather than transferring answers to an op-scan, and (2) respondents could record random comments and questions on the questionnaire with the realization that such comments would be recorded and included in the analysis (see Appendix B). Space was left after each section with the direction to make note of any additional topics or influences. Of course, this methodology required subsequent keying of the responses into a data base before any reporting and analysis could proceed.

The questionnaire was also planned based on the four factors Suskie (1992) indicates as those generating a maximum response rate: (1) a nonthreatening topic; (2) sympathetic subjects who saw value in the study; (3) consideration of respondents as reflected by tone, survey design, and convenient return procedure; and (4) the professionalism and apparent importance of the study, which was clearly dependent of the respondent’s participation. First, the questions were not sensitive in nature, and anonymity was assured. Second, the topic of the study had the potential of attracting faculty who saw it as valuable to the study of their profession. Some faculty may have seen value in the study, but may not have responded for various reasons unrelated to the study itself. Some faculty may have been surveyed frequently, especially at the research institution; on the other hand, faculty who are rarely surveyed, such as those at the community college, may have been unfamiliar with the approach. Third, educational jargon was avoided so that any respondent would understand the language used, regardless of that respondent’s discipline. Consideration for respondents was also reflected in the provision of a convenient format and return mechanism (labeled return envelope to be used in campus mail). Fourth, the attention to detail, the use of a specific institutional names on the cover letter and questionnaire, and the provision of a mechanism for indicating the desire for a report or an interview suggested that the questionnaire had been and would be handled in a professional manner.

Validity and Reliability

The internal validity of the questionnaire was supported by the following considerations. First, it was pilot-tested by faculty who critiqued the instrument and made recommendations (see Appendix B). Fink (1995) explains that content validity is supported by reviewers who have some knowledge of the subject matter. Second, it was based on a literature review, including literature about higher education, instructional design, and survey research (see “References”). Third, it is similar in format to other successful questionnaires included in that literature (e.g., Stark, Lowther, Bentley & Martens, 1990; Suskie, 1992).

External validity depends on results that apply to the target population, not just to the sample (Fink, 1995). While the study is generalizable only to faculty in Arts and Sciences at three institutions, it may also raise issues of interest to (1) faculty and administrators in other colleges/departments at the three institutions surveyed, and/or (2) Arts and Sciences faculty and administrators at other institutions.

Suskie (1992) indicates that a “reliable questionnaire is a questionnaire that elicits consistent responses” (p. 33), but cautions that asking two questions on the same subject in an effort to check
the consistency of a respondent’s answers lengthens the questionnaire. Isaac and Michael (1981) say that reliability “refers to many types of evidence, each of which describes the agreement of consistency to be expected...” (p. 126). To avoid lengthening the questionnaire, reliability was established by the use of the “between method” of triangulation described by Delamont, 1992): “getting data on something with more than one method” (p. 159). The collection of data in the subsequent interviews allowed this kind of triangulation.

Confidentiality

According to Isaac and Michael (1981), anonymity is required only if the information sought is “highly personal or controversial” (p. 135). Because the nature of this study was not controversial, anonymity was not considered necessary. Instead, confidentiality was offered to questionnaire respondents to encourage their participation. Although adult respondents have been shown to provide the same answers whether the questionnaires are anonymous or coded (Isaac & Michael, 1981), some faculty may have been reluctant to respond if the questionnaires had been coded. To facilitate follow-up, however, for those requesting data or an interview, only the return envelopes were coded. They were easily and irrevocably separated from the questionnaires and used only for requested follow-up. In essence, responses were processed with no identifying marks, providing virtual anonymity. No attempt was made to reconcile individual questionnaire responses with later interview responses.

Respondents to questionnaires received a transmittal letter with the procedure for promoting confidentiality outlined:

Of course your responses to the questionnaire and the interview will be kept confidential; only the return envelope is coded for follow-up purposes. It will be immediately separated from the questionnaire for processing and analysis. (see Appendix A).

Questionnaire Components

The questionnaire had four major sections (see Appendix C). In Section I, “Course Identification,” respondents were asked to provide information about a course they had created or revised. This information included discipline, size of enrollment, and level of course. This section was positioned first because the responses to this section influenced the responses to other sections and because the simplicity of the questions encouraged respondents to continue.

In Section II, “Influences,” respondents used a likert-scale to identify the importance of the influences as they designed the course identified in Part I. The response scale was arranged from lower to higher order, left to right, as suggested by Frary (1991). It included the following factors, identified in the literature about faculty content selection for courses:

- Institutional administration -- mission and current initiatives, such as technology and/or internationalizing the curriculum
- Departmental culture -- department chair, colleagues, description, prerequisites, promotion and tenure
- Academic Discipline -- personal education, journals, conferences, personal research, textbooks
- Society -- community service, citizenry, legislative issues and trends, business and industry, economic development
- Students -- learning processes and styles, career choices, prior knowledge, interests, cultural backgrounds

In Section IV, “Future Planning,” respondents identified topics about which they would like more information or to which they desired easier access. They were asked to choose an interest level which corresponded to some of the influences mentioned in Part II of the questionnaire. The terms “faculty development” and “professional development” were not used so that any negative
associations with institutional mandates or training programs did not influence faculty response to this section.

In Section 4, “Demographics,” respondents identified their discipline, their years of experience, their amount of training in education, and their institution. The demographics section was placed at the end of the survey as recommended by Fink (1995) and Suskie (1992).

The four-page questionnaire was printed in a booklet format as suggested by Fink (1995) because some sections were continued on subsequent pages and continuity was essential.

Data Collection Procedures

The following steps were used in the data collection involving the questionnaire:

1. Permission sought and granted from deans (Appendix C)
2. Pilot test and analysis (Appendix B)
3. Mailing of questionnaire packet including the following parts:
   - Letter of transmittal (see Appendix A) --Names of contact people employed at each institution were used to heighten recognition and willingness to participate. The letter also designated a time for return of the questionnaire.
   - Questionnaire (see Appendix A)
   - Return envelope labeled for convenient use in campus mail and coded to facilitate follow-up contacts. At each institution, a contact person was identified whose name and/or address might be readily identifiable to participants.
4. Follow-up procedures included the use of e-mail reminders at institutions where electronic mail is in wide use. Suskie (1992) indicates that follow-ups can generate an additional 50% response and can bring in responses in a late batch which differ greatly from those of early responders.
5. Unopened envelopes were collected from the campus contacts whose names and addresses were shown on the return envelopes.

Data Organization and Analysis

The questionnaires were retrieved from the contact people at each campus and reviewed for clear and complete responses. The envelopes were separated from the questionnaires and retained to determine (1) a respondent’s willingness to be interviewed, and (2) the interest in receiving study results. The questionnaire responses were keyed into a data base and were analyzed with SPSS for the following information:

- Descriptive information: response rate by demographic breakdown
- Rank ordering of items: means and standard deviations to identify the factors which were considered most important in content selection
- Inferential statistics to determine the impact on the responses to the student-influence items by the following variables: discipline group, preparation for teaching, experience, and institution.

Return and Processing of Responses

Questionnaires were received and processed according to the methodology described previously. Questionnaires and envelopes were separated, questionnaires were screened in a preliminary fashion to assure accuracy (according to target population) and completeness of the returns, to see that responses were received from each of the four discipline groups at each institution, and to determine the need for any follow-up. Subsequent data entry led to descriptive and inferential analysis of the data. Original questionnaires were grouped by institution and stored for future reference as necessary.

The preliminary screening mechanisms, and any follow-up are described here by institution. The return rates are also described and discussed. Based on their previous experience,
faculty in Virginia Tech’s Office Academic Assessment and the Office of the Dean of Arts and Sciences had predicted a 30% return rate; consequently, the goal set for this study was 35%.

**Community College Responses**
A list of instructional faculty was obtained from and reviewed by a community college administrator. He removed from the list any names of people whose positions did not fit the target population. Out of 121 questionnaires mailed, 45 were returned, a response rate of 37%. Fourteen respondents checked the envelopes, indicating that they would be willing to meet for a follow-up interview. Fifteen respondents checked the envelopes to request a summary of the results. No follow-up was necessary because the return rate was satisfactory.

Data entry proceeded with this institution being coded as #1 for further analysis.

**Liberal Arts College Responses**
A list of instructional faculty was obtained from and reviewed by a college administrator. He removed from the list any names of people whose positions did not fit the target population. Out of 109 questionnaires mailed, 47 were returned, a response rate of 43%. Thirteen respondents indicated that they would be willing to meet for a follow-up interview. Twelve respondents requested a summary of the results. No follow-up was necessary.

Data entry proceeded with this institution being coded as #2 for further analysis.

**Research University Responses**
The mailing list available for the Arts and Sciences faculty at the research institution included research associates, on- and off-campus faculty, and lecturers. Because of the length of the list, it was not reviewed by a college administrator. Questionnaires were mailed to 246 people on the list, with an initial response from 85 people. Six of those responses were incomplete questionnaires returned by non-instructional faculty. Other non-instructional faculty may have chosen to disregard the questionnaire entirely.

The initial response rate (85 out of 246, adjusted to 79 out of 240) of 33% was slightly less than the return rates achieved at the other institutions. Consequently, 89 e-mail messages were sent as a follow-up request to faculty who had not returned the questionnaire (as determined from the coded envelopes). In response, 18 more questionnaires were returned (20% of those who received an e-mail request), which brought the total to 97 out of 240 for a final response rate of 40.4%.

Forty-one respondents indicated that they would be willing to meet for a follow-up interview. Thirty-five respondents requested a summary of the results.

Data entry proceeded with this institution being coded as #3 for further analysis.

**Cross-Institutional Responses: Summary**
Overall, 189 usable records were created, 45 from the community college (24% of the total), 47 from the liberal arts college (25%), and 97 from the research university (51%).

**Questionnaire Results and Discussion: Integrating the Data**
The results of the questionnaires are reported in the following section with the use of descriptive data to indicate the response rates to various items. Some inferential statistics are also reported with regard to patterns which emerged according to certain variables. Also included with the reports of data are some of the comments respondents jotted in the margins on the instrument. Most of those comments were tied to particular items on the questionnaire, so they are integrated in the relevant sections with the data and the discussion.

Other comments reflected attitudes toward the whole questionnaire. One faculty member alluded to the difficulty of separating the content from the delivery as each answer was considered: “I have distinguished between what we explore (subject) and how (method) as much as possible.”
Some comments indicated confusion, such as, “I would like to talk with you because I generally find questionnaires incomprehensible and imprecise.” Another respondent seemed frustrated by the instrument, noting, “I am confused on all this -- cannot understand questions -- really hate them.”

Other comments seemed to be of a more personal nature, such as, “Good luck with your project!” and “Well designed format; I'll look forward to the results.”

Then there were the most negative comments, which were also reflective of a respondent’s attitude to the questionnaire task. One respondent answered the first section about course description (4 items) and 2 items in the societal influences section; then this natural sciences professor stopped answering questions, wrote the following note, and returned the questionnaire: “This questionnaire has too many statements which are unclear to me. I have tried to respond to some of them, but most are somewhat or altogether beside the point with regard to how I prepare a course. Please do not return it to me.” Another respondent obscured the code on the return envelope and didn’t identify the discipline, noting, “This seems to be another bureaucratic boondoggle. All this paperwork, compilation, etc. -- FOR WHAT? Get back to the students!”

Frustration was also expressed about some issues related to the topics covered in the questionnaire. Those comments are included with the related quantitative data generated in those specific sections.

Other respondents wrote philosophical comments, such as this note from a humanities professor:

It is my feeling after many years of experience with education that we don’t now nor have ever lacked access to information. What is lacking was a key to unlocking creativity which I feel is tied into the maturing process at all levels; that is, how do we truly expand our quality of choices in our everyday decisions, and how do we then act responsively and spontaneously to eradicate a corrupt vision that poisons every aspect of human culture?

Examining these comments along with the quantitative data is important for several reasons. First, spaces were provided on the questionnaire so that respondents could note questions or clarifications. Hence, participants’ expectations that those comments would be included in the study must be met. Second, the comments indicating hostility toward or confusion about the instrument may be reflective of attitudes held by some non-respondents who didn’t see the point in the questionnaire and didn’t bother to complete it. Third, if faculty do not see the relevance of these topics to their courses and students, they may have a flawed understanding of the topics and may unfortunately resist the kinds of faculty development opportunities mentioned in the section on future planning. Fourth, some of the comments tie closely with the ideas expressed in the interview section of the study, lending affirmation for the existence of certain problems and concerns.

Questionnaire Results and Discussion: Demographics

Questions in Sections I and IV of the questionnaire yielded data about the respondents, and that information is combined in this section to reveal a picture of this group of Arts and Sciences faculty. Section I focused on a particular course taught by the respondent, and Section IV sought responses concerning preparation for teaching and subsequent career. Considered together, the sections characterize the respondents.

Discipline

Respondents were first asked to identify their academic disciplines. A blank was provided for the written response.

The disciplines were recorded as listed on the questionnaire. They were also coded into one of four groups: humanities (including performing arts), social sciences, natural sciences, and mathematical sciences according to traditional designations within Arts and Sciences. These groups are subsequently referred to as “discipline groups.”
Returns from faculty in the natural sciences comprised 19.4% of the total; returns from social sciences faculty, 23.3%; returns from humanities faculty, 40.6%; and returns from faculty in mathematical sciences, 16.7%.

Descriptions of Courses Taught

The first questions on the instrument asked for information about a particular course which the respondent would consider as he or she marked the other items on the questionnaire. Some named that specific course (e.g. Freshman Composition) as part of an optional item preceding the first item. Those specific course names were not used in the compiling and analysis of data, but were sought more as an attempt to remind respondents that their answers should refer to this course.

The first item requested the number of students in one section of the course. With a mean response of 2.14, 45.2% indicated that one section had 10-25 students; 33% indicated that one section had 26-50 students; 5.3% had 51-75 students in a section; 4.8% had 76-100 student in a section; and 11.2% had over 101 students in a section. While the item was designed to check for a spread of respondents with all sizes of classes, it did reveal that 78% of the respondents had sections with fewer than 50.

The next question indicated a spread of experience covering all levels of course preparation. 43.3% of the respondents selected a course they taught at the 100/1000 level. 28.3% chose a course at the 200/2000 level; 16% at 300/3000; and 10.2% at 400/4000. However, the majority of respondents (72%) chose to focus on the courses they taught for underclassmen.

Related to this question was one about the percentage of students in the class who were majors in that discipline: 59% of the respondents indicated that 0-33% of the students in their class are majors. This figure fits with the previous item which indicated that most respondents were teaching lower-level classes. 12.8% indicated that 34-66% of the students in the identified class were majors; 28.2% said that 67-100% of their students were majors. Again, the spread of responses assured a spread of perspectives on the subsequent items.

Respondents also indicated the level of control they had over the content of the courses: 51.1% said that they choose course content independently; 30.9% indicated that they choose content with input from other faculty and/or their syllabi; 18.1% indicated that content choice was limited because most of the course content was predetermined. The faculty in this latter group did make some content choices, even if those choices were limited. A natural sciences professor noted the limitations of content control: “Most course content in biology is done to meet transfer requirements for acceptance at four-year institutions. Intro-level biology everywhere covers pretty standard topics. However, each instructor at the college teaching biology has some optional (selected by instructor) topics that he or she can expand on.”

Preparation for Teaching

Items 55, 56, and 57 reflected the preparation for teaching received by the respondents.

Item 55, “number of formal courses taken in education/teaching as part of a degree program,” yielded the following responses: “none”--51.3%; “1-2 classes” --17.1%; “3 or more classes”--31.6%. While the item did not establish a level of quality associated with any courses, it did reveal that half of the respondents had had no such courses as part of their undergraduate and graduate programs.

Item 56 asked how well GTA training had prepared faculty to make content selections. The results were almost evenly spread across the four responses: “not applicable”--26.7%; “not well”--25.1%; “satisfactorily”--27.8%; and “very well”--20.3%.

The third item related to professional preparation asked respondents how many professional development seminars related to teaching during the past five years. Their responses indicated that 25.1% had attended none; 40.6% had attended 1-2; and 34.2% had attended 3 or more. Again, the responses did not contain information about the quality or the source of those
seminars, but they did indicate that most faculty had been exposed to some kind of professional development program, whether through the institution or the discipline.

To create the variable hereafter referred to as “preparation” the scores on these three items were added, with values ranging from 3 to 10. A person who scored a “10” (only 5% of the respondents) would have responded that he or she had 3 or more formal education classes as part of a degree program, had received high quality GTA training, and had attended 3 or more professional development seminars related to teaching during the previous five years.

Respondents had a mean score of 6.3 (SD 3.032) on this preparation-for-teaching total with 33.1% scoring 3-5, 43.4% scoring 6-7, and 23.5% scoring 8-10.

One respondent wrote in the margin,
I am a grad student in social science. Currently, I am planning to attend a “teaching” seminar later this summer. To date I have only taught 2 classes at [the community college], with 2 more planned for the summer. I am very disappointed that graduate institutions don’t teach us to teach.

A humanities professor wrote, “I have had no training, ever. I have learned from experience.”

In total, 77.5% of the respondents’ scores on this variable fell between 3 (having answered “1” on each of the three questions) and 7 (a mid-level for preparation). Clearly this group had not received a high level of preparation for teaching.

Career Ladder and Responsibilities

To get a sense of faculty placement on a career ladder and to determine if the respondents represented all levels of rank, item 54 asked for their academic rank.

Their responses included the following: 19.8% answered “1 - lecturer/adjunct”; 11.8% responded “2 - instructor”; 16.6% indicated “3 - assistant professor”; 27.8% answered “4 - associate professor”; and 24.1% answered “4 - professor.” These responses indicate a good representation among respondents in terms of faculty rank.

Another item asked for information about the length of a respondent’s teaching career. 12.9% had been teaching 0-5 years; 18.3% had been teaching 6-10 years; 17.7% had been teaching 11-15 years; 17.2% had been teaching 16-20 years; and 33.9% had been teaching 21 or more years. The respondents included a large group (63 faculty) who were senior faculty. Again, this item indicates that the responses came from faculty at all levels in their teaching careers.

Respondents were also asked (item 60) what percentage of their job consisted of teaching activities, such as planning instruction, delivering instruction, testing, and meeting with students in their courses. With a mean of 3.91, 38% indicated that they spent 76-100% of their time with teaching-related tasks (response #5); 28% marked 51-75% (#4); and 25% marked 25-50% (#3). Only 9% of the respondents indicated that they were either not currently teaching or were spending less than 25% with teaching-related activities. One respondent disagreed with the distinction between research and teaching reflected in this item; this faculty member wrote in the margin: “Research is teaching.”

On the final item in this section, respondents filled in a blank requesting the number of students taught each semester. Many respondents wrote in the margin that the class size varies significantly from semester to semester. The responses ranged from 5 to 1200. 35% had 50 or fewer students per semester; another 40% had 51-100; and 25% fell in the 100-1200 range.

Demographics: Summary

The responses to the questions in Sections I and IV represented a wide range of faculty. However, there were majority responses which reflect the preparation of the largest numbers of respondents. In summary, the following list shows the strongest characteristics:

• 41% were humanities faculty.
• 78% taught sections with fewer than 50 students.
• 71% focused on a course in which they taught underclassmen.
• 59% indicated that fewer than 1/3 of the students in the identified class were majors.
• 82% chose course content either independently or with the advice of peers.
• 51% had not taken any formal coursework related to pedagogy in a degree program.
• 75% had attended 1 or more professional development programs within the previous five years.
• 43% scored in the mid-range on the variable describing overall teacher preparation.
• 52% held the rank of associate professor or professor.
• 51% had been teaching 16 or more years.
• 66% indicated that they spent over 50% of their professional time on teaching tasks.
• 75% taught fewer than 100 students in all courses taught within a semester.

This summary reflects only the majority of responses and creates a snapshot of the respondents, not the detailed group portrait revealed by the fuller reporting of the data.

Questionnaire Results and Discussion -- Influences

Section II of the questionnaire focused on the influences which affect faculty as they choose content for their classes. Following is a consideration of the results pertaining to the five major influences: society, discipline, department, institution, and students. The results and discussion are presented in the order in which faculty responded to them (see questionnaire in Appendix A and tables in Appendix D). The results are described with descriptive statistics, and respondents’ notes are included where applicable.

Influences -- Overview

Across institutions, the overall mean for the questions related to discipline was higher than that of any other influence as shown in Figure 2.1. The influences of students are considered to be important, but not as important as the discipline. While faculty were not asked to rank the influences as part of their response to the questionnaire, the means reveal that students might be considered second, with society consistently rated the least important of the influences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influence</th>
<th>Mean Overall Score Community College</th>
<th>Mean Overall Score Private, Liberal Arts College</th>
<th>Mean Overall Score Public, Research University</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Society</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>2.01</td>
<td>2.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>2.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>2.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>2.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>2.48</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>2.42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2.1 Overall Means -- Rating of Influences (highest in bold)

Societal Influence

The items relating to society are shown in Table D2.1 (Appendix D, Table 2.1). The means indicate that faculty did not see society as a very strong influence, with the following factors rated the highest in terms of importance:

• input from professionals in the field (2.91)
• personal experience as a professional in the field outside academe (2.81)
• the need for a responsible citizenry -- voters, taxpayers (2.43)
The following factors were considered the least important and generated the greatest agreement among respondents:
• the need for volunteerism, service learning (1.56) with 60% ranking it as not important
• local economic development initiatives (1.48) with 68% ranking it as not important -- One respondent penciled in “habitat destruction” as an example.

One natural sciences professor noted next to the item about the importance of legislative trends, “Only as they impact content -- e.g. fisheries information, habitats, etc.” Another indicated that the legislative trends were important as they related to the “content of trends in research and public knowledge of science.”

Another professor, also in natural sciences, noted that the needs of business/industry and the demands of a global marketplace are “detrimental to my subject area.” One respondent noted that the needs of business/industry “may have some relevance re student job potential.”

Departmental Culture as an Influence
The results concerning departmental culture are displayed in Table D2.2. The two factors related to the department which faculty rated as important were the following:
• consistency within the department, with the college catalog, and with other faculty as it relates to this course (3.08)
• conversations with colleagues (2.88)
These two items may reflect the collegial nature of some departments, in which faculty depend on one another for support with content selection.

The issue of tenure and promotion (departmental criteria) was considered “not important” by 66% of the respondents. One natural sciences professor noted, however, that promotion does not seem to be related to teaching:
This institution’s only basis for evaluation and reward is research $ which bring in overhead. If you don’t do much of that you are “not with the program and unworthy of promotion or pay increases.” Although all my teaching is excellent and my grad students and research progress are all fine, I will not be promoted until “significant NSF or NIH dollars are at hand” so why the hell should I give a damn?

Other comments written in the margins about the department include the following:
• “What is Departmental Culture?” (natural sciences)
• “The composition committee is more relevant than the department chair.” (humanities)
• “had no direction from chair” (social sciences)
• “I can’t offer a lab because of the budget.” (natural sciences)

Academic Discipline as an Influence
The items concerning academic discipline revealed faculty attitudes about the importance of various influences related to their disciplines. The results are shown in Table D2.3. The items which had the highest mean responses were the following:
• my own experience teaching in this discipline (3.59)
• available textbooks (3.04)
  One social sciences professor wrote, “Importance of books available and affordable, key factor.”
• my own undergraduate and graduate education (2.99)
The personal experience in teaching also yielded the greatest agreement with 64% of the respondents indicating that this influence was very important.
One social sciences professor noted, “Course content in history is somewhat decided by history itself. I can’t really choose to leave out the Roman Empire because of its significance. Beyond that, the text, my research and my own interests guide my decisions.”

Institutional Administration as an Influence

The employing institution was considered to be mildly important by respondents:
• mission -- emphasis on research, teaching and/or service -- mean: 2.27
• current institutional initiatives (such as technology or internationalizing the curriculum -- mean: 2.19

One natural sciences professor commented about institutional administration, “[It’s] all lipservice from [the administration building]; they don’t support teaching and service at all.”

A social sciences professor commented on the lack of information about initiatives: “Institutional initiatives don’t reach to the departmental level as yet.”

Another social sciences professor indicated that the institution could be more helpful: “I need more time to devote to my teaching, and the lack of easy access to technology really stands in my way. For example, who do I call to get a class listserv? Where are the handouts that explain all this in easy steps, etc.?"

The overall responses indicated that faculty do not find their employing institutions to be highly influential in their course planning. As these comments reveal, some faculty may even resent the distance they feel between the institution and their own teaching.

Students as an Influence

The section about students revealed faculty attitudes about the ways in which students influenced content selection. The items with the highest means are the following:
• individual student learning processes and styles -- mean: 2.94
• individual students’ prior knowledge related to course content -- mean 2.74
• individual students’ interests, preferences -- mean: 2.67
• student career choices -- mean: 2.60
  One professor noted, “Sociology is for everybody, regardless of career choice.”
• student course evaluations from previous semesters -- mean: 2.52
  A humanities professor made a distinction between the institutional evaluation form and a personal form. This faculty member left the item blank and noted, “I take quite seriously the anonymous review of the course that I prepare a form for and the students complete.”

One item which generated agreement was the topic of alumni surveys. Many faculty (52.2%) rated this influence as not important with a mean 1.76. Some may not see alumnae surveys (in which case there was no “not applicable” response available), and others may not see the connection between students-turned-professionals (alumni survey respondents) and students who are studying to become professional. Another consideration may be the high number of respondents who teach first and second year courses, those which might not be addressed on an alumnae survey. One respondent commented, “I have not received such feedback with regard to this course.”

On the topic of cultural backgrounds, one natural sciences professor noted, “Physics happens to be truly multicultural!” A social sciences professor commented, “I use case studies to represent, even over-represent, activities of women and minorities.”

Overall, faculty indicate in this section that information about individual students was used to plan the course named at the beginning of the instrument. One noted, “I always have several papers in the course and consider what students can do and NEED to do in deciding what these papers are to be about.”
Other Influences

Several respondents indicated that other factors influenced their planning. They added notes naming those other influences:

- diverse goals of various majors and their departments: “I must meet needs of 50% FIW majors and 50% biology majors.” Another professor listed the “needs of biology, chemistry and other departments that this course services.”
- “changes in textbook and lab books”
- “social climate on evolution and creationism”
- “general lay knowledge on environmental issues vs. lack of knowledge of ecology”
- current events detailed in the media (noted several times):
  - “When Waco occurred, I did a lecture on cults.”
  - “Events in the media are particularly important for this course; e.g. Simpson trial. I also require them to read the New York Times and test them on this.”
  - “Often current events will change the course of study. For example, if media violence is discussed in the news, we may spend more time on that.”
- demands of graduate exams: “The questions did not bring out the fact that content of this course is almost completely determined by expectations of what will be needed for the MEDCT exam and medical schools.”
- faculty comfort with texts: “My comfort level with texts taught was important because I’m a relatively new teacher.”
- gender
- critical thinking: “The course content I choose is often based on my perceptions of what stimulates critical and creative thinking and in general gets students excited to learn.”
- class size: “Practical considerations like class size (600) which limit what you can do and how you do it!”
- “personal preferences”
- “student need to master basic elements of the field”
- “growth of the field and job opportunities”
- availability of supplementary materials: “The difficulty of making course packets because of impossible copyright laws -- a real hassle; expense of photocopies for students.”

The descriptive data about these influences reveals the attitudes of faculty toward these five factors. The data is further analyzed in the following section so that inferences might be generated about the relationships of various features.

Four Variables Related to Student Influence

The attitudes faculty hold about these influences reflect the priorities which will affect their course content selection. The differences between and relationships among scores can shed some light on the meaning of the data generated in Section II of the questionnaire. The focus in this exploration of inferential statistics is restricted to the relationships between four variables and the section on student influence. The overall mean score for all the items in the student section of the questionnaire was calculated for use in these procedures.

Preparation for Teaching

As explained earlier in the section, a variable was created by clustering the responses to questions 54, 55, and 56, which reflects faculty preparation for teaching. An analysis of variance was computed to determine the difference among faculty at various levels on that range of scores (3-10) as they considered their students to be an important influence. Although there is a pattern of rising means in conjunction with rising scores on the teaching preparedness variable, there was no significant difference among the groups as they affected attitudes toward student-related influences.
The lowest mean 2.17 (SD = .462) occurred with a score of 3, the lowest level of teaching preparedness. The highest means occurred with a score of 8 (2.69, SD = .520) and a score of 9 (2.53, SD = .613). Interestingly, scores of 4 (2.43, SD = .536) and 10 (2.47, SD = .678) had similar means on the items related to students. The quantity of courses and seminars involved in preparation for teaching did not predict student-centered attitudes toward content selection. While the quality of graduate assistantships was addressed in one item, the quality of courses and seminars was not.

**Institution**

The institution is clearly not an indicator of those faculty who rate the student influence in any predictable way (see ANOVA, Table D2.7). A “cleaner” variable than the one concerning preparation for teaching, the employment by an institution is a fact which warrants no interpreting. Those who were employed by the community college scored a mean of 2.48 (SD = .618) on the items related to students; faculty at the liberal arts institution scored a mean of 2.33 (SD = .413); faculty at the research university scored a mean of 2.42 (SD = .523).

Despite the conventional wisdom which may suggest that one type of institution is more student-centered than another, this study does not support that conclusion. There may be a difference in terms of delivery strategies and support services, but the selection of course content does not vary across institutions as it is related to student needs.

**Teaching Experience**

Another single factor which could have had an impact on student-centered planning was the length of a person’s teaching career. There was, however, no significant difference among the groups as they responded to the questions about students (see ANOVA, Table D2.8). Faculty who chose the first response, 0-5 years, had a mean score of 2.55 (SD = .619) on those questions related to students. Those in the 11-15 year range had a mean of 2.39 (SD = .606); those in the “over 21” category had a mean of 2.467 (SD = .503). The length of a person’s teaching career in isolation from the other factors does not necessarily indicate any tendency toward student-centeredness.

**Discipline Groups**

The four discipline groups were also examined as to their ratings of students as an influence on their planning (see ANOVA, Table D2.9). The natural sciences group (2.31, SD = .454) and the social sciences group (2.31, SD = .499) revealed similar means on the section of items about students. The humanities group (2.46, SD = .6006) and the mathematical sciences group (2.52, SD = .460) had slightly higher scores.

The “discipline groups” variable did show up as a predictor of student focus. A stepwise regression was calculated to reveal the relationship of student influence ratings to institution, discipline, length of teaching career, and preparedness for teaching (see Table D2.10). This procedure included an ANOVA calculation which revealed that the discipline groups reflected a significant difference from the other three variables (significant F = .0433). Although the correlation was low ($r = .155$), the membership in certain groups can predict ratings of student influence. The other factors showed no significance at the .05 level.

The split may run across the skills/content orientation. People in the humanities and mathematical sciences groups may find themselves more in the skills camp, teaching students how to make presentations, how to speak French, how to solve an equation, how to use a computer to generate graphics, etc. The natural sciences and social sciences faculty also teach skills (how to conduct a lab experiment, how to interview a subject); however, they may feel a sharper mandate to “cover” material which their disciplines indicate that students “should” know.
Questionnaire Results and Discussion -- Faculty Development

In Part III of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to indicate their interest in learning more about certain topics which might be useful in their future course content selection. This section was headed “Future Planning” so that respondents who had negative associations with faculty development would not be influenced by that language. However, the emphasis here was clearly on the types of topics faculty would be interested in studying further.

Respondents could indicate their lack of interest by choosing “A -- not interested in using the information/strategy in my content selection process.” They could indicate their satisfaction by choosing “B -- Satisfied with current information about and use of this aspect.” They could indicate their interest in training or development by choosing “C -- Interested in developing more skill/opportunities in this area.”

The results are shown in Table D2.11. In summary, large numbers of respondents indicated interest in the following development opportunities:

- strategies for adding student use of technology and/or research skills to course content (chosen by 61% of the respondents)
- current theories about how students learn (54%)
- ways to tie content to real problems which face citizens/employees (47%)
- logistics of providing more student choice of content (45%)
- ways to identify and incorporate student interests, preferences (43%)

The number of these topics which are tied to student needs may reflect a shifting of focus from coverage of content to more student-centered planning, a need to be conversant in the “hot topics” in higher education, or a reaching-out by faculty to find ways to reach increasingly diverse student populations.

One humanities professor noted, My answers to influences relating to technology were made tentatively. In addition to the faculty mostly being white and male, still I find also that technology has become, very quickly, another great divide in terms of students having equal access to education. I think too much is assumed about the skill level of entering students re computer skills. This semester 36% of my students had no idea how to access the internet. The course is based on research skills, and after investigating what was available to students in terms of learning about software, I had to offer a workshop myself in the new media center. 90% of the group was female, but 80% of all students enrolled in my classes this semester are males. My content is directly affected/influenced by technology because content is affected by systems with which to deliver it.

Other points of interest include the highest ratings in the second category, “satisfied”:  
- ways to match course content to the literature of my discipline (65%)  
  One respondent noted, “My research is too radical for [my] students.”
- information about actual course content of prerequisites (62%)
- ways to include my own research in my teaching (58%)
- better delineation of institutional or departmental initiatives (57%)
- opportunities to discuss content with colleagues (56%) -- Only 4% of respondents indicated that they were not interested in these conversations; 40% reported a desire for increased opportunities.
- strategies for tying student feedback on evaluations to content selection (54%)

This indication of satisfaction may result from (1) an accurate sense of the strategy/topic and recent updating in the related tools, or (2) a false sense of security with planning strategies. One respondent commented in the margin that “satisfaction” shouldn’t be taken to mean that faculty are happy to be using the same old strategies, but that many faculty had recently updated on certain issues and had no interest in receiving more information:
I hope that you are not interpreting 39-53 in ways which presume that we should be interested in the various pedagogical improvements listed. I sometimes listed “satisfied” precisely because I have recently been so interested or so well trained in that area that I now am satisfied.

In contrast, faculty who have taught themselves to design content for their courses may not be fully aware of the possibilities for improving their systems.

In the group of responses reflecting lack of interest, the only unusually high score (46%) was tied to item #50, “Ways my course content might be tied to service learning.” Some insight may be gained into this response by noting that several respondents wrote on their questionnaires, “What is service learning?” This lack of information about service learning may have caused this apparent lack of interest. The responses may also be tied to faculty attitudes about the importance (or lack of importance) of societal influences.

In the space set aside for comments about other topics, respondents wrote the following:

- “No more information please -- main problem is glut.”
- “Where students go/what they do after graduation”
- “The most important thing for me to know is what students need to be able to do on the job. That provides direction. Unless the direction is correct, it does not matter how well I teach.”
- “As always, time is the key element in effective planning.”
- “How to motivate students to learn--I want more on active learning--need to learn to decenter myself.”
- “I understand 39-53, but would be happy to learn more.”
- “For teaching interdisciplinary courses, there are few experts or funds of knowledge to consult. The instructor must draw on his/her real world experience in research and teaching to develop courses and must constantly review, evaluate, and revise based on classroom experiences. This is a new and important area--so new that any reference to interdisciplinary activities does not appear in this questionnaire!”
- “Need more discussion of strategies with colleagues.”
- “I would like more info on greater student activity (writing) in a large class where I have no TA’s.”
- “More info on logistics of collaborative learning.”
- “How to make innovative, successful courses a standard part of curriculum rather than a one-shot special study which never continues within an unstable educational environment insist on maintaining the status quo. In all, I have been influential in directing/designing courses and their content so they are innovative, current and relevant for the student.”

While some of these comments relate to topics listed on the questionnaire, others are more related to delivery of instruction than the planning of course content. Nevertheless, the responses are useful for planning faculty development opportunities.

Conclusion -- The Questionnaire Findings

The findings of this portion of the study are most useful as a picture of current faculty: their backgrounds, their priorities, and their interest in development activities. The current power of the discipline as an influential factor is important across institutions. The fact that faculty express an interest in development activities related to student needs, however, may suggest that faculty are feeling the need to update their course-planning skills in the direction of students.
CHAPTER 3
FACULTY CONTENT SELECTION -- THE INTERVIEWS

Introduction

Interviews were used to bring a richer picture to the entire study in order to illuminate some of the subtleties involved in faculty content selection not ascertained from the questionnaire results. The qualitative portion of this study revealed a predictably wide range of faculty responses, the vastness of which is suggested in the snippets of interviews included in this chapter. From the painfully uncomfortable to the overly confident, from the text-dependent to the student-dependent, from the satisfied to the seeking, faculty presented their diverse perspectives. One person measured the chapters in his textbooks, another agonized about student evaluations, and another rambled disjointedly through the interview, expressing his confusion about the student perception that he was disorganized.

Since participants had completed the questionnaire and indicated their willingness to complete a follow-up interview, they were fully aware of the nature of this activity. Many participants were eager to explore and articulate their ideas about content selection. While they clearly did not see the interview as threatening and were often remarkably candid, some seemed surprised that our conversation was useful not only for this study, but also for them personally.

The richness of these interviews may be somewhat dissipated in the following pages because the interviews have been fragmented and tied to common themes. However, it is in these themes that we find the humanity, the unquantifiable component in this examination of faculty content selection. This chapter includes (1) methodology (2) participant backgrounds, especially their preparation for designing courses--results and discussion, (3) prioritizing of influences--results and discussion, and (4) selection processes--results and discussion.

Methodology

Participant Selection

The Arts and Sciences faculty who participated in interviews were selected from those who returned the questionnaire and expressed a willingness to participate in the interviews, indicated by their checking a response box on the return envelope. Numbers of participants were determined by the size of the target population so that more faculty were interviewed at the largest institution; the goal was to interview five faculty members at each of the smaller institutions and 10 faculty at the larger institution. This purposive sample was created to reflect the size of the three institutions and a variety of disciplines. Since the people who volunteered had already met the inclusion requirements for the questionnaire, they were considered equally good candidates for interviews. Consequently, the specific choices for interviews finally depended on the availability of the interview candidates within the timeframe for the interviews.

From the 45 returned questionnaires at the community college, only 14 faculty checked the box on the return envelope indicting their willingness to be interviewed. Six faculty were selected for the interviews, including faculty from the following disciplines: philosophy, English, history, biology, anatomy/physiology, and mathematics.

Out of the 47 questionnaire respondents at the liberal arts college, 13 volunteered for interviews, leading to interviews with 5 faculty. The faculty who were interviewed were members of the following departments: history, English, political science, physics, and chemistry.

At the research institution, 41 faculty volunteered for the interview out of 97 questionnaire respondents. This higher rate of volunteers may reflect the nature of a research institution, at which faculty may have a greater affinity for and familiarity with research procedures. Twelve were selected, including faculty from the following departments: sociology, psychology, philosophy, English, mathematics, communication studies, biology, foreign language, political science, and chemistry.
Data Sources

A standard set of three questions framed each interview. Within that framework, the discussions and questions that followed each of the following questions varied greatly, according to the participant. Often questions were geared toward elaboration or clarification of participant comments.

First, participants were asked, “What is your teaching background, including teacher preparation?” Participants were encouraged to offer a range of information in response to this question including schooling, TA training, and career path. Some named specific institutions, degrees, and courses.

Second, participants were asked, “How do you rate and react to the major influences affecting content selection?” To assist them with this task, they were provided with five index cards, each listing one of the five influences identified in the literature along with examples of factors which might be included with each category. The five influences were shown as follows: academic discipline, departmental culture, students, institution, and society (see Figure 3.1). No numbers or letters were used to suggest any order.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discipline</th>
<th>colleagues at other institutions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>personal research</td>
<td>personal education</td>
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<tr>
<td>personal teaching experience</td>
<td>journals</td>
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<td>texts</td>
<td>conferences</td>
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<tr>
<th>Departmental Culture</th>
<th>consistency with catalog, among peers</th>
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<tr>
<td>colleagues</td>
<td>prerequisites</td>
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<td>budget</td>
<td>follow-up courses</td>
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<td>promotion, tenure</td>
<td>department chair</td>
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<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>career choices</th>
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<tr>
<td>learning styles</td>
<td>prior knowledge</td>
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<tr>
<td>alumni surveys</td>
<td>expertise with technology, research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interests</td>
<td>prior, current course evaluations</td>
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<tr>
<td>cultural background</td>
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<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>current initiatives, such as technology</th>
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<td>administrators</td>
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<td>mission</td>
<td>internationalizing the curriculum</td>
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<tr>
<th>Society</th>
<th>business, industry</th>
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<tr>
<td>experience outside academe</td>
<td>volunteerism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>need for responsible citizenry</td>
<td>business, industry -- needs, grants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>social problems</td>
<td>economic development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>legislative trends</td>
<td>global marketplace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>professionals in the field</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3.1 Five Major Influences and Examples

Third, participants were asked, “What are the content-selection steps you follow when you plan a new class or revise one?” Participants were encouraged to list the steps in sequence. Others generally described activities in which they engaged, but declined to order them. No sample steps were provided to avoid the suggestion of steps which participants might feel they “should” include. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) remind researchers that problems are often “formulated
and reformulated” (p. 34) as the researcher comes to fuller understanding with new information. As the interviews progressed, sub-themes emerged that were incorporated into the standard set of questions. Other questions were added to the set, including the following: “What influences are missing from the cards?” “How has your process for content selection changed over time?” “What kinds of information or resources could be supplied by your institution to better support your efforts toward effective content selection?” “What advice would you give to new faculty about content selection?”

Data Collection Procedures--Conducting the Interviews

The following procedures were used in the conducting of interviews.

First, participants were contacted by phone or e-mail to set a time for the interview. Some chose office hours already set aside for potential discussions with students; one chose a time when she was supposed to be supervising students in a lab; most chose blocks of time when they were not scheduled to teach or hold office hours. Participants also chose the place for the interview, usually their campus offices for private conversation. In one such office setting, an office-mate chimed in to answer questions and clearly affected the participant’s responses. One chose a coffee shop; another chose a livingroom-style section of a dormitory. Participants controlled the seating arrangements, some choosing to sit behind desks, some opting for a less formal arrangement of two chairs together.

At the beginning of the interview, participants were asked to sign informed consent forms stipulating the steps that would be taken to promote confidentiality:
All materials will remain confidential. The audio tapes and/or notes from interviews will be transcribed only by the researcher. Interviews and materials will contain proper names, which will be replaced with identifying markers. Audio tapes will be erased upon completion of the project. All materials will be used only by the researcher. (Appendix C.)

As they reviewed the form, I arranged for tape-recording or note-taking. At first, the interviews were preserved by audio tape, but one respondent expressed discomfort with that arrangement. Subsequent interviews were recorded by researcher notes, taken by hand or laptop computer.

Before beginning with the first question, I identified myself as a faculty member and a doctoral student and explained the purpose of the study. As a faculty member myself and, hence, a participant in the culture, I attempted to build rapport with participants. However, Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) warn researchers against “over-rapport” which blinds them to the other influences in a culture. They also warn against the expert or the critic image which threatens the participants. These warnings were useful, especially as a reminder that some faculty may be wary of sharing their processes or concerns with a person who is studying the pedagogy which may not have been an element in their training. I consciously tried to present myself as a commiserating colleague or as a student of their methods, not as a design critic.

Once the introductions and explanations had been completed, participants began to respond to the three questions noted previously, concerning (1) background, (2) influences, and (3) processes. Participants were encouraged to elaborate on any aspects of those questions. Although, one interview ended in just 30 minutes, most lasted 60 to 90 minutes. While many participants seemed eager to continue the discussion, they had been promised that the interviews would take an hour to an hour and a half, so an effort was made to uphold that promise.

Data Organization, Analysis, and Reporting

Transcripts of the interviews were typed and filed by participant number and institution. The transcripts were then coded according to common themes. According to Delamont (1992), “The reading, rereading, and coding of the data should lead on to interrogating them” (p. 155).
Consequently the individual transcripts were reviewed repeatedly to assure exhaustive analysis in context. Once the coding by theme had been completed, the comments of participants, identified by participant number, were lifted from the transcripts and actually sorted by theme so that further analysis of the data was done by theme, not by participant.

For reporting purposes, participants have been identified only by discipline group. This approach masks their identity and further highlights the membership in a particular discipline group as an important variable in the study. It also bears a relationship to the questionnaire results and discussion.

Interview Results and Discussion: Preparation for Teaching and Designing Courses

Of the three overarching topics in the interview--preparation for teaching, influences on content selection, and processes employed in content selection--participants were first asked to describe their backgrounds, including their preparation for teaching and the span of their teaching careers. This allowed participants to ease into the interview as they talked about their personal histories. Of all the parts of our conversation, participants seemed most candid and expressive about their preparation for teaching.

Because the responses were related to their comments about that topic on one of the influence cards, the responses are important not only in a descriptive sense to characterize the participants, but also later as they relate to the discussion of influences.

Overview of Results

The responses about major features of preparation for teaching are charted in Appendix E. As the Table 3.1 indicates, 12 out of 17 who responded (61%) had accepted a Teaching Assistantship (TA) during graduate school, but some received no TA training. In conjunction with undergraduate or graduate work, most participants (13 out of 20, 65%) reported some formal coursework in education, including degrees in education or teacher certification. In general, the respondents are experienced teachers, with only two respondents having taught fewer than fifteen years.

Participant comments about the various aspects of their preparation for teaching are included in the following section. Those comments that were most illustrative of various faculty perspectives were chosen from the collected data. Every effort was made to present the full range of perspectives, whether in summary or as direct quotations. The responses swirled around four ways in which faculty learned to select course materials: training as a graduate teaching assistant, formal coursework, observation of models, teaching and associated academic experiences, and professional experiences outside academe.

TA Training

Of the 17 people who mentioned TA training, 12 had received a teaching assistantship, which may or may not have included training, and 5 had not participated in any kind of assistantship program. While most of the participants had completed doctoral work, some were masters level and one had completed no graduate work. Consequently, even the opportunity for TA training had limited availability for some. The comments included here represent the attitudes varying from the benefits of effective training to the consequences of ineffective training.

A humanities instructor described her TA training as “very useful.” As she described it, her TA program included mentoring, a two-week orientation before classes started, and an advising group. The advising group consisted of 5 TA’s with one instructor who had a course release for the mentoring job. The TA’s used the same book as the instructor (at least to begin with) so that they could coordinate their classes and approaches. TA’s in her discipline had to take fewer courses than TA’s in other disciplines because of the rigorous requirements of the TA training program. She felt well prepared for college teaching.

One humanities professor had “extensive” training first as an undergraduate tutor under
close direction of a professor. He described the tutorials:

The undergraduate tutorials were nonthreatening, but got me used to being in front of a group. I did some straight lecturing, which got me halfway. I was less overwhelmed as a TA, which was a fortunate thing. We’ve started that [kind of program] here. I ask a senior to sign up as a field study and be a tutor. The tutor sits in on class and helps with grading. I try to find someone who is moving toward teaching.

His next training involved working as a TA with a professor who was the coordinator and who created the syllabus:

I did day-to-day activities. The director also taught a section and shared his own lecture notes. I stole the whole thing. I used it and then started to move away in my own methods. He seemed a little too manipulative to some, but I was insecure enough that I liked it.

During this same professor’s last year in graduate school he assisted in another course. He described the impact of that training on his early teaching:

After I got my degree I stayed on as a visiting assistant professor and taught the same course. I used her model as a way of doing a big lecture course. I stole her stuff (the organization) because I was new. In the ten years since then, I’ve created my own worlds of what works for me and students. I talk with people at conventions about what they do, what books they use, and how they use technology. I need to know what to think about.

In contrast, a social sciences professor did not find his TA training helpful:

Those courses were cynical maneuvers to respond to students’ complaints that grad students were inadequate and professorate wasn’t trained in the craft. Some professors allowed graduate students to experiment, but they had to experiment the same way the senior professor did. Some faculty may have had too loose of an approach because teaching was loosening up in the ’60s. Bad teaching can be expecting too much, but the other extreme of ‘letting it all hang out’ was nonsense. At end of a session people felt good but didn’t learn anything.

One humanities professor was a TA in graduate school, but she had no training. During her first year she was a grader for a couple of courses, but she received no instruction on grading. She had had a better experience as a senior in college when she worked as an intern teacher, which included “at least some discussion among the interns and the master teacher.” She says, “I was not taught to teach; I learned to do it on my own.”

The level of preparedness for college teaching is certainly in part affected by the TA experience. In the first situations described here, the training not only prepared the TA’s but also gave them confidence. Excellent training helped to create a solid foundation upon which teaching careers were built. However, the comments made by many of the participants indicated that even in excellent training programs, content selection was not a focus of their TA training.

Those who were dissatisfied with the TA experience seemed to approach their college teaching at a disadvantage, having to invent the approaches to content selection and instruction which they would use in their careers. Poor TA training can lead to a teaching career riddled with concerns and false starts.

Formal Coursework

Another element in the preparation-for-teaching mix is the amount of formal coursework related to pedagogy. Several participants commented on the value (or lack of value) inherent in formal education courses.
Among these participants, the number of those who have taken formal education courses may be higher than that generally found among college teachers. This result is probably due to the methodology of the study, which allowed questionnaire respondents to self-select for the interviews, perhaps leading to a greater number of participants who felt comfortable and/or competent to discuss pedagogical issues.

The following comments ranged from accepting to negative; none was enthusiastic about the value of the education courses.

A humanities instructor earned a BS in Elementary Education and taught elementary school for five years part-time. After numerous moves and a variety of part-time jobs, she eventually completed a Masters degree and began teaching at a research university. She credited her coursework and her teaching experience: “As a beginning college teacher, I knew the basics about students and learning based on my background in elementary education. As a teacher, you take a student where a student is, and you go from there whether that student is 7 years old or in college.”

One professor in the natural sciences earned a Masters in Education, which required her to take numerous education courses, but she declares that she “learned to teach by doing.” She said, “It doesn’t matter if you have an education background. Good teachers learn their subject and do what works. I don’t remember anything I learned in education classes although maybe they had an effect, but I’m just not aware of it.”

A humanities professor, who has taught for 21 years and has earned two of her three degrees in education, says that her formal education courses were somewhat valuable. When asked if her training in education made her atypical among her peers, she responded, Definitely, definitely. I’m not sure that it helped that much other than I know how to write objectives. I shouldn’t say that. I know how to plan courses, how to think about what fits in where. I’m much more concerned with how things fit together, whereas I think other people are more concerned with “What do I have to do?” It’s more of a singular “This is me,” and there’s not a lot of concern about where does this all come together and how does this fit into not just our major, but with the students’ progress and where they’re going. That’s a huge difference that I’ve seen throughout.

There were a couple [of valuable education] courses, one that I can remember very clearly at the Ph.D. level on teaching. It was about teaching [in my discipline], but it went beyond that. In fact I still have the book at home. The philosophy of teaching and what do you think teaching ought to be about. It was before learning styles came into fashion, but essentially that’s what one course was--what are student learning styles and what is your learning style and what works. The other ones were much more practically oriented: ‘Let’s do a unit on -- let’s do a literature review, blah, blah.’ To me that’s okay, but it didn’t ask the big questions about philosophy of teaching.

Another humanities professor, who is currently struggling with her teaching, was disenchanted with the lack of formal coursework related to education she encountered as a doctoral student: “I remember, even as a grad student, being struck that in the Ph.D. program we had only 1 hour’s credit in teaching. We were forced to learn by doing. It’s an inefficient way to learn the profession.”

Her resulting lack of confidence still plagues her experience as reflected in her comments about preparing new faculty to teach: “I wouldn’t suggest my system because they may have a better system, a more efficient or more effective way to get where I’ve gotten. I get by a little better every semester. I have confidence about certain elements of the content, but I’m not confident in how I arrived there.”

These faculty members reflected the sentiment of most respondents, that formal education courses could have been more plentiful and more helpful in their preparation for teaching. The complaint that formal education courses are not useful may be related to the lack of opportunity students have for application of concepts; often they are not teaching when they are taking the
courses. They also may not recognize the usefulness of some information because they have no prior knowledge of teaching based on experience.

**Models**

Several participants mentioned the influence of their own teachers on their personal teaching. The professors served as role models although there was no formal mentoring relationship established. The consideration of models was one which developed out of conversations with faculty, who cited such teachers as an important ingredient in their preparation for teaching. Although none reported any conversations with those models about how content decisions were made, the models influenced the participants in other ways. Some participants copied the models; others rejected the approaches of faculty they observed as reflected in the following comments.

A humanities professor noted the absence of any reference to models on the influence cards used during the interviews. She said, “Positive learning experiences as a student influenced my content--my observation of good models who had a sense of humor, which is necessary.”

A social sciences professor echoed her comments, saying that he patterned teaching delivery and content after a model. “When I listen to myself in the classroom, I hear my major professor’s information and attitudes.”

A natural sciences professor indicated that the role models were useful only in terms of delivery style. She identified a “couple of role models, who had an impact. I think my style is like theirs, not necessarily their content.”

Another natural sciences professor, a thirty-year veteran of college teaching, said that he had received minimal TA training, an experience which required him mostly to monitor labs. “But I watched people,” he said. When asked if he saw good models, he responded, Absolutely and some were bad. Most of the bad ones just couldn’t help themselves. Some of the worst were wonderful people; they just couldn’t teach. It was a matter of personal quirks and characteristics and things of that type.

I began as a researcher and kept an eye out to see people coming in and giving presentations on their research. During the course of that you see models of individuals who would deliver things so well and so understandably you’d say, “That’s the way I want to do this. That’s the way I would organize my thoughts. That’s the way I would present it.” And so the best scientists and best chemists tend to be the ones who present the material in the classroom setting or in a seminar setting just superbly. The better the chemist, the better the presentation. They make it understandable.

So you have a lot of models if you just watch. If you know you’re going to go into teaching, just start watching. In graduate school you begin to see some of the very best people in terms of just presenting material and making it understandable and interacting.

[Graduate students] should learn by watching the people who deliver classes to them. There is no reason in world that you have to wait until you get here unless they’ve never had a good lecture class. There are plenty of models. I had wonderful models -- not a whole lot of them because I didn’t see that many, but some were just superb. I knew that’s the way to teach this course.”

In contrast, a humanities professor reacted adversely to the models he observed. He said, “My earliest decisions were influenced by what I had been taught; the methods I chose were not the methods I observed in my own education. I became an English teacher because I had so many poor English teachers.” He also talked about his students’ experiences with models: “I view it as an advantage that people have had a poor experience; virtually anything I do is better!”

This discussion of models reflects one of the themes which emerged during the course of the interviews. Because the influence of models on the future teachers in their classes is important, the topic crept into the early interviews and established itself as a consideration for subsequent
interviews.

Teaching Experience

Once faculty are on the job, their teacher-training continues (or in some cases, begins) via their classroom experiences, (2) their service on institution-wide or departmental committees which deal with issues related to teaching, and (3) their participation in faculty development activities. Such activities could include attendance at conferences or participation in on-campus workshops, orchestrated by the department or the institution.

It is important to note the high level of teaching experience among the participants. As a whole, they had at least taught long enough to be able to evaluate the effectiveness of their preparation for teaching, as reflected in the following comments. Again the nature of the selection process may have attracted this large number of senior professors. Faculty who are new to teaching may be more reluctant to discuss it or may be consumed with promotion and tenure activities. While one had taught only four years, the majority of the group fell in the 15-30 year range.

One natural sciences instructor discussed her experiences outside the classroom, which helped her choose content:

I’m not teaching the way I was taught. I know what’s important because I have been on curriculum development teams, worked with AP, and worked in industry as well as with research. I communicate constantly with industry because I need to know what industry needs. I want students to be prepared if they want to pursue a career related to my field.

Related to this kind of on-the-job training is faculty development, another source of information about what and how to teach. Unfortunately, one natural sciences professor’s response indicates the way in which faculty may view these institutionalized efforts to train teachers. When asked about the effectiveness of faculty development programs, he said,

I don’t know I’ve never used one. I’ve participated in some and found them not particularly much fun to do. I think the classroom technology type of thing has been very attractive to faculty -- to see that the utilization of some technology is important. They’re not all going to use it. They see how cumbersome it is to do. They see it as expensive and development of software utilizes so much time, but I think it’s good. I think the [teaching center] is a step in the right direction. I think the folks who work with that and have been working with it are real conscientious and dedicated to trying to improve the instructional delivery--it’s more than delivery. I have no quarrel with that. I think the money has been well spent.

While the faculty who commented on faculty development seemed to accept it, they did not rely on it or relish it. This attitude is a hurdle for faculty whose attitudes may prevent them from taking advantage of development opportunities, and for administrators who seek to advance methods for instructional design in higher education. Of course, if faculty have learned that such activities are not useful, they will decline to participate.

Another component discussed by a natural sciences professor was her work at professional conferences: “My most important training came from learning to present data as a scientist.” She talked about the challenge of “presenting complex information to people with different backgrounds [at conferences], making it entertaining, useful, justifying its importance.” She felt that such experiences enhanced her communication skills and made her a better teacher. “Being able to explain my work helps me justify my existence.”

A related, but rarely acknowledged, kind of teaching experience identified by one participant is parenting. When a mathematical sciences instructor was asked how she learned to identify what students need to know, she responded, “Having children helped; no education prepared me. We mentor graduate students to teach in our department, and I suggested that my
recent student needed to have children." Her suggestion was made jokingly, but she did discuss
the value of the parental perspective for college faculty. She also pointed out that the nature of
higher education may not be supportive to those who want to parent and teach and research. Her
prior experience had included teaching at a community college, which she also attributed to her
being in touch with student needs: "Community college students have unbelievable problems;
faculty end up mothering the students and become more intensely involved with the private lives
and needs of students."

The nature of these teaching experiences, their success and their inadequacy, influences
faculty as they mature in their teaching careers.

Professional Experience Outside Academe

Finally, some faculty had experiences outside higher education which contributed to their
training as teachers. They had worked as consultants or had taken a circuitous route into college
teaching. Those in the latter situation indicated that they were not like their peers.

A humanities professor said that she is unlike other college faculty because her preparation
for college teaching includes a greater degree of professional experience than that of her colleagues.
"When I was interviewing, I was told they were looking for someone with professional experience
to lend credibility to the program. They seemed unsure that what they were teaching is what’s
really going on out there. They seemed to wonder what I would think of them." She recalled that
most of her fellow doctoral students were "straight-throughers" who had been required to get a
doctorate in order to keep a teaching contract.

She also indicated that her school career had not been stellar, which made her better able to
relate to students: "I’m more like the students than other faculty who have had all their success in
academics. The outside world may scare them."

Two themes in this interview also surfaced in discussion with faculty about students as an
influence and about faculty interest in bringing those "real world" tasks into the classroom. Both
themes are included later in this chapter.

Interview Results and Discussion: Ranking of Influences

Once participants had discussed their backgrounds, they were asked to rank the influences
on their content selection by organizing cards in a 1-5 order of importance. Although they had
previously responded to the questionnaire which listed the same influences, they had not been
asked at that time to prioritize and discuss those influences. Many commented on the difficulty of
the sorting task, as they arranged and rearranged the cards, changing their responses even after we
had moved onto another topic. Some quickly responded to the headings on the cards while others
carefully studied and discussed the subheadings. Some had no hesitation and quickly prioritized
the influences, unwavering in their choices.

Overview of Results

Table 3.2 in Appendix E summarizes the ways in which faculty identified the levels of
influence related to their content selection. While the prioritizing of influences varied among
participants without apparent pattern, a review of the table shows the two influences which faculty
reached agreement on: discipline as the most important influence (chosen first in 14 cases out of
20--70%), and the institution as the least influential in their course content selection (chosen last in
15 cases out of 22 participants-- 68%).

This loyalty to the academic discipline and disregard for the employing institution were
reflected in the questionnaire results and are discussed here along with the other three influences,
which are scattered into various rankings, reflecting no agreement on the part of those interviewed.
Interestingly, these attitudes seem to prevail among the participants in this study, despite
differences in institutional mission. In an odd way, the attitudes reflect some kind of agreement in a
culture where there is great diversity of attitudes about the nature of education. On the one hand,
faculty do not want to be the pawns of their employing institutions; on the other hand, they seem to be willing to accept the norms established by the colleagues in their discipline, some to the extent that they are allowing the discipline to resolve all questions about content selection. While the discipline may seem in many ways remote, it may inspire such loyalty because it is the source of training and professional memberships. The discipline-related conferences and newsletters and journals may offer the only information related to teaching which some faculty receive.

The results and discussions of the ranking of influences are organized as follows: first, the most highly ranked influence: academic discipline; second, the lowest rated influence: the institution; and then the three most often in the midrange of influences-- department, society, and students. As part of the discussion of each major influence, a consideration of the subheadings on each card is included.

**Academic Discipline as Influence**

The card with the heading “Academic Discipline” was chosen most frequently as the strongest influence on content selection. So that respondents had the same understanding of the “academic discipline,” the card included the following subheadings as examples: personal research, colleagues at other institutions, personal education, journals, conferences, texts, personal teaching experience.

Faculty comments ran the gamut from highly dependent on the discipline to less dependent, although the highly dependent group is clearly in the majority. The comments included here are those most illustrative of those perspectives.

**Academic Discipline -- The “Driving” Influence**

Many participants commented on the importance of the discipline. The discipline-dependent faculty look to the academic discipline for guidance in course design. The comments included here which are reflective of the discipline-dependent are taken from the interviews in which the participant rated the discipline as the most important influence.

A social studies professor expressed this strong influence of the discipline most succinctly: “The central mission of my course is to bring the discipline to my students.”

A natural sciences professor concurred,

The driving force behind all the things that are done is chemistry as a discipline. It’s a strong academic discipline; as a national discipline it has set standards. The American Chemical Society is the largest professional society in the world. So discipline has a strong influence. What’s going on in the discipline is the most important thing: advances in research or approaches to teaching and the newest textbook.

In terms of choosing content, I think, “What's a modern course this year?” What do your disciplinary peers around the country and around the world think the course content should be, based on advances in the field, applications into new areas and into traditional areas?

Another natural sciences professor is guided in her content selection by her consultations with peers: “I need to know what other people have decided is important.”

A humanities professor also appreciates the influence of his peers: “It would be nice ideally, to go somewhere -- a summer institute or workshop . . . [to] talk about curriculum and come back the next year. It would be a wonderful way to learn to set up a class.” Although he prefers this interaction with peers, he said, “Course design would be solitary for me because of the nature of [my discipline].

These faculty had a strong sense that the discipline and their colleagues in that discipline at other institutions would provide good direction about courses.
Academic Discipline -- A Moderate Influence

Another group of participants conveyed a sense of mixed feelings about the influence of the discipline and ranked it in the middle of the other influences. A humanities professor said that he is not influenced about what students will be expected to know by someone outside her class:

I am not by nature concerned about the canon and the discipline although occasionally I feel guilty, like a rebel. The canon is not high on my list of priorities. Only a small group of people need to know it all to be literate.

I have an ambivalent relationship with the discipline, but I certainly use and benefit from it. In terms of knowing what to teach, I’m dependent on the discipline. I had to read other people’s research to determine what’s important to communicate to the students. Actually, probably my own personal teaching experience is most important to me.

I consider what do students need to know to understand the document and to understand the period? Part of that is discipline-driven. I make choices based on documents and in terms of [student] interest level.

Increasingly less dependent on traditional sources of content for students, a different humanities professor reads four newspapers a day and regularly reviews textbooks for use in class. She said,

I’m reading fewer journals. Journals have become so specialized. I can pretty much tell you what’s going to be in any journal before it ever comes out. It’s become a good-old-boy network. If you don’t use the right buzzwords or you don’t come from the right place, your chances of getting published are very small at least in journals [in my field]. Now I sent something off two weeks ago to one of our big journals, and I’ll be anxious to see if it even gets a reading.

Our journals have become centered on whatever the buzz thing is. I really don’t use the journals that much anymore. I use the popular press much more when I’m bringing in ideas for my teaching.

I get more help when I talk to people about what they’re doing. At one conference, we have several sessions about “Here’s what I’m doing” and that I find very useful. Or I’ll go to a couple panel presentations or poster sessions, and I can talk to the actual person about what worked rather than reading an instructional manual, which I find to be a waste of time.

I’m supposed to be voting right now on the name for our discipline. False distinctions occur even within the terminology people choose.

A social sciences professor also straddles the fence on the discipline issue. He says, I’m guided by two things, polar opposites. First, what is the canon? Then I supplement with interesting things like historians, religion, and non-Western materials that other political scientists don’t use. That’s considered a bit weird, anti-canonical, but it helps me cope. There are more than just western white boys who have thought about politics.

The other thing that’s guided me is that I have a surly attitude about the way the discipline works. I include radical Marxist literature, which is considered bad taste by others, but I find it interesting. A university means if it’s in the universe, it should be taught. I have students read novels, histories, and poetry. Dry social science technocratic writing is not the only way to understand the world.

These attitudes reflect a more complex relationship some faculty have with their disciplines. They seem to struggle to assign the appropriate weight to this influence as it is compared to the others.
Academic Discipline -- A Mild Influence

No one rated the discipline last. Only two people rated discipline even as low as fourth. One had moved away from discipline dependence:

I used to teach only the canon. I taught what I had been taught. I had no self-confidence to do anything else. As I’ve gotten old enough, senior enough, I’ve gotten self-confident enough to make those decisions without apology. A tenured full professor is as autonomous a role as you can have in this world. You have lots of power to thumb your nose at the establishment and some responsibilities not to do that all the time. I have the freedom to do what tenure was designed for. I don’t have to look over my shoulder.

The only other person who rated the discipline even as low as fourth is a person who is different in one important way from the other participants and probably from most faculty in higher education: she has not achieved any advanced degree beyond a Bachelors. Although she has taught for over twenty years, she has not developed the loyalty to the discipline which is evident among other faculty members. She said, “I hate to think people have too much freedom in their content,” when she talked about faculty who made choices outside their departmental guidelines. She might be seen as an outlier at least on this particular issue.

Academic Discipline -- Texts and Supplements

The consideration of academic discipline as a strong influence cannot be discussed without including comments about textbooks and supplementary readings. Listed as an example on the “discipline” card, the texts prompted much conversation.

An important component of this category is the development of textbooks, perhaps as repositories of the discipline-related wisdom. Based on the responses in these interviews, the choice of the textbook often drives the course and determines not only what content is presented, but also the sequence in which it will be presented. Again the responses run the gamut from those who are highly text dependent to those who abhor the use of texts. (Some participants discussed their process of text selection, which is included later in the section on content selection process.) The degree of text dependence may also reflect the degree of discipline dependence. Comments here are arranged to reflect the spectrum of highly-dependent attitudes to non-dependent attitudes.

A humanities professor seemed discouraged with her current text approach and planned a change. She sees text-dependence as a kind of giving-in:

Until now my lectures have been supplemental information to the text or amplification of a very small part of the text. Now I’m going back to lecturing from text material with some review of what was in the text and some amplification of major points. Maybe [the students] will do better. I’m tired of fighting it, tired of them complaining, so I’ll move to a more text-centered course. If I had all motivated students I could give them a better course the other way. The bar has been too high for the majority of students in that class. They are sophomores, not yet motivated by the resume, the fear of flunking out. I’m afraid I’ll bore the really good ones, but I can’t ignore that inability of some students to identify the important concepts. When they read a chapter, do they really know what’s important?

A natural sciences teacher uses the text as the foundation for teaching and learning and supplements with other materials. She said, “The text is a crutch the first year of teaching. It’s also easier for students if they have a reference. After first time, I can add to it and eventually come up with my own labs, customized to our available outdoor areas.”

A humanities professor similarly depended on a text: “The book tends to guide topics, manner and order, especially when I’m first teaching the course. I assume the textbook author knows what is important. This fall I need to make a web page to supplement what isn’t in the text.”

A natural sciences professor’s attitude varied in the centrality of focus. As an experienced
teacher, he had seen some evolution in texts and in students:

> I have experienced many changes in texts. The content has changed, and I am covering less material now than I did 28 years ago. I have to do more teaching now, whereas students formerly almost taught themselves or each other. We attract students to small colleges who come with the expectation that teacher will teach you. There is a dependence on people, not the text. Students use notes to learn from and to prepare for test; the text is used as supplement.

An experienced social sciences professor has little use for texts:

> I neglect texts in many cases. A text tries to come in below their understanding. I do use texts in lecture courses, but I am no slave to the text, other than “unpacking” the text for students. I deliberately choose challenging texts for upper-level students in senior seminar. Each chapter had a reporter to present the chapter, and kids would come in for conferences because they needed help with understanding.

> In addition, kids use the *New York Times*. That keeps the class fresh. I can guide content, and the kids see the relevance. There’s even a kind of prestige because the business majors carry their *Wall Street Journals*, and now the government majors carry their *New York Times*.

When one humanities professor was asked if her textbook guided her class, she responded, No, no. It’s a supplement to me, and that’s what I tell the students. I was always insulted in classes where a teacher would read at you, and I thought, “I could be at home doing this.” I look for a textbook that will give them background. I assume that many students come in without the same background, and I want them to have some perspective. So I look for a text that will give broad guidelines and backgrounds, different examples. I try to use the same terms that the textbook does, but if I disagree with something, such as definitions, I tell the students to cross out what the text says. They never bring their text to class and underline, following along with me. I’ve always used lots of current events.

A humanities professor, who also ranked discipline fourth, has a philosophy of text selection which she easily articulated. She describes her choice as a political act, reflecting her view of the discipline:

> In my 20th Century American Literature class I now choose the *Heath Anthology of American Literature*, which very self-consciously includes non-canonical works and works by marginalized groups. In the introduction to the anthology, the editors say that the choice of what we read is a political choice, and the choice of material for an anthology is a political choice, and the choice of an anthology is also political.

> I don’t use the *Norton Anthology*, which is straight canon, and that’s a political choice too. To say that students need more 18th and 19th century literature than 19th and 20th is a statement suggesting that you can hold back time.

> I never teach the same course twice because I don’t want to bore myself, so I change books often. In Contemporary American Novel I used a decade of Pulitzer Prize winners (’85-’95). That took the onus off me of making decisions. It was an interesting way to do the class -- Morrison, Updike, McMurtry. We talked about why this book and not that one received the Pulitzer. Some of my colleagues may not have seen *Lonesome Dove* as part of the canon, but it’s laden with American cultural kinds of things. Students read 10 novels in 13 weeks; they read them all because they enjoyed them. They were starved for contemporary works. English majors love to read, but they find themselves being stuck reading Dryden, Pope, Swift. Those authors are fine but not as interesting to students. They read all the novels and slighted their other courses. But that’s not my
fault. When I choose material, I know I can’t do it all. I have to make difficult choices. I know my colleagues well enough to know what students will get in their classes (for example, a grounding in the classics). I also know what my colleagues don’t teach: contemporary stuff, women writers, minorities. The further you move into the contemporary period, the more you realize that coverage isn’t possible. Instead I give as wide a variety as I can of what’s out there. We’ll also discuss how we should make canonical decisions.

Along with her political power of choice is her power to create when it comes to selecting content, a process which she acknowledges is important to discuss:

I do think it is important to be self-conscious about the selection of materials. This conversation is helpful and reminds me that the choice is a political act. What you do with the material is more important than the material itself. Any anthology could work with supplements. You can make anything into an important, thoughtful experience. That’s one advantage of teaching literature rather than psychology and sociology. Those of us who teach literature are lucky in that respect.

In the series of Civilization courses, I make my own text: magazines, or course packs or slides. That’s part of the advantage of having humanities training. I used art slides to get students to visualize modernism in an English class too. It’s easier for them to understand the concept if they look at pictures than if they read the word on the page.

Many faculty commented on their preference for primary sources rather than texts. They seemed to see the texts almost as pabulum for students and also felt constrained by the materials a particular author or publisher saw fit to include.

A humanities professor described the preference for primary sources so that students have a fuller context for their understanding and can also develop more analytical skills:

I set up a structure, but I try to stay loose within the structure and provide a certain amount of flexibility. That method determines my content. I’m a believer in discussion of primary materials, and we spend most classes talking about the materials. Students learn most clearly and fully about the past when you’re reading documents that come from the period. Historians create a different intellectual problem: they provide facts, which lead to little discussion. Instead I can ask for Confucius’ main values [as described by Confucius] while I’m also teaching them how to read the document.

A social sciences professor had a similar approach, also based on concern for the development of students’ analytical skills:

My course is not tied to a text. I sometimes use anthologies or packets of articles. That’s the nature of the field. I want students to read primary sources because I want them to learn how to read; most texts are watered down versions of primary sources. I also want them to see how the author figures out the problems. Students need the first-hand experience of reading primary sources.

Unfortunately, just as cost is a factor in textbook selection, she found it is also a factor in the reproduction of primary sources.

However, cost became an issue when I had to pay copyright fees for student packets. The readings cost $100 per packet of copyrighted articles. I tried articles on reserve, but that was not successful. I just finished and published my own anthology for the introductory course to make it cheaper. I can’t find other anthologies that work for other classes.

Once such materials are provided to students, however, she finds that their reaction is at first
negative. She then assures them that in a student-centered approach to teaching, she will work with them to achieve understanding:

Usually after the first week of reading, they’re depressed or wanting to drop the class or feeling stupid. I expect them to not get it the first time through. I don't assume they have everything, and once they know that, they’re okay. They also find out that no one understood it all the first time through. We explore the literature together. I also use supplemental material--movies, short stories--to pick up on main themes of the course and to give students an easy way into the harder material.

Another social sciences professor described texts as “useless” and was the most extreme about his refusal to use them. He expresses disdain for authors who dilute content for students and for publishers who take advantage of captive audiences:

Texts have too many pictures, are patronizing, and assume you’re stupid. That’s why I hated high school. Texts are useful only in science. I don’t even look at texts as a reference point; in [my field] they are generally stopped after sophomore-level classes. The last time I used a text, it came with an anthology of original stuff. But other texts are horrible and have the worst assumptions of the previous generation. The people who came before you in grad school learned this stuff. If you teach it, you reproduce it.

My students react to it favorably. Most of them don’t like texts either, but my course is more money and more effort. In [one class] they read a book a week. I tell them most of them are upper class suburbanites, and they’re going to get the canon in my class (what everyone tells them they should be getting in college because supposedly they’ve been scammed in other university classes). I tell them, “Now you can leave the university with the canon of western knowledge. Keep these books because you’re an educated person. It’s not the Reader’s Digest version (which some people use). There’s lots more in the book than I can cover. Save it; read it later as part of your life, not something just to get through college.” When I was a student, I kept the books because they were useful.

In other junior- and senior-level courses, we read books that may be considered graduate-level books. We should be using those books at a university. I don't give in to “This is State U” mentality. People at other universities are using good books; most of my colleagues are not using texts. Texts are commodities and are promoted by publishers. It’s a rip-off; new editions are revised minimally, and resale is nothing.

The perspectives of faculty about the use of texts or primary sources reflect the ways in which they see effective transmission of the discipline. Several participants indicated concern that a textbook does not reflect the level of scholarship faculty would like to offer to their students.

**Academic Discipline -- The Research Connection**

Another factor related to the discipline is the faculty research interest. While most participants focused their conversation more on their teaching than their research, some discussed the importance of that research as in influence in content selection.

A natural sciences professor was adamant that her research was crucial to her classroom choices:

I can’t overemphasize how important my research is. I’m an active researcher in the trenches; that’s a major factor in my teaching, that’s what my students are paying for. My two jobs are inseparable; my research is my teaching. It certainly influences the content of my courses. That’s how I know what students can do with the information, not just learn the information. Too many things based on my experience go into how I look at material or how I put it into context. Students can’t just read the book and get the that understanding.
I’m doing everything I can to be the teacher I am. I can’t do any more. I’m spending rest of my time being a scientist.

Successful researchers are good teachers because communication is important in both jobs. Successful scientists are fabulous teachers because they have to explain their research in so many areas, not because we know more, but because we’re good communicators, good justifiers. I know how to make science interesting because I love science. I tell students, “Don’t become a scientist unless you love it.” Certainly they wouldn’t do it for the money.

This connection between research and content selection was also expressed by other participants who thought it important to share their research with students. Certainly if faculty intend to groom a new generation to advance the discipline, this research component is fundamental.

Institution as Influence

The card headed “Institution” included the following subheadings: administrators, institutional mission, and current initiatives, such as technology and international efforts. It was this card that created the surest and swiftest reaction from faculty, generating very little range of responses. Two faculty members who did not rank any of the other influences ranked only this one, both relegating it to last place. The comments selected here are representative of the majority opinion: the institution is the least important of the influences, regardless of the type of institution. This reaction may also be a function of the interview sample, the majority of whom had greater levels of formal training in pedagogy and perhaps a keener interest in or at least comfort with their roles as teachers. The frustration they describe with their institutions seems to emanate from their sense that the institution is distant from and/or unsupportive of their classroom efforts.

A natural sciences professor indicated that the type of institution determines some faculty responsibilities: “The type of institution creates expectations. If it claims to put teaching first, that ought to reflect on what I do in the classroom. If it claims to teach critical thinking, faculty should require much less memorizing and more problem-solving.” He was one of four participants who listed the institution as the fourth most important influence among those discussed.

More typical of other participants was a humanities professor who said, The administration is so low because the operative goals never match their stated goals. There are too many hidden agendas. I’m too far removed; they don’t care how I do in my classroom unless the wheel squeaks. They will be glad to take credit if Michael Jordan were my student and gave me credit. They don’t care how I teach, and they don’t know my field. Education doesn’t seem to drive them; politics and the budget do. 

[Administrators] could give me raises and promotion based on my teaching instead of my research. I need more money for teaching workshops and better equipment in classrooms. The library would have a better budget and staff.

Technology was where money was and the equipment was. No one is talking about it now that the money is gone. My students have old computers. Money drives this place.

A natural sciences professor commented on what he perceived to be a top-heavy system with administrators as a new breed of campus manager:

Does the administration select a person or create a person? An administrator used to be a colleague who served the department or the university short term. Now the registrar makes decisions for the benefit the registrar.

[Technology initiatives] help. Experienced folks could be available to offer advice about the logistics of teaching. Faculty have to search to ferret out resources; they’re not easy to find.
The technology of teaching is changing. I’m reluctant to set up a chat line with students because it reduces their responsibility. It also infringes on my time; I get too many phone calls about what they missed in class. I’m being paid to do something besides handhold (though sometimes I wonder). The administration is trying to push us into a large community college. I have tried to be a diligent advisor. I take it seriously, but I am not going to send reminders or read the catalog to students or fill out their forms. I’m here to run interference for them with the dean’s office.

A social sciences professor in response to a question about the university’s influence said that his academic freedom outweighs the power of the institution:
Planning course content is the responsibility of the individual instructor. There is no role for the university beyond (1) a curriculum committee deciding what the nature of a course will be and (2) policy choices about programs to offer (initiatives). Beyond that, an individual instructor needs to determine course content once a broad outline is available.

I have traditional ideas about the nature of the university. Faculty are quasi-independent scholars. The university and the discipline help provide the framework. The faculty must be allowed significant latitude so that students get the opportunity to be exposed to the widest range of debate, concerns, issues and problems.

I would be firmly opposed to any program imposing content. I’m perfectly comfortable with the imposition of program change and course offerings, but I would resist any attempt to make sections match among a particular course. I’m concerned not so much about the creation of courses (an important university and department function), but only about course content. The exercise of academic freedom to determine course content is part of what a university is.

I’m not a total libertarian. Incompetence can be an issue [about which an administrator needs to take action.] There is certainly a need to follow the catalog description. Any course should be open to scrutiny by committees and administrators.

If a course is not a prerequisite, no formal collaboration with other faculty members in the department occurs or is necessary. It’s reasonable to have conversations about sequential courses, where there is a clear progression, say, in math. It is not so important in social sciences although we do have a need for developing statistical methods/skills. A department or committee should be reactive. Administrators could tell me I don’t do a good enough job on statistics, which might lead them to determine that faculty members shouldn’t teach that course anymore. They should hire a person and trust him to do the job although I know it doesn’t always work that way.

A humanities professor said, “The institutional mission is always published but never thought about. Administrators exert no influence. Their mandates may affect the how, not the what. Internationalizing the curriculum was an institutional focus a few years ago, but no one paid any attention to it.”

A social sciences professor concurred that the institution exerts little influence and even seems to minimize the importance of faculty: “I feel no guidance from the institution. I’m glad they’re out of the way. Administrators here don’t acknowledge that we exist. They don’t understand social science. They see us as underworkers to help engineers and professionals.

He did give the institution credit for providing access to technology, but found its other initiatives to be pointless, even regressive:
The [technology initiative] was helpful because it got me the computer; half of what I learned. . . is already obsolete, but it got me onto a track that’s kept me awake. Otherwise the institution is useless. The core curriculum is nonsense; I saw that as rearranging the jars in the cabinet. Of course if you had more direction in the core curriculum you’d have to argue about what the direction is. That wouldn’t benefit us or me in this discipline. We
used to have a better idea of what it took to be educated. The reading list I received to get into the university, my students are expected to read to get out of the university.

A humanities professor theorized that the institution ranks last in influence because its initiatives are outdated, confusing, or inadequate:
By the time the institution decides what’s important, I’ve moved past. Take the example of our university core. It makes no sense whatsoever. Courses are unrelated. Students don’t understand what they’re for. One person in our department has 500 kids in a core course although core classes were supposed to have writing. The Core continually changes (due to departmental and institutional decisions) which causes confusion. The institution just moves way too slowly, with no clear sense of goals. I served on the committee to rewrite the . . mission statement [for our college]. The college has 27 departments, and there is no agreement about what is important.

There’s not the right kinds of rooms. They’re poor for teaching in, not well equipped. We have to carry tape recorders to class for student use. It would be lovely if everyone could use the computer stuff, but not everyone has been trained, nor are there enough classrooms for the people who are trained. I’m using Web pages, but I’m totally self-taught. I’m now putting resources on a webpage for students who want to learn more about some background elements (that’s assuming that students have access). I’d like to take some of those things into the classroom, and right now I can’t.

I wouldn’t ask to cut back on my teaching time. I had 3 preparations in the spring. Some semesters I have 2, which is the norm. That’s minimal. Even if they cut back, people wouldn’t spend more time on their teaching.

A natural sciences professor agreed that the institution is slow to endorse what faculty are already doing in their disciplines:

Institutional spokespeople (and I’ve been one myself to some extent) are way behind the times in terms of what faculty are already doing. The institution is so slow; they’re always lagging behind the disciplines. Those who are on the cutting edge of the disciplines are those who are reporting their research, who are publishing in journals, who are giving the things at conferences. They’re the ones who set the tone for the discipline because those are the things that practicing professionals within the discipline have decided (text, what’s the best way to write a text, what things should be on exams). Then, from there, that information comes back to the department.

He goes on to suggest that the discipline creates the change, not the institution:

The university--what do they know? Unless a particular administrator happens to be from that discipline. So it’s been known in this university and by members of this department and other departments, including sciences and engineering, that interdisciplinary work is important and they’ve been doing it. Now the university says, “Hey, guess what? Interdisciplinary work is going on. We should be doing more of this.” They don’t know that it’s been going on for twenty years, and I’m embarrassed to say that I have been part of that.

And they also say, “How about outreach? We never do any outreach and so on.” This department teaches 50 professionally sponsored short courses a year and has done it for 26 years. So that’s the way the profession was going. This “updating professionals by virtue of short courses” kind of outreach everybody is talking about is old hat because the industrial members in our discipline said, “People are falling behind. They don’t find out what’s going on in research universities. They’re going to get further behind. How could we help with that?” Our professional association said, “We’ll offer these outreach
courses. Who would like to participate?” And the people at this institution have a long history of [participating]. Now [institutional administrators] are all saying, “Oh, guess what? We should do these short courses for outreach and professional advancement and so on.” So it’s really discipline driven, not institution driven.

A natural sciences professor offered this suggestion when asked how institution might be more influential: “We don’t know enough about who we get at the beginning of a class or what they do when they leave here. We need to know if we’re doing a good job. Alumni responses may reflect on the successful students. What about the ones who got lost?” She suggested that the institution could provide this information to assist faculty in selecting course content.

Another natural sciences instructor suggested that her institution could be more supportive by providing information via technology: “I would like to know more about students. I don’t have easy access to records. I need communications of all kinds with other institutions and industry. The technology piece is absent; I’ve done technology on my own.”

A social sciences professor said that the institution makes its focus known, whether it is technology or interdisciplinary approaches, because “I get a billion memos; it’s drummed into my consciousness that money is available to explore technology.” But she also needs support from the institution in other areas: “I need smaller classes. There’s too much diversity on this campus. I can’t meet everyone’s individual needs in a large class, so faculty start teaching to the lower common denominator. I also need better student evaluations. The current evaluations are useless, giving no information at all.”

A humanities professor suggested that the institution could be more vigorous in its support of teaching:
There is trouble with the bureaucracy of creating courses; the institution could ease that. There’s also some lack of connection about the valuing of courses. Faculty don’t think administrators value teaching; administrators keep saying they value teaching. Even though I have high teaching scores (3.8) and have won teaching awards, I worry that my research may not be enough to carry me through promotion and tenure review.

Faculty were most vociferous on the subject of their institutions. While some faculty made suggestions for ways in which institutions might be more influential, those interested in encouraging institution-wide initiatives may do well to support them in the disciplines, where faculty have more interest and loyalty.

Departmental Culture as Influence

One card had as its heading, “Departmental Culture,” with the following subheadings: colleagues, consistency with catalog and among peers, prerequisites, follow-up courses, department chair, promotion/tenure, and budget. The influences shown on this card were never ranked first by any participants, but were often considered as more important than two or three other cards. It appeared that the department is viewed as an arm of the discipline on campus, an influence more immediate than that of the institution. Out of 20 cases, it was chosen 5 times as second, 4 times as third, 5 times as fourth, 2 times as fifth, and 4 times as equal with another factor in the second through fifth positions. Again, the comments ranged from those who were dependent on the department to those who felt little connection with or direction from their departments.

A mathematical sciences instructor listed her department as the second most important influence, saying, “I have the least freedom in content [decisions] and the most freedom in delivery. I hate to think people had too much freedom in their content because faculty need guidelines.” She explained that the department is responsible for determining content: “Faculty groups do most of the decision-making and choose the texts and create exams. The department chair did intervene one time on a departmental geometry exam that seemed unreasonable, and I
appreciated his intervention.”

A natural sciences professor and department chair also listed department as the second most important influence. He explained, “We meet weekly to discuss course activities. We agree on course offerings and some components which should be included in certain courses. We hear about each other’s work and share the things that worked.”

One professor, who is also a department chair, chose the department as the third most important influence and said of the influences listed on that card, Colleagues, consistency, and prerequisites exert the most effect. The more political an institution, the more important the department may be. Departmental politics may force people to choose membership in a particular camp.

Consistency is important because of requirements. It’s probably more important to community college people because academic freedom is nonexistent at a community college. We have too many faculty and adjuncts and a more diverse student population.

I don’t explicitly influence faculty as Department Chair, but my implicit influence is in determining the status of their employment.

A mathematical sciences instructor who also listed the department as third appreciated recommendations from the department’s curriculum committee as they strove for consistency in multiple sections of several sequential courses:

[The committee identified] concepts that should be covered for any student in those courses, including primary and secondary criteria and text selection.

The department has been testing different ways of teaching and has tested two texts. We found that one text required more supplements. Students tested better who were taught with one text when they took the same test at end of semester. We realized that the more varied approaches, the more people you catch.

The [curriculum] committee is most influential. Every teacher receives a daily syllabus for freshman and sophomore classes. Three people develop the syllabus and the schedule. Sometimes faculty get bogged down and need the sample schedule. It allows plenty of time to cover the required topics along with issues of interest to particular faculty.

A natural sciences professor admired the collegial support his department encouraged among experienced faculty and with new faculty:

You don’t re-invent the wheel. You don’t reinvent the course content in something that you’ve never taught. You shouldn’t. You should at least have sense enough to do it once the way someone else has done it successfully. [A new person in the department should] go to a person in the department who had experience teaching that course. People are very willing to share. Go to the practiced instructor and say, “What do you do? How do you do this? Let me have your tests. Let me have your syllabus for the last couple years.” I wouldn’t think of starting without doing that as the very first thing. In most cases you don’t start from scratch in terms of teaching [in the sciences].

Then you would say, “If this is a large course or a multiple-section course, it’s important that I provide course content that is consistent with what other people have agreed upon, a syllabus.” Within that framework of a syllabus you have plenty of license to bring in things that you find interesting, anecdotal, practical applications.

Then within the department it’s the desire of the department faculty as practicing members of the discipline to say, “Well this is the way education [in our field] is going, and this is the way we as a department should go. This is the prerequisite, this is the curriculum, and so on.”

In contrast, a social sciences professor was not influenced by any direction from his
department. He said, “No one reviews the syllabus (and its 7 ‘required’ components), which is often turned in after the class has been completed. The department chair doesn’t know about my [specialty].” He said that because he had been the former department chair, he knew that the faculty members in the department did not look to the chair for course direction, but only for office management and budgeting concerns.

A natural sciences professor preferred diversity among sections of the same course: “I don’t have to agree with colleagues. We avoid consistency, especially with texts, although we agree on prerequisites. Only one course has to fit in with subsequent courses or graduate schools.” He explained that his department chair is unfamiliar with his field and “doesn’t interfere.” He complained that the institution is devoting too much time and money to administration when professionals should be able to manage their own classes. He said that his budget requests are usually filled, so his department is not constrained in any way.

A social science professor, who is close to retirement, found that his departmental colleagues seem to have little in common with him or his academic goals for students: “I don’t want to sound like a curmudgeon. Am I a dinosaur? Do younger colleagues have a different agenda? lower standards?”

Another social science professor indicated that the departmental influence is minimal: We have no course sequence. Our department doesn’t insist on some kind of continuity or some kind of certain knowledge by a certain point in education. It’s all a function of staffing dollars. We use temporary faculty in intro level classes. You don’t know what they taught or how. The quality is not always the best. The rational response is to tell them what to teach but not in this department. Enough arguing already occurs. Why add to the conflict? I don’t think we could agree on what should be taught. We make no attempt to align different sections of the same course. Actually it’s a joke in the department that students could take the same course twice because the sections are so different.

Colleagues can give you help, but most of them don’t talk to you about what you’re doing in your class. Prerequisites are never enforced because students lie [about taking a prerequisite], and we have no way to check it. We have no threads in a course sequence. Once you take the required 12 hours, you take anything you want as a major. That’s not uncommon in social sciences. The department has no impact on content.

Tied to this perception that the department is not influential is the sense some faculty expressed that they need more interaction with members of their departments. An environment which fosters working together in a collegial manner seemed to lead to higher ratings of departmental influence. None of these faculty shrank in fear of an autocratic department chair, but some felt disconnected from chairs who had more of a laissez faire style of leadership.

Society as Influence

The fourth card faculty ranked was one headed “Societal Influences” and included a list of the following factors: experience outside academe, professionals in the field, need for responsible citizenry, volunteerism, social problems, legislative trends, economic development, business/industry (needs, grants), and global marketplace. This influence was cited twice as a primary influence and fell in the mid-range among the other influences 14 times; in 4 out of 20 cases, it was ranked last. The comments included here reflect that spectrum from faculty who perceived society as highly influential to faculty who perceived society as minimally influential.

Among those who ranked society as an important influence, was a humanities professor, who ranked it first. She said:

That’s easy because if the stuff I teach doesn’t relate to society, it’s a waste of time. If what I’m telling them about ancient [times] has no bearing on themselves and how democracy works or who they are in life as family members, why am I bothering? I would
guess most faculty would choose discipline first. Maybe that’s different with [another] discipline. If what I say doesn’t relate to society, there’s no reason to teach it, and our field is the most basic to society. Maybe that’s where I come from. Without [studies in my field], there is no such thing as society; there's no such thing as a group.

A natural sciences professor listed society second, saying, “Students need to know so many issues in [science] to understand what they read in the paper -- contraception, genetics, fertility, AIDS.”

Another natural sciences professor indicated that citizens need a knowledge of [science], citing an incident when uninformed voters voted down the Blue Ridge Dam because they didn’t understand the proposal.

A social sciences professor listed discipline and students before society, but indicated that it was an important consideration:
Students need to learn to be comfortable with themselves. If they have explored their own ideas and understand what they’re responsible for, then they have a better sense of who they are and what they are, which makes them better people. I hope it makes them more tolerant. The lack of tolerance is one of the barbs that show up in the class. I try to get them to reveal the prejudices, ask them to re-evaluate their ideas. I tell them I don’t care where they end up, but whatever ideas they form should be the result of a struggle to achieve. I may disagree but I’ll respect them.

A humanities professor ranked students and society as equals for the second and third slots, explaining.

He pointed out that the factors listed on the card seemed to reflect the improvement of society, not the individual, whereas he sees the improvement of the individual as the means to improving society.

At the other end of the spectrum a humanities professor selected the last position for the societal influences, saying, “It’s a consideration, but not a major one. The implicit motive of [higher education is] to create a responsible citizenry. It certainly is implicit in the notion of social problems. Many have abandoned Huck Finn, but it contains an important social message. Literature can be used as a tool to teach people how to live.”

A social sciences professor also listed society last. She said, “I don’t see how society at large fits within the content of my class. I’m trying to teach people to think about things. I can’t push a social agenda in the class.”

The reaction to societal influences seemed even more varied than the reactions to other influences. These wide-ranging perspectives may result from the major difference between this and the other influences: the role of society is much more amorphous than the roles of the other major influences. Faculty seemed to have much clearer reactions to those influences which have identities, roles within the campus community.

**Students as Influence**

The final card from which participants chose was one headed “Students.” It listed the following factors as examples of student-related influences: learning styles, career choices, prior knowledge, interests, cultural background, expertise with technology/research, course evaluations, and alumni surveys. Among the majority of participants, the student influence was clearly not the
most important although it was never chosen last. It was chosen by five participants (out of 20) as the most important (or equal to the second choice); three of those five participants were English teachers. Otherwise, it was situated in the second through fourth positions. The comments included here range from those reflecting students as very influential to those picturing students as mildly influential.

**Students as Very Influential**

One humanities professor quickly, almost instantly, chose students as the number-one influence. She realized that she was unlike most faculty and commented on her ability to connect with students who are more like her than they are like other professors:

I’m atypical of types for university teachers, most of whom are INTJ. I’m the opposite in every category. More students are my personality type. I may be better suited for working with students than for intellectual life. Most of my peers made better graduate students than teachers because they weren’t typical of the other students around them. It’s easier for me to choose material for my classes because students want to read what I want to read.

My colleagues bemoan the lack of motivation they see in students. They say, “They just aren’t challenged by the life of the mind.” Where were you at 18? I have a better memory of what it was like at 18. I recognize and play on those youthful attitudes. I currently work with [honors] students who will become tomorrow’s college professors. I wouldn’t have fit into that school of geekdom; I was a party animal and a sorority girl. I can see in these students the kinds of professors they will become, who will then say the same things about their own students. My challenge is to help them get balance. I encourage academic success, but I’m concerned about helping them with social adjustment.

Later in the interview, she described four phases of a professor’s job, which she admits may be categorized differently by other faculty:

1. Teaching, 2. participation in the corporate culture (administrative work, being a good institutional citizen), 3. professional development (publications, more and more what academics do), and 4. student mentoring. Mentoring isn’t even on the list for some faculty, but I spend 1/3 of my time talking to students. They come to my office and say they have a question about a paper, but really they have questions about growing up. They pay $20,000; I owe them that for what they pay me. Students don’t always take advantage of office hours, but I don’t see it as my free time although some of my colleagues see it that way.

Success in the classroom is in large measure based on relationships outside the classroom. I can’t teach students I don’t have a relationship with. I talk with them, not to them. I just talk more than they do. I don’t want to talk with a group of strangers.

Another humanities professor first indicated that the discipline ranked as more important than students, saying,

Ideally students should be at the top if not at the top, but I don’t design a course with students foremost in mind. I think about the kinds of works that might be appealing to students, but I don’t think about it in terms of learning styles or prior knowledge.

The more he talked about this perspective, the more he wavered in that ranking. He almost seemed hesitant to put the discipline in second place even though his goal seemed to be to “create unity” for students instead of simply covering certain literature. He finally opted for putting discipline and students in the first spot together:

The academic discipline goes hand-in-hand with students, especially with a survey
course. The process of my course-building began with the discipline. My choice of content was dictated by what I had already read, but as time has gone by, students have exerted more of an influence. I use kinds of information gained from students to make selections, especially course evaluations and interests.

The career piece is not a concern. They might use lessons learned from a short story some day in life, not necessarily in the career. I may have accountants, but I don’t choose “Bartleby the Scrivener.” The process is nebulous. I just have a feel for selecting, based on my own reaction. I’d teach a story I was tired of if I knew it would provoke a lively response or if students profess to get a lot out of. I do teach works that are supposed to be important. A lot of what I do is designed to create unity. “Civil Disobedience” creates a bridge to *Huck Finn*, which then looks ahead to Whitman’s plea for equality. I’m looking for threads of unity so that I can help students relate individual works to major themes.

A third humanities instructor ranked students as the most important influence. She said that students are given a diagnostic essay assignment so that she can determine what they need to learn in her class. She discussed her approach to conference grading and to selecting relevant content:

I grade essays with students and try to give positive feedback. Students can see you thinking, why you make the decisions you do. If you want to improve your writing, you must write and get feedback. Unfortunately conference grading requires 12 more hours in our week.

If I can give them something that’s at least marginally useful and interesting, they’re going to give something back. They don’t want to waste their time. I teach the canon and new stuff; I see it as a buffet of basic tools. The content must seem relevant and interesting so they get engaged. On the other hand I want to push them by teaching topics they’ve not been exposed to.

We need to know what students are capable of doing, where their brains are in terms of growth. Sometimes we assume they’re where we are. I try to get the balance between appeal and stretching. When kids complain about not liking a book, I tell them that’s why they’re here: “If you come out of my class and you’re not changed, I wish you hadn’t taken it.”

We’ve had more of a problem lately with students being able to express themselves. Supposedly children would want to learn clear and correct expression, but that didn’t happen. We’re going back to teaching skills that students haven’t learned. We try to get the ideas out and encourage critical thinking, but we must balance that with presentation skills so that people can understand what students are saying. That’s what employers are saying, what professors in other disciplines are saying; that’s what we want students to know.

A social sciences professor chooses content with an eye toward encouraging students to formulate and articulate their own ideas, as opposed to regurgitating his:

I get students to overcome the reticence of saying things they think rather than things they think they’re supposed to say. By the time the semester is over, there are some things happening. Sometimes there is real change and they come back and tell me about it.

Everybody can’t teach the way I teach. It’s difficult for some people to put their own ideas out. I’m just another voice in the classroom, as vulnerable as other students. I don’t see myself as the professor who stands up and lectures and has notes. You need to identify gaps for kids so they can succeed. If you get a kid who doesn’t know how to use an encyclopedia, you have to take time to build that skill.

A natural sciences professor discussed the importance of relevance in determining course...
content, in mentoring students, and in understanding diverse student abilities, expectations and concerns:

Relevance refers to methods that students will use again; that is the motivating thing. Students have the opportunity to try the procedures that they will use in other courses or on the job.

It’s easier in a lab course (than in a lecture) to get to know them. We talk about career objectives. With seniors, I talk about going to graduate school; they ask for letters of recommendation. I get a better sense of what they need and what they come into the course with, what their expectations are. Students also get first-hand accounts of grad school from my two TA’s. Student expectations of the class are often way off-base. The best thing I can do is give them options. Lots of them think they’re premed; we have major responsibility to set them straight. They have ideas from TV shows such as *ER*, and they don’t know about the system.

The biggest surprise to me was the range of student ability. It’s easiest when you’re first starting out to take a textbook and go from there, adding your own ideas later, but the text can’t define what you’ll find in terms of ability. The hardest thing about teaching is finding the place to pitch the class.

It’s hard for students to know what’s important and interesting. In lecture courses, where large sections are tested with op-scans, I add a 6-point question at the end of each test saying, “Tell me something I didn’t ask you on the exam.” That gives me feedback about what they thought was interesting or important. It lets me know that students did their own reading and lets me emphasize that the next time around.

Student evaluations are important to me and to my department chair. We pride ourselves on teaching; our scores are high. If you don’t fall into that standard as a faculty member in this department, it’s a real problem. I take them personally. Sometimes I get a comment that leads me to make a change in the class, and the following semester kids complain about that. I’ve learned to take them a little less literally. I don’t have tenure, so I explain the tenure process to them and ask them to make written comments. One student wrote, “This person shouldn’t get tenure.” Sometimes I wonder if the students who complain even come to class.

I do surveys in all my classes with juniors and ask for their career plans. My peers are shocked at the results; they didn’t know what the students were thinking or planning. I would like to for the surveys to be used across the department. What do students think when they come into the department? I don’t know how helpful our exit survey is. We should be surveying them all the time, asking them what could we do differently so they wouldn’t get lost.

It’s dangerous to encourage the premed mentality, which is still the norm among some of our faculty. We need to provide for students who aren’t going to medical school, and we need to do a better job of informing them along the way. We need more courses to acquaint them with the real world so that we overcome the ivory-tower mentality.

One mathematical sciences instructor listed students as the strongest influence although she is limited in terms of content she can select for them. She does try to shift perspectives to fit student interests, career expectations, and feedback on evaluations:

The curriculum guide and committees determine the topics to be covered from a text that committee selects. I sometimes add other topics or problems that I think students need or that the committee overlooked. As long as I cover the required topics, I can make other adjustments.

[On personal information sheets], I tell students to write anything they want me to know that would help me. Students are candid, but their career choices are not always clear. I sometimes (not a whole lot) get time to talk with them about career choices
because I usually have the luxury of smaller classes (12-35). I may talk with them after a semester when I know them better.

I could adjust content if a student had a specific career goal. If he’s in a technical field, I would look at things in a different or extended situation. Most are so anxious to get through with math, but they sometimes surprise themselves. I encourage a lot of applied math. I lean a little more to that than the curriculum guide. We do lots of problem-solving labs and work in groups. Students’ cultural backgrounds come out during group work. Some don’t have a clue about the whole college scene. I usually help after class or pair them with someone in class who is more experienced.

If I know students are going into a health career, I know what to emphasize more and will spend more time on ratios and proportions. I explain to them how it will be useful; they’re more apt to concentrate on it if they know they’ll be using it. I can pull problems from departmental resources to relate to different careers. Sometimes I group students according to career and give related problems, teaching them what they’ll need in career because they don’t have any idea, that is, if I know.

I’m sort of influenced by course evaluations. Sometimes the class doesn’t have a clue. Some students think you’re a god if you’re kind and patient; they’ll give you everything. If you can get their confidence, you can get a lot from them.

A social sciences professor said that she had learned to focus on content and skills in order to meet students’ needs:

Students are number one. One of the challenges I find is keeping an eye or ear on students to identify skills that students need. I occasionally add in articles because I want them to do careful in-depth reading. I’m teaching them how to think rather than just teaching content. If students learn how to read a text and ask questions, that would be fine with me even if they remember little content. On the content-skills continuum, I’m over on the skills end, maybe not as far as a person who teaches English.

Students are really important. I want to help them develop intellectual skills. I don’t spend a lot of time looking at what they are, but I do try to figure out what they can do. I can imagine teaching as more of a conversation with students contributing a lot, but that’s not the kind of teaching I do. I want students to discuss course content, not based on prior knowledge. I see the classroom as a place where we work together. Students might like me better if I pay more attention to their concerns and needs.

I have gotten more comfortable with giving things up. Now I need to teach more skills when I ought to spend more time on some materials. I’d rather they understand if I have to choose among understanding, making sure they’re comfortable, and developing and covering topics.

A mathematical sciences instructor, who also ranked student influence second, commented on student need for content and confidence:

If I could get my students to not be afraid to tackle something whether they would fail or not, that would be what I want for them. I want them to say, “Here’s a problem; I have not a clue how to solve it, but I’ll try anything to solve it.” Any majors could use that attitude anywhere, confidence whether they like a particular subject or not.

Students need to know a certain amount go to the next course. I’m inflexible in that way, I wish there was a sense of fun in classes. I would like to encourage the fun, the experimentation, rather than the competition. Students need a sense of adventure, a sense of inquiry. We can loosen people up by minimizing the penalties for making a mistake. Lots of students come into this class thinking there is only one right way.

She is currently engaged in her own professional development as she reads literature which
stimulates her thinking about student needs:

I’m reading *Summerhill* right now, and I admire the real leap in faith to do what he’s doing. I wish we could make it so that they want to learn. School has broken the creativity. We may not really want to deal with creative thinkers. It’s harder to handle those who don’t follow the rules. We have to be on the side of the kids, but we do not always do that.

She concluded by citing an example of the ways she tries to connect personally and respectfully with her students: “I try the first weeks of class to learn students’ names, calling them Mr. and Ms.”

A humanities professor plans content by considering student interests:

I think about how this could be useful and important and interesting to the students. How can I couch this to make it interesting? I would think about what’s the basic perspective that the students have to have. I rarely teach a model for instance of anything; I’ll teach several different perspectives. You can buy into whatever perspective you like, and I’ll shift among models as I’m doing various lectures. And I’ll point out, “This is the way so and so would see it -- and this is the way so and so...” I give them different perspectives, so that if one perspective doesn’t make sense, another one will.

I try to think about what will be interesting and useful to them. It’s always interesting and useful.

I come in with some basic knowledge, what are some of the artifacts, some basic definitions; then we add on a theory. Then students can apply that theory to the particular subject they’ve chosen.

In one class, I have 100 kids. First we study how people look at the subject, then the next unit is what are the elements of that subject, all the bits and pieces they can look at. All the time I’m putting things together, and then at the end we look at specific contexts. I always move from general perspectives. Let’s all get a firm grounding and see that you can look at things in a broad way and then at elements and then at specific applications in context.

Even in a class with 100 students, this professor focuses on helping students to make sense of the course content. She, like the other faculty who identified students as very influential, refers to many of the components identified as essential in student-centered planning. They look for content based on student needs, interests, expectations. They are concerned about making connections with students by engaging them in conversation, eliciting information from them about their goals, and being responsive to course evaluations. Not one of them talks about simplifying course content; rather they focus on making it accessible for their students. These are the types of faculty whose content selection practices should be documented and shared with other faculty who are interested in developing more student-centered content.

**Students as Moderately Influential**

Respondents in this group ranked students in the middle of the influences, but that placement of students did not reflect any lack of interest in student needs.

A social sciences instructor indicated that she tries to identify students’ goals and expectations:

I ask them where they’re headed. I try to meet needs of students. I talk to them privately, or let them do a paper on a subject they’re interested in, or if there’s enough interest, we talk about it. It doesn’t take a lot of effort. I can be flexible.

My course needs to be the same as if it were taught at Harvard, but the course here doesn’t have the same entrance requirements. Teaching here may be more of a challenge, but I would not sacrifice quality. A student finishing the class should be on a par with anyone else. Community colleges are all about giving people a chance. We take
them where they are and can’t presume a person already has a degree or an ability. Some community college students may work harder. I don’t like the stereotype of community college students. It’s a privilege to teach here. I have to really teach because of students with widely varying ability and experience levels, all of whom need to accomplish the same level by the end of the course.

A social sciences professor placed students in the middle of the influences, saying,

I started [teaching] in a very traditional mode. I thought certain things were important to cover, and there was a certain way to present it. I tried to emulate the good lecturers. Then within three years, I rejected both [the content and the models]. I got bored with it; I wanted something more interesting for me. Also students didn’t really see the value in the content. Most are not majors [in my field], and they don’t care about historical grounding. They would like to explore the field. I can’t teach it all in one course, and I gave up on normal canon.

As she described this transition from the traditional approaches, she notes the influence of students and also the influence of faculty development activities, which led her to shift even more in the direction of students:

Another reason for the change was the dealing with people at [my institution]. I went through several faculty development workshops, which exposed me to different ways of teaching--more interactive, more student-generated. I try to think about what would be interesting to students. I try to hook students. Older professors may frown on what I’m doing because they see some inherent value in [the canon]. Part of my job is to bring that to the student. I do lots of popular culture, trying to bring the issues alive. I may relate them to movies or short stories. I teach the MTV version of my class.

When asked how a course can be student-generated, she replied,

That depends of course on whether or not students can bring topics to the table. Freshmen don’t have the background to articulate interesting problems or questions. They also have no expectation or understanding of what this class is like. Most high schools have no such course. Freshmen are clueless, taking the class because it fulfills a core requirement. With freshmen, I do more setting of a framework, presenting certain topics that are covered in all courses. I encourage them to try to relate it to their own lives.

She is determined to help students create connections with the course content, but stops short of tying that content to career goals. Instead she focuses on critical thinking, asking students to de-emphasize their diverse expectations and emphasize the analysis skills:

I don’t really want to bring their career goals into the class; I try to head off career applications at the beginning. I tell them, “The class is not going to change your life or help you to earn more money. This is a skills course. After the course what you think about is your own business.” I teach them how to think. Some topics do relate to a major, so connections are made, but I want them to find them for themselves or just not worry about it. Sometimes they send me e-mail messages about a connection they’ve seen. Many students direct what they learn to their future jobs, a college degree, or earning a good living; I sort of want to bash against that paradigm.

At the senior level, however, I determine 12 weeks of material, and the last 3 weeks are open for student exploration and presentation. In graduate seminars students develop their own topics in the 5 weeks at the end of the semester. They present their research to the rest of the class.
I’m influenced by the points listed on the card except I don’t care about career choices, alumni, or evaluations. They don’t shape how I design the course, but I care about students themselves.

Ultimately, this professor would suggest that new faculty have greater opportunities to focus on the levels of students’ abilities and exposure:

[To advise new faculty] I would probably talk about the students. The tendency of new teachers is not to have a handle on their audience. They think of graduate students who are very interested and have a background. The level of audience is the most important and most overlooked aspect of planning.

One humanities professor grouped the student influence in the middle position, stipulating that it was equal with the discipline and the department. She clearly struggles with responding to student needs and comments. When she was asked how important student evaluation is, she responded,

Even if I was tenured it would bother me. It’s a bogus number in a lot of ways, but it has some validity. If it’s a measure of their personally liking me, it wouldn’t bother me. If it's really an accurate measure of what they learn, it would bother me a lot.

Student evaluation is a large part of FAR. Peer reviews can be helpful but are not accounted for. No one looks to see how I use new materials each semester. 19-year-olds are telling me whether I’m good, whether the text is right.

She also noted that evaluations are tied to her shifting of course content:

I change the course content each semester to keep from being bored myself. I get ideas at a conference, get new ideas from reviewing texts, an idea to make it easier for them to grasp something or to reinforce a concept. It’s a constant upgrade; sometimes the new stuff doesn’t work out and I have to ditch it. One class told me they needed free time, so I reduced the requirements the next semester. I gave them more unstructured time and got the lowest rating because students said it was like an independent study.

I have made shifts mid-semester. I could focus on another approach if a couple kids in a small class ask. I can't change in a large class; change freaks a big class.

Aside from her willingness to shift content when possible, she expressed dismay at some of the attitudes she sees in the classroom and concern for students who have problems:

I had expected majors would be eager to learn. I flunked out of school because I tried to do it all the night before. They can’t get that by me. I’m attracted to the good students who are drifting and the poor students who are working hard. I tell them, “I wasn’t an all-A student; I don’t think less of you because this paper is not good.”

A social sciences professor says that he wants to make classes important for students because he remembers not liking classes he didn’t get anything out of as a student. However, he finds that his students have different agendas than he did:

I’m not like many of my students. Students can find the quality even in a large university. The first year in a university attempts to get everybody up to speed, screen out people who shouldn’t be there, give people room to run around.

Students are less conscientious and less interested than I was. Students wanted to be teachers then; now they want to be on Wall Street. There’s a different context. I’m the first to go to a university in my family. They expected me to work and I did.

Because he is unlike his students, he describes the ways in which he connects with students, as
reflected in student evaluations:

I always get great evaluations. They don’t have an effect though. They’re useful because they say something about books or experiments I try. I’ve won a lot of teaching awards, but evaluations never have helped. What students want is not what colleagues and the institution want. Awards provide a useful symbolic purpose.

I talk to students, read syllabi, check out required books and learn more. As a student I pushed for evaluations through the student union; we gathered information and published it. It’s wrong to think people don’t take courses because they’re hard. Our current evaluations are developed by administrators and used to punish. They can use them to deny you tenure, but they’re rarely used to give you tenure. The system of honors and awards is tied only to those things; it’s incredibly bureaucratized. Good teachers can get alienated if they don’t want to keep up of the dossier and play the game. Entire departments have a machine established to play the game for them.

The evaluations are better than nothing, but the way data is interpreted and used is faulty. It is rare that it would affect content. I know something isn’t working before they do. They’re always going to have a problem with the material: too liberal, too conservative, something.

I think they should do lots more than they expect to do. Some professors say they shouldn’t have to read more than one book a semester, and that’s a text supplemented by two or three articles out of a packet. That’s a joke. They accuse me of child abuse if I expect them to do more. Those professors are the problem in reducing student expectations. That’s a function of big classes. Engineers expect to do more, but they don’t want to do a lot of reading; architecture students expect to work a lot; most arts and sciences and business students and human resources students expect not to work very hard.

Careerism is useless. Most majors need a liberal education, but people don’t want to hear that, that their education will make them less servile and more free. The job market is useless to me and my discipline. The university is going too much that way. We’re going to be blindsided by training, and eventually people will learn at home from a video.

A natural sciences professor said that the success of students is his guide to knowing when to shift content:

First, I see how students do. Second, my own knowledge of the discipline, my interest in various topics, often colors an approach to things—interests and emphasis. They all cover the same thing, but they emphasize different aspects.

I look at student performance. How well are they doing? Are they grasping the topics? Are they of importance to those students in their other courses, and that’s something you learn if you teach a particular course. You see what students are taking either concurrently with that course or the next year.

He also seeks information about student needs from the departments in which they are majors:

It’s important to know what departments students are coming from. You have interaction (both by seeking it out and unsolicited) with faculty members in those departments. Faculty come over and talk to us and say, “It would be helpful to our students if you would emphasize this aspect in your class. Faculty have never been shy about giving feedback, and we’ve never been shy about trying to accommodate. So that has a lot to do with it—not only the needs of the students, but also the curriculum.

Those things being said, we want the students to be successful and learn in the context of what the discipline as it advances has, the kinds of things that it has set for practicing professional to do, so we want to do those things with and to the
students.

He then commented on the practical applications of that information to students’ everyday lives:
It’s intellectually very satisfying to see students learn and get a feel for my subject.
I saw that happen this spring with some students; two of them came to visit me and one said, “I know I’m a nerd now because I look at the composition on shampoo bottles and try to picture the structure of the organic component.” That’s what it’s all about. They had just talked about that in class.

Although this next social sciences professor listed the student influence as second most important, his comments reveal frustration with those students. He expressed concern about his need to reduce complexities for today’s students. He opened the interview by saying that he feels pressure to put his course materials online, but he refuses to do that because it would relieve students of the responsibility to get to class. He said he had already “dumbed down” his classes in last few years. While he believes students are important, he is finding fewer and fewer ways to relate to them as he nears retirement, saying “I don’t share enough of their culture anymore, let alone ideals and attitudes.” He explained,

Students are just not reading. I have had to reduce the number of topics and complexity in my course. I don’t know how valid my measures are because students don’t want to talk in class. When they say they don’t know, maybe they do know. They’re not doing as well on exams even though I thought I was choosing easy test items. I included more factual memory stuff, but students did poorly. I have even said something that’s gobbledy gook and they write it down; they don’t process it. Students served a long and arduous apprenticeship in that kind of learning: regurgitate, write it down exactly, no processing.

To illustrate this he described a day in class when he “filled the board with writing” as he explained a topic; his back was to the students. Then he turned to them and said, “Isn’t that beautiful?” He described their reaction: “They were yawning and didn’t respond. I closed my books and walked out of the room.” He said that this diminished ability of students has also diminished the fun of teaching:

No, it’s not still fun. I do like grad students who are interested and my own research. There are some exciting things; the university allows me to research. I always hire or make use of undergrads and graduate students, but the majority don’t care. Practiced blasé faces look back at me in class. I do my course, not just talk about it. I do bring these ideas into the classroom, but students don’t care. Undergrads have opportunities to research, but most would rather see a video. They don’t want to do hard work; students think learning is passive. I even warn kids that I’ll call on them; they’re no longer embarrassed by not knowing. Even my better students don’t want to bother. I’m even seeing this lack of interest in grad students and younger colleagues.

As a group I know [my students], but there are some responsive individuals I talk to in class. The rest are welcome to listen. Those interested people are a diminishing group.

His frustration is increased by mediocre student evaluations and extra teaching assignments:

I get median teaching ratings from students according to department averages. My teaching scores have slipped in the last couple years. I teach three courses a semester now. Isn’t that sad? I’m being punished by [extra] teaching.

I was asking students for evaluations before the university required them. I asked for something written out. I don’t believe in blind reviews. Reviews should be submitted
after grades are posted. The numbers aren’t useful, nor are the questions. The numbers are used to justify faculty reviews, but those numbers aren’t really precise. Equal weight is given to the student who has missed 20 classes as to one who has been there every time.

This lack of interaction with students seems to have led to a resignation about his role as a professor:

I would prefer to be liked, but I just want have an effect on them. If they remember me as hard, that’s okay too. But I wonder if I’m effective. I feel like I’m at war. I worry about the future of my profession. I shouldn’t have to gird my loins and go into battle.

Although this professor is obviously affected by his students, he seems to have given up hope of ever understanding them. His defense seems to be to blame the students, rather than find new ways to match content to new generations of students. His classroom has become a battlefield.

Students Ranked Low Among the Influences

A natural sciences professor rated the student influence fourth, saying, I can’t design around what students want to do. They don’t know what they need to know, so they need exposure to lots of different things. Within the framework established by 1, 2, and 3 [discipline, society and department], I meet the needs of students to the best of my ability.

A social sciences professor ranked the students low among the priorities but indicated that his perception of what students need is important as he selects content:

No course is taught just for students. Society, discipline, and students flip flop in importance as influence with students usually lowest of those three. I make lots of choices based on where students are or where they need to be, not just based on student appeal. Student feedback is important, I but need to hear their comments a couple times before I react.

A social sciences professor acknowledged the importance of some of the examples of student influence, but negated the power of others:

We must be aware of their culture, expertise, and prior knowledge. Those are always important. They’re always there regardless of the other influences. I don’t think about course evaluations or alumni surveys. Student interest is irrelevant. They take the course because they’re interested. It’s the same with career choices; they’re not important.

Only rarely is learning style important. In general I have such a range of learning styles. I implicitly decided (maybe I never thought about it) to chose a one-size-fits-all. I once taught an honors course for which I completely changed the text materials, thoroughly modifying the course content. It was a smaller class with much more discussion. I let students decide how to be evaluated. Even among those honors classes there were differences. Some hated one book or another that had different approaches and made you think different ways. You would have to enroll students based on learning styles. Maybe there are theories and methods I don’t know, but I haven’t thought much about how different learning styles influence content.

I don’t make the assumption that students at certain levels have certain prior knowledge. I don’t assume statistical ability. Course evaluations don’t influence content. Good evaluations wouldn’t make me think that I should use the same content again. Students almost always don’t like the text regardless of pictures and diagrams or other aids.
Even the faculty who ranked the student influence as low as fourth, did not dismiss the power of that influence. Instead, they seemed to re-frame the discussion in terms of balancing the influences. They also seemed to believe that they should make content decisions in a rather autocratic fashion because they alone know what students need. They employ no means to determine the accuracy of their assumptions, nor do they gather data about the students from the students themselves.

Student Influence Compared to Other Influences

The ranking of influences reveals much about faculty perspectives, especially their attitudes toward student-centeredness in content selection.

First, there seems to be little agreement about the importance of students as an influence. They were never put in last place, but participants sprinkled the student influence among the four other places with no apparent pattern. Perhaps the student influence has no clear identity or spokesman. If so, faculty may simply have a harder time recognizing the importance of such an influence.

The perspectives offered by those who ranked students as an important influence suggest that a student-centered approach springs from a sense of student needs. While none of these faculty indicated that they had undertaken a formal needs assessment, they had informally collected data about students to build basic understandings of student interests and needs. These faculty seem determined to fit the content to the students.

Some of those who ranked students low on the influence list also voiced frustrations in dealing with students. These participants wanted to meet student needs, but found the job increasingly taxing. While generational differences may have caused such a divide, the faculty who expressed this frustration seemed to have few tools to bridge the gap. Certainly they had done no needs assessment to determine the needs of current college students.

Interview Results and Discussion: Process of Selecting Course Content

The final segment of the interviews included a discussion of content selection process. Participants were asked to describe the process they follow when they revise an existing course or plan a course they have not taught. Some took this response a step further when they described how they would advise new faculty to create or revise a course. Although this discussion had fewer prescribed components than the discussion of influences, three topics emerged from the conversations: (1) the ways in which faculty change their content selection as they progress through their careers, (2) the steps they generally follow as they choose content for a new or revised course, and (3) informal criteria they consider when choosing texts or other materials.

Change in Process Over Teaching Career

As faculty described their content selection processes, they were asked if those processes had evolved over the course of their careers. Many agreed that they had honed their processes with experience.

A social sciences professor described what he saw as a typical pattern of growth:

Everybody starts off teaching first courses by using your grad school notes, and notes for your prelims. You get the best, hardest book that you wouldn’t take into the classroom, and you get as far as you can with it. You fear you'll run out of material, so you take too long with the early stuff.

As you progress, you know more. You attend conferences and keep adding. Then something has to go as the field grows. You can leave undergrads behind quickly if you don’t simplify and entertain. Teaching is more like producing something. You’re the producer of the learning event, not the sole authority. It was good preparation to begin teaching in the 60’s when no one was an authority.
A natural sciences professor said, “The number of topics has gone down though there’s new information in those areas, too much information. I can’t cover a book in a year; it’s too frustrating to cover everything. I try to cut out things that they’re likely to get somewhere else.”

A social sciences professor described the changes she has made in this way:

I still plan the course around a reader and use primary sources and discussion. I still follow a model professor I had in grad school. However, I have added other things to do in class beside discussion of primary sources. I’m making choices about content differently now.

In graduate school my teaching came out of notes from previous classes; I would then add from books I was reading. Now I’m a lot more interested in education questions like “What does the student need to know?” I’m not just teaching something because I want students to be able to recite certain things about it. I’m not data driven. I mostly want students to understand the period.

I’m not into personal relevance. I don’t use class time for students to apply information to their own experience, but maybe I should give them more time to make the personal connections. Students are number one—not so much what they come in with, but where they’re going.

I have gotten more comfortable with giving things up. I now need to teach more skills. I ought to spend more time on some materials. Between making sure they’re comfortable and understanding, I would rather they understand the topics.

A humanities instructor described her growth in the selection process:

Exposure from your past is probably the most important. I don’t teach the same way someone taught me. You can’t be authentic if you’re just copying. Certain styles and techniques are available, but people have to choose their own. A teaching style can’t be forced; it comes from who you are. The trends in my earlier career led me to depend on the canon and guidance from my department chair (not so much because of inexperience but because of the nature of the discipline and the department). Now I have more freedom in selections.

A science professor laughed as he commented,

I did a lot of things as an early-career teacher that I wouldn’t do anymore. I think I’ve become more and more aware and tried to move toward presenting material that will be useful to the students, either in subsequent courses, in preparing them for life, or in making them aware of the modern nature of that discipline.

The comments relating to evolution of the selection process are reflective of faculty willingness to learn from experience and to improve their approaches as they move through their careers. Unfortunately, that learning seems to be isolated. Without a discussion or study of effective selection processes in their training, faculty are relegated to a slower, self-education model of learning. Ironically, as they create their own systems they do seem to be “reinventing the wheel” of instructional design.

Steps in the Content Selection Process

In response to the question about process, some participants seemed to be talking through the steps for the first time, as if they had accomplished their content selection in some intuitive, informal manner, which they hadn’t articulated before. Some commented that the process is not really linear, indicating that the tasks involved in content selection overlapped and may be completed over a long period of time. A few did not define a series of steps but talked in more general terms about course planning.
No specific steps were suggested to participants. In varying order, participants identified the following as the most common steps: contacting colleagues (discussion of approaches, gathering of syllabi); reviewing departmental course description; brainstorming a list of topics that should be covered in the class; reviewing and selecting a text; selecting supplementary materials; consideration of departmental sequence (prerequisites, subsequent courses); and organizing topics.

As shown in Table E3.3, half of the participants began the process by contacting colleagues (on- or off-campus) to collect existing syllabi or discuss approaches (8 out of the 16 who listed steps). Two of the participants included personal brainstorming of topics as one of the first two steps, and three would review the departmental course description. Only one faculty member even mentioned the identification of student needs as a step in the process, indicating that as a first step.

Among those who identified a series of steps, the high dependence on colleagues and existing syllabi reflects the general tendency of faculty to rely on the norms set by the discipline. The fact that these colleagues may be from various institutions with different types of students and missions didn’t cause faculty to filter the information they received from these colleagues--and in some cases, didn’t cause them to even do much adapting of an existing syllabus. One said she would use someone else’s exact syllabus for a year, and then make any adaptations.

The references to text selection usually occurred by the third step, indicating that decision-making about the course was often highly dependent on a publisher and, once again, on the recommendations of colleagues and the discipline.

The limited references to a review of the course description and consideration of the course as part of a sequence may reflect faculty views that the institution and sometimes the department are not influential in their planning. Some faculty were almost bragging that sections of the same course had little in common.

One rarely mentioned piece is the brainstorming about topics. It seems as if faculty set aside their own knowledge or ideas about such a course. They may lack confidence in their own ability to devise content, they may lack the time for this kind of reflection, or they may just have supreme confidence in norms established by the discipline. “There’s no need to re-invent the wheel,” as one participant said.

Only one participant mentioned student needs as a first or second step. This proactive approach led to decision-making early in the planning process about ways to relate content to students. While some participants indicated that they would be flexible once the course had begun and they ascertained student needs and interests, they did not mention any study of student demographics, majors, or prior student evaluations in their process of content selection. They instead shaped plans while interacting with students or reacting to student input.

Six faculty members whose responses are not reflected in Table E3.3 discussed planning in general, not a series of steps. Their processes were overlapping or spiraling in nature and were not suited to a listing of steps; however, some of their comments are included in the following collection of participant comments about content selection processes.

**Criteria for Content Selection**

The following section includes information about the criteria faculty use as they choose content and textbooks. While some indicated that the text is selected by committee (one on which they may or may not have a place), others had developed rather specific criteria for selecting texts for their courses.

**Relevance**

One theme that emerged about content selection was the need for relevance. A social sciences professor described his process of choosing relevant materials for a course he had taught a decade earlier:

> Everything I did ten years ago was useless. The primer [I had used] was tedious, and [today’s] students have no conceptions of how the world works. I don't see how they get here when they don’t know how a check works at a bank. So I decided for this course...
(because I refuse to use textbooks; they’re useless) I had them read Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* and Marx. They enjoyed it. I added a new world order element, the world economy after the cold war, and had students look at the ways national economies and international economies are working in new ways and affecting people at local levels. I combine the way I see the world with the authors they should read to address land use in Northern Virginia. It’s an in-your-face approach. It’s written from a non-affirmative perspective, not business school happy talk. How does an economy work when women work for $2 a day to make Jordans which sell for $200 here?

Ten years ago I had 70 students; today’s insular and isolationist nature of society is reflected in the enrollment of 15 students. There’s not a lot of interest about matters outside the United States. The new class went well. I required three analytical essays; that is, they had to take apart a book and ground it in their own experience.

A mathematical sciences instructor also focused on relevance when she described the process she used:

I took over a technical math course and coordinated it with the machine shop people. I asked them what they wanted. It was their course, their students. The first book students didn’t like, and the department didn’t like. Then I picked a book with machine shop examples. It had more relevance, including actually what they used, their kinds of problems. Then I managed to have a class that was just machine shop and another for mechanics and welders, rather than failing for all three of them.

We’re trying to get more problems from engineering, building and construction, business, English and other social sciences. We try to use different content, and there are differences in requirements and topics. We’re trying to use problems that will interest students.

A social sciences professor, who has reduced dependency on a text, said that students benefit from relevant supplementary materials too:

[They] need a text that is understandable and does a good synoptic job. Texts are kept up to date by the addition of sidebars and new cases. It can be hard for students to integrate that material unless they’re being tested in a multiple-choice format, which I do not prefer. I like to give kids real-life feel with the study of cases. I chose 12 cases and decided on a common text with a colleague. The cases made the content of the course more accessible.

This use of case studies to enhance relevance for students also enhances problem-solving skills and analysis skills. For those faculty who prefer the use of a text as the foundation of a course, this case-study approach may bring a good balance between the influences of the discipline and the student.

**Complexity/Organization of a Text**

A social science professor said, “I abandon books that are boring to me. They're always boring to the students.” He described his history of trying a variety of books, some of which were too “meaty” for his students: “The students had no idea what they were about.” He continually sorts through texts based on these criteria: “They’re fun to teach, students could read them without any trouble, and they might be stimulating to better students.” He indicated that cost has not been a factor in his selections although he had to cut one of the three books he had chosen for one course because the total would have been $75 for two semesters.

A social science professor said he gets examination copies from publishers and looks for the most appropriate:

The best mix between how I think about these problems and what’s in the text. Does the
author’s organization fit with how I think about it? I might then look at his citations and works he thought were important and might then create a syllabus to include those. Some texts are incompatible with my idea of the course.

My understanding of students also influences the choice of a text. However, I’m more likely to make the error of thinking they will get it when they won’t. I make that mistake sometimes.

Sometimes I make the mistake of having too much for kids to read.

Despite his recognition that his errors in judgment can cause problems for students, he does not believe in mid-semester corrections:

When you start off you make a contract, and in general you just stay with the plan even if the plan is not the best. Some students will plan their semester around that. I’ll stick with it and be fair in regards to grading. Of course, I would change if there were some serious problem. Usually I would simply re-evaluate for the next semester.

His rigidity in planning is further reflected in the choice of chapters he makes:

Once the text is determined, I should be able to use it all if I want to. Usually texts are marketed as texts for semester courses. Sometimes I drop out chapters if they don’t fit the set-up of the course. In a typical course I have three exams and sometimes a paper. The course has three parts; I determine what fits in each part of a semester before a test. I try to evenly divide the chapters across the semester, but I may drop chapters and use supplements instead.

In this case, the pre-set format of the class dictates the number of topics (chapters) covered.

A natural sciences professor doesn’t currently use a text although the students have asked for one. She explained,

We created a lab manual and are now adding background sections. It’s getting better every year. We do have a text on reserve in the library. Actually there is no appropriate text. Students are frustrated by that because they want to have something in their hands. They want to be able to double-check the information. Based on my discussion over the internet, lots of people are teaching it this way.

When a text selection is made for another course, it is a joint decision with other faculty. She continued,

Some work with other faculty trying to pick one expensive book for several courses in a sequence. Currently we have one text that costs $80 but is used for three courses. Since this is a difficult subject, the text must be accessible. The current trend toward multi-authoring creates parts that are better than others. I like illustrations, a CD, transparencies. The reading level is a consideration because the same ten pages can take one student an hour and another two days.

A social sciences professor was also concerned about complexity:

The key event is picking the books. I look for readers that contain a collection of documents; that limits cost and also allows for the discussion of one or two documents per class. I like to give students substantial chunks of documents, but lots of readers have only snippets. That makes it hard for them to get much out of the material and retain it. I would rather use 30 more thorough documents than 100 snippets which they can’t recall later.

I have learned which readings are too hard, and I don’t assign those unless I think
they’re really crucial. I like the readers because I think some of the readings are fairly interesting. I have them read some works of fiction. Especially in teaching freshman, I am concerned with issues of student interest and what they can deal with. I’ve learned with trial and error.

At the 300 level there is more reading, and students spend more money than they do for a 100 level class. In an upper-level course I’m not as conscious about what they can handle. I think about how much I can expect them to read and what the sources are that are important for us to read if we want to know [a certain topic well]. Frankly I’m not worried about interest at this point.

Availability of Teaching Aids

Another area of concern for some faculty is the availability of aids for use with a text. While one natural sciences professor said, “I never would use a test bank,” other faculty looked for such resources.

A social sciences professor looks for a text with good support for teachers:

I look for something reasonable, not oppressively long, with a variety of teaching aids, such as a computerized test battery and a manual. My current text has a good student study guide but no test bank, so I’ll drop it. Most of the test banks don’t reveal a knowledge of tests and measurements.

Although this faculty member admits that test banks can be unreliable, he still opts for access to such support.

Design of a Text

Another feature which some faculty considered is the design of a text. When asked how she knows if a text is appropriate for students, a humanities professor responded:

It’s luck. I do a lot of text reviewing for publishers; this summer I’ve done six projects. I look at the outline and the text’s flexibility. It should be consistent, but a professor should find it possible to rearrange the chapters. (I never use a book the way it’s ordered.) I look to see if there’s a consistent focus. If they say in their introduction that the theme is diversity or critical thinking, then I want to see that in every chapter. I look to see if there are student aids, but I don’t care about teacher aids. I look for a table of contents and a glossary.

One natural sciences professor said the weight of a book could even be a factor in selection:

I try to select a text that’s not so overwhelming to our mixed bag of students. I try to choose a book with a basic outline and then supplement. Students are more likely to read it and use it than they are if it’s like an encyclopedia. They wouldn’t bring one book to class because it was too big, too heavy.

Whatever the criteria, faculty have a “sense” of what works in terms of content and texts. Aspects such as reading level or design are informally considered, and some faculty acknowledge that the process of text selection is based on guess-work. Information related to student interest or capacity to handle dense material is rarely collected to assist faculty with their selections.

Interview Results and Discussion: A Summary

The interview segment of this study teased out the attitudes underlying some of the questionnaire responses, but it can be summarized only in terms of themes. While “most” participants may have responded in similar ways, the minority opinions, even the individual opinions are equally important and interesting. Again, these attitudes were expressed by participants who chose to be interviewed, which may reflect their interest in or comfort with their
content selection specifically and their teaching as a whole. The major components of the interviews reveal the following picture of these participants.

Career Development: Learning to Select Content

Training for college teachers ranges from none to slight. This group of participants was not typical of most college faculty in that it included a high percentage of participants who were certified teachers. Despite that fact, many of these participants did not credit that training with the progress they had made with their teaching once they had become employed. Clearly poor training has led to feelings of inadequacy on the part of some faculty and misinformed attitudes of confidence for others. As a whole they did not have enough formalized coursework or sufficient TA training related to course design and needs analysis in order to transfer that knowledge into their own content-selection processes. Some grew into student-centered content-selection practices over the course of their teaching careers through exposure to formal faculty development opportunities or through trial and error.

Influences

The majority of these faculty who rated their disciplines higher than any other influence were equally sure (almost unanimous) in their sense that the employing institution was the least important of the influences. Comments about the discipline were varied, and the minority of participants had moved away from selecting content based on the dictates of their professional organizations or other manifestations of their disciplines.

Most interesting and useful for this study were the comments about students as an influence. Even those who did not place students first were profoundly affected by their students’ needs. Those who placed students first (only four participants) seemed to have developed approaches to student-centered content selection without formal design tools. They were guided by feedback from students, conversations with students and professionals, and their own knowledge of information and skills students would need in their futures.

Process of Selecting Course Content

Several participants talked about the changes they had made over the course of their careers, as they moved from dependence on graduate school influences, texts, and “covering” topics to more independent approaches. Overall, however, faculty indicated that they depended on colleagues (regardless of their employing institutions) and sample syllabi to determine the direction for a course. There was no talk of collecting information about students in any kind of needs assessment. For those faculty who consider student needs as a priority, they must integrate those considerations very subtly as they plan content for courses. Another aspect of the content selection involved the determination of appropriate texts, which they could actually describe more easily than they could describe the first steps in their course design.
CHAPTER 4
CONNECTIONS

The data from the interviews and the questionnaire were examined in conjunction with each other to identify faculty perceptions about the “why’s” and “how’s” of their content selection. The synthesis of the data offers us the full spectrum of information illuminated by the study. There was no attempt to reconcile individual questionnaire responses with a particular person’s interview responses. The collective examination of the responses provided confirmation as well as discordance, across data sources. The overall result of this synthesis provides us with a richly textured picture of faculty content selection. Specifically, this chapter focuses on the following issues which emerged across the two levels of data collection and analysis activities: (1) faculty preparation for instructional design, including and preparation for teaching and faculty development; (2) the influences on content selection; and (3) planning practices.

Training in Course Design
Career development for college professors includes their preparation for designing courses and any on-the-job training through seminars and conferences, usually referred to as faculty development. These two components along with a plan for future development activities were also addressed in both the questionnaire and the interviews.

Preparation for Course Design
From the large sample questionnaire responses, it is clear that most doctoral programs have not included a requirement for courses related to teaching. Therefore, many faculty have not had formal training in instructional design. Specifically the questionnaire results indicate that 51% had no formal coursework related to teaching as part of a degree program, and 52% responded that they had either not had TA training or that the TA training was in some way inadequate. Illustrating the restricted sample in the interview data, participants had a fairly high rate of formal education courses, which they had taken as part of a degree program. 45% had earned teaching certification or a degree in education, including Masters and Ed.D. Those who discussed those formal education courses had not found them to be particularly useful. Also some of these participants had had useful TA experiences although those activities did not include training about selecting course content.

The preparation for teaching varied widely and seemed almost serendipitous with no level playing field established for incoming faculty. Some interview participants did say that their departments were looking at new hires more carefully in terms of their teaching experiences and training. If indeed there is a trend based on these data, such a trend may be the strongest influence on doctoral programs which have historically emphasized research over teaching.

What type of preparation leads to the creation of student-centered planners? Because the types of preparation revealed in this study were not consistent from program to program, there is no way to identify a pattern of training which leads to student-centered content selection. Clearly this is an area for further study if more new faculty begin their careers with better training. Whatever the pattern has been in the past, participants in this study generally expressed disappointment in their preparation for teaching.

Experience
The length of one’s teaching career is meaningful to the study only as it indicates that a variety of faculty perspectives were included from people at all points in their careers. Longevity in college teaching, however, does not promise an increasing student-centeredness. As shown in one rather extreme case among the interview participants, the professor of retirement age feels isolated from undergraduates, graduate students, and even from new faculty. He may think students are important, but he has no way to connect with them. While he can contribute information about the
history of an institution’s instructional mandates, he seems stuck in time. He may represent the basis for the stereotypical image of the senior lecturer who ignores the students in his classes. The comments, such as those included from his interview in Chapter 3, reflect his isolation: “I don’t share enough of their culture anymore, let alone ideals and attitudes. . . there are some responsive individuals I talk to in class. The rest are welcome to listen. Those interested people are a diminishing group.” Unfortunately, a conflict with his department chair has led to his teaching more classes, which he described as “punishment.”

However, he seems to be an extreme case, and his paralyzed frustration stands in contrast to the attitudes of faculty who have found ways to grow and change over the course of their careers. This growth is reflected in the various ways they select content which they perceive as “meaningful” to students or “relevant.” Although the questionnaires could not address this issue, many of the interview participants discussed the ways their processes had evolved over the course of their careers. As discussed in Chapter 3, some participants said they had abandoned the rigidity of their early dependence on texts and model professors, and had moved to more fundamental concerns involving students. One professor, quoted in Chapter 3, described himself as moving toward the inclusion of more and more “useful” material so that they will be ready for other courses and for their careers. Others described the support they receive within their departments as faculty share resources and ideas. While this kind of conversation was deemed fertile, many faculty indicated that they would like more opportunities for such dialogue.

The impetus for that change may have been their attendance at some faculty development activity, whether sponsored by the institution or the discipline. 75% of the questionnaire respondents had attended at least one professional development activity during the previous five years. However, the quality and focus of those activities was not addressed in the data. Some expressed a negative attitude toward development activities because some that they had attended had not been helpful.

Others expressed a sense that “things” were not working in their classes--either for their students or for themselves. Many discussed the importance of student evaluations even if faculty themselves did not believe in the validity of the evaluations. Clearly many were personally affected by such student comments, and some were evaluated by their departments on the basis of single evaluation scores. Some were simply bored by any static approach to teaching. In either case, change became important. Some participants seem to have crafted their own principles of design as they progressed through their careers. While this trial-and-error approach may not be the most efficient way to learn design, it can lead to planning which may be more responsive to students and to the immediate context of the institution.

Future Development of Design Skills

The final piece in the development puzzle is the consideration of future opportunities for the enhancement of pedagogical skills related to content selection. The questionnaire yielded the most specific information on this topic because faculty indicated which types of information they might like to pursue as part of a faculty development seminar. While technology took a clear first, that response does not necessarily reveal any lack of interest in student needs. The item was worded “Strategies for student use of technology and/or research skills.” While many faculty indicated in the interviews that they feel pressured to implement more technologically advanced approaches in their classrooms, they also see the need to help students master the technology.

In keeping with that highest ranked response, the next group of most frequently chosen topics for faculty development were all student-related: learning theory, tying content to real problems, providing more student choice, and ways to incorporate student interests and preferences. Apparently, these are the areas with which faculty feel least familiar. Whether those topics have come up at faculty meetings or are mentioned in journals, faculty have been made aware in some way that this focus on students is worth exploring. Even if faculty at first simply...
want to be conversant in learning theory, they may become convinced of the validity of these student-centered planning practices once they attend a seminar.

The list of topics with which faculty felt satisfied with their current knowledge were more professor-focused or discipline-focused: matching content with the discipline, understanding the content of prerequisites, including personal research in the course, better delineation of institutional or departmental initiatives, and opportunities for conversation with colleagues. Some of these topics spring from traditional approaches to teaching with which many faculty already felt familiar.

The facet of the interviews which most closely corresponded with the section on the questionnaire about future development was the discussion of the institution’s influence on planning and the ways in which the institution might be more helpful or supportive. Faculty did not mention the need for faculty development seminars; rather, they focused on more concrete assistance, such as more useful classrooms, more technology, and increased support for efforts related to teaching. As indicated earlier, the confidence level of the interview participants may have been high as evidenced by the fact that they volunteered for the interview after they had completed the questionnaire. Although some participants expressed concern about aspects of their teaching, this group as a whole may have already been exposed to the topics listed as potential development workshops.

Influences

An important difference between the two approaches in this study is that faculty were asked to rate the importance of the influences in the questionnaires, but not to compare them in any way. In the interviews, faculty were asked to rank the influences, which created a slightly different picture of the importance of various factors as faculty select course content. However, if there is a “winner” among the influences--across institutions, across disciplines, and across the two approaches in this study--it is the academic discipline.

Loyalty to the Academic Discipline

Both the questionnaire and the interview results indicated that the majority of faculty find their academic disciplines to be powerful influences, which is consistent with other research mentioned in the literature (Stark & Lattuca, 1997). The professional organizations which promote discipline provide training, materials, and direction for faculty through journals, conferences, and networking among faculty on various campuses. Faculty also receive financial support through research grants and publicity based on the judgments of their peers in a particular discipline. As Dressel (1988) indicated, faculty who are most influenced by their academic discipline will probably engage in discipline-centered planning, with a focus on covering the most important topics to the furtherance of the discipline: the main concepts, important historical information, and new research.

Such goals were clearly in the forefront of the attitudes revealed by the questionnaire results and the interview results. On the questionnaire, 64% of the respondents indicated that the discipline was very important, rating it higher than any other influence. As some of the interview participants explained, the discipline is the “driving force” behind all decisions. The discipline provides the “central mission” as they consider their courses.

Secondary to the nature of the discipline as the primary influence is the idea that the focus on content may relieve faculty of dealing with some complexities. As Weimer (1990) points out, faculty may even find that “teaching content, with its straight-forward delineation of facts and details, its establishment of principles and propositions, is easier [than teaching students]” (p. 9).

Interview respondents did talk about the importance of their research, the stress involved with balancing research and teaching, and the difficulties of meeting student expectations. For these faculty, using a discipline-centered approach may have simply been more familiar and certainly seemed to garner more professional rewards.
Students as an Influence

Although the faculty who participated in this study did not indicate that student-centered planning is more difficult than discipline-centered planning, the complexity of student-centered planning may be the factor which inhibits some faculty from embracing it. Plater’s (1994) concern about the complexity of student-centered teaching for a diverse student population may be echoed by faculty who worry that they already have limited time for their teaching.

In the questionnaire results, the student influence was considered less important than the discipline, achieving the second place in the ratings of importance at each institution. However, faculty were not so clear on that second place when they were asked to rank the priorities. Students were ranked from first to fourth in terms of their influence on content selection, most often falling in the middle of the influences or considered equal to other influences. The student factors which faculty identified as important or very important on the questionnaire did not seem to sustain their power when faculty were forced to prioritize.

As faculty discussed their reactions to the student influence in the interviews, they acknowledged the importance of students even if they ranked them lower than they did some other influences. They talked about their attempts to be responsive to comments on student evaluations, to include more authentic course content, and to incorporate contemporary learning theory into their decisions about their courses.

Other Influences

The other influence which produced strong results from the two approaches to the study was the institution. Faculty seem to generally agree that the institution is a weak influence. In the interview results, it was chosen consistently as the weakest influence; in the questionnaire results, it was considered fourth with society in last place.

Many interview participants described their institutions as being distant or out of touch with what was really occurring within departments. As interview participants derided the institutional influence, some actually did seem indifferent to their employing institutions. Faculty were almost disparaging about the mandates of their employing institutions, complaining that such directives were out-dated or otherwise ineffective. Interestingly, however, some seemed almost frustrated or even angry that their institutions either did not provide some tools which could support teaching or almost interfered with the efforts of faculty to use their time to focus on student needs.

As Stark and associates (1988, 1989, 1990) indicated, faculty often misunderstood or took for granted the local resources and contexts of their employing institutions. The faculty in this study seemed to confirm those findings as they tended to focus on the missing pieces instead of on the available opportunities. In some cases they didn’t seem to know what was available or how to access it.

Considerations of society and department were wide-ranging and in some cases inconsistent between the questionnaire and the interview results. The influence of the department fared better in the questionnaire, while society took on greater influence in the interviews. Faculty interpretation of “society” certainly influenced their perception of its importance, with some saying that the furtherance and study of society was the reason for teaching, and others indicating that social issues were important but not as immediate as the other influences. The attitudes about the departmental influence may also have varied so widely because departments are so different, some pulling faculty into group decision-making and some less collegial. These two influences are the ones that leave open interpretations the widest because of the wide-ranging responses. This is clearly an area that merits further research.

Planning Practices

The topic of faculty planning practices was addressed only in the interview portion of the study. Participants received no prompts and were asked simply to describe the processes they undertook to select content when they designed a course. Consequently, no list of technical
instructional design terms, such as “needs assessment,” was used. Instead participants identified the steps based on their own experiences and language.

How can this topic be connected, then, to the questionnaire? Faculty familiarity and facility with instructional design is an over-arching theme of the study. The questionnaire responses about preparation for teaching and the influences which affect content selection reveal the faculty attitudes and pedagogical expertise (or lack of it) that lead them to the practices they described in the interviews.

The interviews revealed that faculty tended to first contact their peers for information and sample syllabi. These peers seemed to offer some kind of norms for the course in question—norms apparently set (officially or unofficially) by the discipline, whether the graduate schools faculty had attended or the professional organizations to which they belonged. The norms did not necessarily reflect institutional, departmental or student needs/expectations. Consideration of texts was another often mentioned early step in the planning process. The only person who even mentioned student needs as a consideration is a person who has recently earned a doctorate in English Education, with the recency and direction of his doctoral work singling him out from the other participants.

The general practice among these participants was to call a colleague, review and adapt (or even use “as is”) a borrowed syllabus, and review the texts. This sequence may be the face of current practice in faculty planning despite the recommendations in the literature about instructional design.

The seventh step in Gagné and Briggs’ (1974), “instructional system design process” is the selection or development of instructional materials. Faculty in this study tended to slight (if not ignore) the first six steps: analysis and identification of needs, including needs of the individual and society; definition of goals and objectives; identification of alternative ways to meet needs; design of system components; analysis of resources required, resources available, constraints; and action to remove or modify constraints.

Faculty in this study also spent little time with Kaufman and English’s (1979) “gap analysis,” which identifies current levels of student skills, knowledge and attitudes and desired levels of performance. The designer/educator then identifies the gaps in an effort to determine the instructional needs. Nor did the faculty in this study follow a system akin to Sherman’s (1980) “responsive instruction” by following a design sequence which begins with (1) intentions about the focus of the course, (2) assessment to collect information about students (3) the establishment of goals which are based on the relationship of the intentions to the assessment, and then (4) selection of content which must be “appropriate” to students and “learnable” (p. 43).

Even the least formal models of instructional design were not reflected by the practices described by this group, such as the Toombs and Tierney (1991) matrix of curriculum design, with groups of issues in three categories: (1) context, (2) content, including nature of significant knowledge, learning psychology, student needs; and (3) form, including learning resources and instructional strategies, outcomes and assessments. Some faculty in this study considered context when they reviewed course descriptions and course sequences, but jumped right to the consideration of significant knowledge and then to the instructional strategies and outcomes.

Finally, the vision of faculty as researchers who might apply those research skills to their course design, beginning with data gathering (e.g., Diamond, 1989; Lovell-Troy and Eickmann, 1992; Pregent, 1994; Weimer, 1990) also fades with the results of these interviews. These faculty planners do collect information about a new or revised course but do not formally collect information about the students before preparing a content and resource list.

In some cases, however, faculty did make content selections based on their knowledge of students. As described by some participants, their design processes are based on accumulated knowledge of student needs and goals, an outgrowth of conversations with students, student evaluations, and faculty understanding of the careers students will be pursuing—not based on a formal needs assessment. The manner in which they learned that process is discussed in the “Experience” section of this chapter.
The processes faculty use also reflect their priorities; that is, which of the influences seem most important to them. Clearly their planning steps emphasized the academic discipline.

Consistency of Various Components of the Study

In all, the data from the interviews and the questionnaires were surprisingly consistent, reflecting wide areas of agreement across institutions and disciplines.

The main points of discordance were reflected in three issues. One, the interview participants generally had a higher level of teacher preparation and experience than the questionnaire respondents. This difference may have affected the second area of discordance: the attitudes toward students as an influence. While the ratings of student influence were fairly high on the questionnaire, the rankings of student influence might suggest that faculty actually place students lower on their list of priorities. However, the conversations with faculty revealed a high degree of interest in student learning. The final and most minimal area of discordance was in the ways faculty identified future needs. Due to the difference in presentation of this question, the questionnaire respondents chose topics about which they would like more information or easier access. The interview participants, however, seemed to focus, not on the kinds of workshops they might attend, but on the tools and services they needed from their institutions.

While the questionnaires indicated that faculty have some interest in learning about student-centered approaches, many of the interviews revealed the use of current planning strategies which are strongly rooted in the needs of students. Because these practices may be employed by a minority of college faculty, they might have been lost in a purely quantitative study. The interviews enabled all participants to expand on their attitudes and approaches, and some faculty were able to articulate the ways in which student-centered content selection is already a feature of their planning.
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS

A fundamental--and often unexamined--component of courses has been considered to be the domain of individual faculty: content selection for those courses. Shulman (1986) refers to this as the “missing paradigm”: “In reading the literature of research on teaching, it is clear that central questions are unasked... What we miss are questions about the content of the lessons” (p. 8).

Examining the ways in which faculty choose content is important for faculty and administrators so that they understand the current practice of their colleagues and consider ways to enhance student-centered content selection within the existing framework. The first segment of this final chapter deals with the conclusions and implications related to student-centered content selection--faculty knowledge of and experience with course design, influences on content selection, and faculty content selection processes. The second segment includes an analysis of this study and considerations for future research.

Overview

The nature of current practice in higher education defies any sort of limited characterization; it is most simply described as being in a state of flux. With a renewed emphasis on teaching, traditional practices are being challenged and changed.

One of those traditional practices--autonomous and isolated content selection for classes--seems to be slow in coming out from behind the closed doors of faculty offices. Current practice does include faculty who are finding ways to match their content selection to the needs of their students, but their practices have not be documented or rewarded. However, new emphasis on interdisciplinary studies and shared teaching responsibilities requires greater understanding of the differences in planning practices and responsiveness to influences--within and across departments and institutions.

Calls for change related to content selection include demands for more relevance in classes and more personal meaning for students (Eisner, 1979). As Eble (1972) described the trend, “The specific demand may be for the teacher who can draw out the learner’s own sense of who he is, help dignify it, enlarge it, and keep before him the possibilities of who he might be” (p. 90).

Learning to Select Content: Current Practice

The seeds of alliance with the discipline are certainly planted early in the professional training of faculty. As indicated in this study, faculty spring from many different models of professional preparation, but the commonality seems to be the paucity of training in course-building. Many endure a “baptism by fire” when they begin their college teaching careers; naturally they would seek the familiar approaches of their senior faculty in graduate school or tried-and-true existing syllabi available. Respondents to the questionnaire indicated that their own undergraduate and graduate education was very important, but half of them had no formal coursework related to pedagogy. Typical of a comment which emerged frequently in the interviews was this one about the quality of teacher preparation: “I remember, even as a grad student, being struck that in the Ph.D. program we had only 1 hour’s credit in teaching. We were forced to learn by doing. It’s an inefficient way to learn the profession.”

This invention of personal approaches to instructional design may actually lead to student-centered content selection, but it is an inefficient way for the faculty who do learn this skill. “College teachers form personal, implicit theories of teaching upon which they often depend, even though they are not particularly aware of their theories. Such theories are likely to be inaccurate because they are developed more or less implicitly or subconsciously rather than explicitly and thoughtfully. (Paulson & Feldman, 1995, p. 41) Such an invention process also leads to wide differences among faculty, some of whom may never find their way to needs assessment and related content selection.
The other aspect of career development is faculty participation in workshops or seminars provided by their professional organizations or their employing institutions. Since 75% of the questionnaire respondents reported attending such a seminar in the previous five years, clearly that type of faculty education is thriving. What cannot be ascertained from the data is the quality of those activities and faculty attitudes toward them. As one professor said, “I’ve participated in some and found them not particularly much fun to do.” This negative attitude was also reflected by a questionnaire respondent who said, “No more information please -- main problem is glut.” Faculty already overwhelmed with information are unlikely to choose participation in a workshop which may lead them to more articles and more work as they try new design strategies.

Despite some negativity toward some development programs, faculty interest in topics related to student needs is evident. This may reflect the fact that their preparation for teaching did not include such information; or that current discipline, departmental or institutional emphasis reflects a growing interest in meeting student needs through courses based in more contemporary learning theory. Indeed, most of the comments written in on the questionnaire dealt with concerns about meeting students’ needs.

**Influences Affecting Content Selection: Current Practice**

In a culture of professionals from widely diverse disciplines, there was clear agreement that the discipline yields the strongest influence. The strength of that influence may be attributed to the loyalty inspired during graduate school, the professional memberships (journals and conferences), and the consistency of materials/funding available for research and classroom materials.

Related to the discipline, some interview participants hold the “good researchers are good teachers” philosophy. As one said, “My two jobs are inseparable; my research is my teaching. I’m doing everything I can to be the teacher I am. I can’t do any more. I’m spending the rest of my time being a scientist.”

There was also much discussion of texts, which in some cases become the primary design tool faculty use. Texts were rated second highest among the discipline-related influences. While most supplemented the texts, they seemed to use the text as a foundation. As one professor said, “The book tends to guide topics, manner and order, especially when I’m first teaching the course.” Those faculty who are text-dependent seem to relinquish their content selection prerogatives with the sense that someone else may know better what the norms for the course are or that there is no reason to “re-invent the wheel,” as one professor described the process.

The “rebels” who find themselves outside the fraternal order of the discipline seem to choose content in an almost oppositional fashion. For example, an English professor described in Chapter 3 abandoned the canon, realized that her colleagues had “stuck” their students with Dryden, Pope, and Swift, and opted to teach Pulitzer Prize winners to provide variety and to capture student interest. As she said, “Choice is a political act. What you do with the material is more important than the material itself. . .You can make anything into an important, thoughtful experience. That’s one advantage of teaching literature. . .”

While the departmental culture was not as powerful as the academic discipline influence, it did establish some direction for faculty and was rated almost equally with students as an influence by the questionnaire respondents. One interview participant said, “Evaluation is important to me and to my department chair. We pride ourselves on teaching; our scores are high. If you don’t fall into that standard as a faculty member in this department, it’s a real problem.” While there was no direct connection to content selection, at least some departments are directing faculty to balance their interests in teaching and research.

The influence of students on content selection was rated high by the questionnaire respondents but ranked in the mid-range by the interview participants. While the majority of participants in this study focused first on the discipline, it is crucial to note that there is a body of faculty who rank students above all else. While these faculty are in the minority, their perspectives...
are important as administrators and faculty try to identify processes for student-centered content selection.

The only variable which had a correlation with high ratings of students as an influence was the discipline with the mathematical sciences and humanities faculty ranking slightly higher on their attitudes towards the importance of students than the natural sciences and social sciences faculty.

The place of the institution among the influences was last, even more unanimously than the placement of the discipline as first. Somewhat lost among the disciplines was the influence of society, which was perhaps too amorphous for faculty to characterize.

Content Selection Processes: Current Practice
As this study indicates, faculty planning practices are based largely in a borrow-and-reshape approach to content selection: contact a colleague, borrow a syllabus, and adapt it if necessary. While some faculty incorporate an informal needs assessment into that early planning, they seem to be inventing a cousin of the kinds of instructional design revealed in the literature. As noted in the section on career preparation, lack of training in pedagogy and/or lack of emphasis on course planning (with resulting lack of time and rewards) may cause this trial-and-error approach.

The processes that are constructed by individuals may have some similarities within discipline groups, as faculty in certain groups seem to share attitudes about particular influences. Those differences may lie along the content-skills continuum, with faculty on the “skills side” leaning more toward student-centeredness, focusing more on teaching students to do the discipline, as opposed to students who are taught about the activities of others in the discipline. One professor considered it a challenge to “keep an eye or ear on students to identify skills that students need. I’m teaching them how to think rather than just teaching content.”

Implications for the Future: Enhancing Student-Centered Content Selection
These conclusions have implications for change--either initiating it or formalizing it--in various types of postsecondary institutions. As effective development activities and support policies are created for faculty, the potential also exists for a shift from the dominant discipline-centered planning to more student-centered planning. The implications described here involve (1) enhancing faculty preparation to match content to student needs, and (2) the creation of a teaching environment which supports and demands a relationship between content selection and needs assessment.

Teaching Instructional Design
First, whether in the preparation of new faculty or the development of established faculty, sharing the tools of instructional design could be the most useful step toward fostering student-centered planning.

Graduate Instruction
Formal Coursework in Instructional Design. If graduate students are exposed to design principles, at least they have the opportunity to begin their college teaching careers with the knowledge that content must be selected with learners’ needs as a primary focus. Otherwise, new faculty are relegated to chance--maybe they’ll land in a department with mentors and colleagues who will share design expertise with them; maybe they’ll stumble upon a workshop or seminar which provides the planning tools for them; maybe they’ll wade through years of trial and error as they make their way to student-centered content selection. Or maybe they’ll never find their way in that direction.

Interactions with Expert Designers: Models. The impact of models on future generations of college teachers is another important ingredient in teacher preparation. Formal observation of models with some analysis and discussion about their approaches might be useful for graduate
students who are preparing to become professors. Also, graduate students and new faculty might benefit from participating in opportunities for experienced faculty to articulate their rationale for certain course-related decisions so that they could witness not only the manifestation of those decisions in the classroom, but also the judgment processes involved.

Teaching Assistantships. The investment in quality TA programs has the potential to improve the experiences of the undergraduates in a TA’s course and also the TA as a future practitioner in the discipline. The TA experience may be the only opportunity for budding faculty to learn how experienced faculty choose content for their courses.

Faculty Development
Just as faculty recognize the need to tailor a research-based presentation to the needs of their colleagues as an audience or the citizenry as an audience, they could be persuaded of the merit of using a similar approach to preparing a course for students as an audience. This audience analysis is akin to a traditional needs assessment advocated by instructional designers.

As indicated in the questionnaire results, faculty are interested in faculty development programs related to student needs. One respondent asked for development opportunities concerning “how to make innovative, successful courses a standard part of curriculum rather than a one-shot special study which never continues within an unstable educational environment insistent on maintaining the status quo.” Such negative attitudes toward the institution could even be diminished if that faculty interest is met with appropriate development opportunities. Since faculty are requesting this information, they are not likely to resist development activities provided by their employing institutions (a weak influence). These opportunities might be offered in conjunction with academic disciplines, capitalizing on faculty regard for their disciplines. They are more likely to respond to activities generated for faculty by faculty (or even by outside consultants) than they are to those offered by representatives of the employing institution.

Ensuring Student-centered Content Selection
If administrators and faculty are determined to create an environment where course content reflects student needs, they must follow up on the career preparation and development by creating policies to ensure the practice of effective design principles. Policies might include standards for new employees, expectations for continued development activities and needs analysis as a part of course design, and other initiatives to support faculty in their efforts to match content to students.

Hiring Practices
Departmental personnel committees might characterize and weight quality TA training and formal coursework in pedagogy highly in their consideration of employment for new faculty to assure that an early-career faculty member has some guided teaching experience upon which to build. Personnel committees and department chairs should, of course, be duly impressed by evidence of successful research and/or innovative instructional strategies, but they should also seek evidence of the ability to plan appropriate content. What do new hires know about instructional design? They may not know Gagné & Briggs’ (1974) “twelve steps,” but they should certainly be asked to describe their planning practices. How do they try to tie course content to student needs?
While the lack of knowledge about learning theory, identifying student needs, or instructional design wouldn’t preclude the employment of a new hire, expectations for development activities in those areas could be set forth as part of the contract process.

Establishing Expected Development Activities
Continual updating in the discipline should be complemented by corresponding updating in pedagogy, with an emphasis on learning theory and appropriate content for students. Expectations for routine faculty development activities related to pedagogy should be established by departments and considered as part of faculty evaluations.
Establishing Expectations for Content Selection

Will training in instructional design, and specifically needs analysis, lead to more student-centered planning? Not necessarily. The key for new faculty or experienced faculty lies in the practice of those principles and the departmental or institutional follow-up to those development activities. In departments where the maximum requirement is that faculty file a syllabus (perhaps even after the course is taught) or list student evaluation scores as the measure of good teaching, faculty get the message that planning appropriate content may be very low on the list of influences fighting for their attention.

Faculty should be required to document their planning practices (including even a minimal needs assessment) along with the filing of a syllabus before semester begins. This kind of documentation might become part of a teaching portfolio or other personnel record to be reviewed in annual evaluations.

Providing Support

Faculty need incentives to shift their planning practices. Student-centered planning can be difficult and can meet with faculty and student resistance (Felder and Brent, 1996). Faculty who are already feeling overwhelmed by demands on their time are not likely to spend time learning new tools without support.

Rewards. Faculty need to hear a new message--that careful planning of course content is not only required, but also rewarded with extra planning time, promotion, or other awards. One professor said that even if she documents her course planning, that aspect of her teaching is ignored during her annual departmental evaluations, in which student evaluations seem to be the focal point: “Peer reviews can be helpful, but they are not accounted for. No one looks to see how I use new materials each semester. Instead, 19-year-olds are telling me whether I’m good, whether the text is right.”

As one respondent wrote on his questionnaire: “This institution’s only basis for evaluation and reward is research dollars which bring in overhead. . . Although all my teaching is excellent and my grad students and research progress are all fine, I will not be promoted until ‘significant NSF or NIH dollars are at hand’ so why the hell should I give a damn?” Of course, this perspective reflects attitudes found at a research institution, but faculty at all types of institutions need to know that effective planning is crucial for their success on the job.

The rewards system must include attention to planning activities. As Svinicki and Menges (1996) point out, “Many aspects of exemplary teaching may involve no student contact at all--time devoted to the design of course materials, texts, evaluation instruments, and computer-based instructional packages” (p. 110).

Removing barriers and blame. Not only must the rewards be in place, but other barriers must be removed (Blackburn and Lawrence, 1995) so that faculty are willing to shift their attention to pre-course activities, such as needs assessment.

With a more diverse student population, thorough needs assessment can be even more time-consuming and the resulting choices of content may be even more of a risk as faculty include types of literature and authors that faculty themselves did not study as undergraduates. (Eble, 1972).

Time for identifying and sharing expertise. Faculty “. . .are concerned about the proliferation of tasks, too many demands, too little time, and in general the overall lack of direction that comprehensiveness has brought. . .” (Smith, Anderson, & Lovrich, 1995, p. 278). They need time for reflection, time for learning new tools, and time for sharing those tools with others.

Expert course designers should be encouraged to examine and describe their processes for the benefit of new faculty. One theme that emerged from the interviews is that faculty wanted to
talk about their teaching not only because they have expertise to share, but also to allow personal reflection. The fact that faculty actually appreciated the opportunity to be interview subjects and to talk about their planning indicates that some faculty are eager for such dialogue.

Such sharing can also be fostered by pairing faculty with more or less experience outside academe. Faculty with more experience in business or industry might be paired with those who have stronger pedagogical backgrounds so that the shared expertise could be used in course planning.

Another kind of sharing could be fostered by naming people with varied perspectives to curriculum committees. Those faculty members who choose students as the most important influence may bring balance to curriculum committees if course content discussions are on the agenda.

Other types of support can include assistance with identifying priorities. Faculty may need help integrating the other influences or recognizing the value the influences should be accorded. Assistance can also be provided with the provision of more detailed information about students. Some said that their institutions could provide more information about students so that planning would be facilitated.

**Reflections on the Study**

As this study draws to a close, considerations can be made about ways to enhance it and possibilities for extending the research. Final reflections focus on the student-centered planners of the future.

**Enhancing the Study**

If this study were to be repeated, the following adaptations and enhancements might be useful for further data gathering:

- **Add the fourth institution (a regional university) as originally planned.**
  While differences were not found in the influences or approaches to content selection across institutions, a study of a different type of institution would be useful to see if the patterns exist even there or if a fourth type of institutional mission or environment creates a difference.

- **Use focus groups for discussion of content selection.**
  Because faculty commented on the value of conversations with colleagues, the use of focus groups could lead to even richer conversation about content selection skills, influences, and current processes. Suggestions and comments from colleagues might spur further clarifications.

- **Use case studies to round out in more detail the planning practices of those faculty who seem to have the most student-centered planning practices.**
  The use of a case study approach with subsequent interviews and analysis of questionnaires related to specific interviews would allow individual stories and processes to emerge more clearly in the reporting of the data.

**Further Research**

During the study, the following topics and questions emerged from the interviews and questionnaires which may bear further research:

- **What other factors might predict student-centeredness in course planning?**
  The possibilities which emerged during the course of the study: Gender? Quality and content of formal coursework related to education which faculty have undertaken as part of a degree program? Personality type? Departmental culture: collegial vs. autocratic or laissez faire?

- **What is the impact of instructional design training (especially needs assessment) on new faculty?** Such a study could be accomplished with two groups of new faculty, one that
receives the training and one that doesn’t. Follow-up could include examination of planning processes and change in those processes.

• How have hiring practices actually changed to reflect a renewed focus on students? A historical study of job descriptions and interviews with department chairs could substantiate or refute the existence of this supposed trend. In conjunction, a study of changes in doctoral programs could reveal the responsiveness of such programs to new expectations in higher education.

• Why does the role of society fluctuate so among the influences? Faculty perceptions about the influence of society varied widely. Further research might illuminate the ways in which they define or identify that influence.

Content Selection: An Ideal?

Clearly there is no one-size-fits-all approach to content selection for all faculty. In a culture dominated by discipline-centered approaches, there may be one participant in this study whose approach would make sense for many faculty.

Described in Chapter 3, this experienced humanities professor has carefully studied the design of his courses. He initially ranked the discipline first and students as second; he then decided that the influences are equally weighted. He explained, “Ideally students should be at the top...The academic discipline goes hand-in-hand with students."

When he talked about his planning processes, he described them as having changed over the course of his career:

The process of my course-building began with the discipline. My choice of content was dictated by what I had already read, but as time has gone by, students have exerted more of an influence. I use kinds of information gained from students to make selections, especially course evaluations and interests.

He described his goal: “A lot of what I do is designed to create unity,” so that students can relate what they’ve read to various themes.

Later in the interview, he discussed his steps in the planning process and listed the collection of information about student needs as a first step, the only participant to do so. He said that student “need drove the course content,” and was supplemented by his knowledge of the subsequent course students had to be ready for, his review of the literature, and his own teaching experience. Although he collects such information, he described that process as “nebulous,” saying he “just has a feel for selecting,” yet he informally conducts a needs assessment which helps him with his decision-making about content. It appears that he also uses the intuitive sense that other faculty describe, as he works to integrate the demands of the discipline and the needs of his students.

He also talked about the value of the interview and the opportunity to reflect on his content selection, saying that he would be better able to articulate his process after our conversation. He acknowledged that he thought carefully about content choices, but hadn’t framed his process: “We think about it, but we don’t think about our thoughts about it.” In conversations with new faculty, he said that he normally discussed their options for course content; at the end of the interview, he said, “I may need to spend more time talking about types of students so that new faculty can make selections appropriate for the population.”

What led him to this student-centered process? He has had significant formal coursework in education, and he has continued to involve himself in professional development related to pedagogy throughout his teaching career. He has found the balance between furthering his academic discipline and meeting student needs with appropriate content related to that discipline, proving that one influence doesn’t have to suffer so that the other may be promoted. His approach may be one that is most palatable to the majority of faculty in this study who are currently discipline-centered planners, but who could become student-centered if they had the design tools they need and the support of colleagues and administrators.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A
LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL AND QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Faculty:

Please offer your expertise to a study of faculty planning as it occurs in Southwestern Virginia. This study is being conducted as part of my doctoral program in the College of Education at Virginia Tech.

Your input is needed to determine how faculty handle the influences or pressures that face them as they select content for their courses. While much of the current literature focuses on the ways in which faculty deliver information, there have been few studies on the ways in which they choose learning tasks for their students. Because of the diversity of institutions in our region, I am surveying faculty at four different types of institutions. If you could take fifteen minutes to respond to the enclosed questionnaire, you would help to assure that your institution is fairly represented among the total responses.

Of course your responses to the questionnaire and the interview will be kept confidential; only the return envelope is coded for follow-up purposes. It will be immediately separated from the questionnaire for processing and analysis.

Once the questionnaires have been completed, I will conduct interviews with faculty who would like to share further observations and insights about the results of the questionnaires and personal approaches to content selection. If you are interested in participating in this aspect of the study, please check the label on the return envelope.

The results of the study will be available upon request and will be directed to administrators and faculty who wish to have more information about the current status of faculty content selection in this region. Please check the label on the return envelope if you wish to receive the results.

Having taught college students myself for the past fifteen years, I am well aware that your time is precious. Please help me to create an accurate portrait of faculty attitudes in our area by completing and returning the Op-scan in the enclosed envelope via campus mail to Marlene Preston within one week. Other phases of the study cannot be carried out until the responses have been analyzed.

I am eager to add your perspective to the study. Please contact me if you have questions or comments about the questionnaire. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Marlene M. Preston
QUESTIONNAIRE

INFLUENCES AFFECTING COURSE CONTENT SELECTION

Please identify your academic discipline:______________ (math, biology, etc.)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

As you answer this questionnaire, please focus on your selection of content for a specific course you teach. Optional: Identify the specific course--______________________________

Circle the letter of the answer which most closely describes your course.

1 Number of students in one section of the course?
   A. 25      B. 26-50      C. 51-75      D. 76-100      E. 101 or more

2. Level of the course? A. 100/1000 B. 200/2000 C. 300/3000 D. 400/4000 E. Graduate

3 Content decisions?
   A. I chose the content for this course independently.
   B. I chose the content for this course with input from other faculty and/or their syllabi.
   C. Most of the course content was predetermined; my content decisions were limited.

4 Approximate percentage of students in the class who are majors: A. 0-33% B. 34-66% C. 67-100%

INFLUENCES

Please rate the potential influences as explained here:

   A. Not important in my planning for this course.
   B. Minimally important in my planning for this course.
   C. Important in my planning for this course.
   D. Very important in my planning for this course.

Note: For purposes of this questionnaire, “content” is considered to be the subject matter of the course, not the methods used to deliver the subject matter or evaluate student mastery of the subject.

Please circle the letter most reflective of your response. Any comments you write in will be useful to this study and will be included in the analysis of the data.

SOCIETAL INFLUENCES as they affected your content selection for the course identified:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5. input from professionals in the field</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6. the need for a responsible citizenry (voters, taxpayers):</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. the need for volunteerism (service learning)</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. the need for solutions to social problems (such as homelessness)</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. legislative trends (local, state, national)</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. local economic development initiatives</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. needs of and/or support from business and industry</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. demands of a global marketplace</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. personal experience as a professional outside academe</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(A, not important -- B, minimally important -- C, important -- D, very important)
**DEPARTMENTAL CULTURE** as it affected your content selection for course identified on page 1:

<p>| | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>conversations with colleagues</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>consistency within the department, with the college catalog, and with other faculty as it relates to this course</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>content of prerequisites for this course</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>content of course for which this class is a prerequisite</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>direction from my department chair</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>my promotion/tenure (departmental criteria)</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>budget available for course implementation</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE -- PERSONAL STUDIES AND EXPERIENCE** as they affected your content selection for the course identified on page 1:

<p>| | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>colleagues in this discipline at other institutions</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>my current research</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>my own undergraduate and graduate education</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>academic journals</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>conferences</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>available textbooks</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>my own experience teaching in this discipline</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**INSTITUTIONAL ADMINISTRATION** as it affected content selection:

<p>| | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>mission -- emphasis on research, teaching and/or service</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>current institutional initiatives (such as technology or internationalizing the curriculum)</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**STUDENTS** as they affected your content selection for the course identified on page 1:

<p>| | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>individual student learning processes and styles</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>student career choices</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>individuals’ prior knowledge related to course content</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not interested</td>
<td>Satisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>individual students’ interests, preferences</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>individuals’ cultural backgrounds (multicultural issues)</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>student expertise with technology and research skills</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>student course evaluations from previous semesters</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>alumni surveys or informal feedback from alumni</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>individual students’ programs of studies</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please note any important influences which have not been mentioned:

**FUTURE PLANNING**

Please indicate if you would like to include these factors in your planning for course content, but need more information or easier access to the information.

*Circle the letter reflective of your response as explained below:*

A. Not interested in using this information/strategy in my content selection process.
B. Satisfied with current information about and use of this aspect
C. Interested in developing more skill/opportunities in this area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Not interested</th>
<th>Satisfied</th>
<th>Interested</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>ways to match course content to the literature of my discipline</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>ways to include my own research in my teaching</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>strategies for adding student use of technology and/or research skills to my course content.</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>current theories about how students learn</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>ways to collect information about incoming students</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>ways to identify and incorporate student interests, preferences</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>strategies for tying student feedback on evaluations to content selection</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>information about actual course content of prerequisites</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>ways to tie content to real problems of citizens/employees</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>clearer or more comprehensive delineation of institutional or departmental initiatives</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>ways to document the course planning process for departmental evaluation of my teaching</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>ways my course content might be tied to service learning</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>logistics of providing more student choice of content (for example, by using technology)</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>legislative action which may affect my discipline, my course, or</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
my students

53 opportunities to discuss content with colleagues

Please note any other aspects relevant to your course planning about which you would like more information or easier access:

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Circle the letter of the answer which most closely describes your position and training.

54 What is your academic rank?
   A. Lecturer/Adjunct   B. Instructor   C. Assistant Prof.   D. Associate Prof.   D. Professor

55 How many formal courses have you taken in Education/Teaching as part of degree program?
   (For example, courses about selecting appropriate content for students, preparing syllabi, assessment of student performance, delivery strategies)
   A. None   B. 1 - 2 classes   C. 3 or more classes

56 How well did training as a Graduate Teaching Assistant prepare you to make content selections?
   A. N/AB. not well   C. satisfactorily   D. very well

57 During the past five years how many professional development seminars related to teaching (course planning, delivery, and/or assessment) have you attended?
   A. None   B. 1 - 2   C. 3 or more

58 Number of years since most recent course or workshop about teaching?
   A. 0 -5 years   B. 6 -10 years   C. 11 -15 years   D. 16 -20 years   E. 21 or more years

59 Length of teaching career?
   A. 0 -5 years   B. 6 -10 years   C. 11 -15 years   D. 16 -20 years   E. 21 or more years

60 Approximate percentage of job requirement consisting of teaching activities, such as planning instruction, delivering instruction, testing, or counseling students enrolled in your course (excluding research, administrative duties, service):
   A. not currently teaching   B. up to 25%   C. 26-50%   D. 51-75%   E. 76-100%

61 Total number of students you teach each semester?_____

Thank you for your time and interest in this survey. Please return it in the enclosed envelope via campus mail. The coded label on the envelope will be used only to track the questionnaires for follow-up activities. Please indicate on that label if you would like a copy of the results of this study and/or if you are willing to participate in a follow-up interview (scheduled at your convenience).

Marlene M Preston
mpreston@vt.edu, 231-3154, 231-9109

Your comments? Clarifications?
APPENDIX B
PILOT TEST

During March 1996 the questionnaire was pilot-tested at the community college and at the research university. The comments, some of which are cited below, were used to revise the questionnaire for greater clarity and convenience.

Content

Recommendations are listed here as they relate to the four sections of the questionnaire. An asterisk indicates those that led to changes in the instrument.

Section I -- Course Description
* check course level which may vary by institution 100/1000
* ask if course is primarily for majors or non-majors (career concerns will be different)
* allow respondents to identify the specific course -- perhaps optional
* overlap in item #3, item #4

Section II -- Influences
* directions -- edit slightly
* repeat entire scale at top of second page
* may want to add block about professional experience (society?)
* own teaching experience?
* add “input from professionals in field” (society)
* add alumni surveys (students)

Section III. Future Planning
make choices simpler
would everyone define service learning in the same way?

Section IV-- Demographics
* #49 reversed order of assistant and associate Prof.
* #49 add adjunct, lecturer
#55 How does GA training fit?
#56 Use narrower ranges
ask number of preparations and number of sections taught each semester

The changes (indicated by an asterisk) were made before the instrument was reformatted according to the suggestions described in the following section.

Options for Recording Responses

One of the community college respondents suggested that I use the term “answer sheet” instead of “op-scan” because of the greater familiarity faculty would have with the prior term.

Another respondent at the research university had some qualifying comments he would have written on the questionnaire had that space been available. Although the respondents did not express difficulty using the op-scan, one respondent indicated a preference for marking responses on the instrument itself. The comments mentioned here coupled with reservations expressed by some committee members led to the reformattting of a questionnaire which would not be accompanied by the op-scan.

This approach makes responding easier for faculty and will allow for stray comments and/or clarifiers to be written on the instrument should a respondent choose to do so. The complexity of subsequent data entry could be offset by the potential richness of responses.
APPENDIX C
RESEARCH REQUESTS

A1. Application for Approval of Research Involving Human Subjects
A2. Letter of Request Sent to Deans at Three Institutions
A3. Informed Consent for Participants of Investigative Projects

Note. One version of each of these requests is included here. Each document was worded to reflect
the institution at which particular faculty were employed.
Application for Approval of Research Involving Human Subjects

Investigator: Marlene M. Preston  
Doctoral Student, College of Education, Virginia Tech (231-3154, 345-0224)  
Faculty Member, Communication Studies, Virginia Tech

Advisor: Dr. Susan Magliaro, Committee Chair (321-8338)  
Project Title: Course Content in Higher Education: Influences and Design Processes

Justification of Project

This study has been undertaken to examine (1) the place of student needs among the influences affecting faculty selection of course content, (2) the importance of context analysis in their course design, and (3) their interest in acquiring more information and/or skills related to content selection. The study will address the following issues:

- Which factors are identified by faculty as those that generate the most influence when faculty make decisions about course content?
- How is student-centeredness related to decisions about course content?
- Which characteristics correlate with a strong interest in student-centeredness:
  - type of institution?
  - amount of pedagogical training?
  - discipline?
  - amount of experience?

The results of this study, conducted at three institutions of higher education in Southwestern Virginia, may be useful to faculty and administrators who are interested in identifying and/or moving toward student-centered content selection.

Procedures

Instrumentation -- The study will be based on two approaches.

1. Faculty will be asked to complete a questionnaire about their planning for a particular course. The 60-question instrument will ask for (1) demographic information, (2) attitudes toward the importance of various influences affecting planning (e.g. institutional administration, academic discipline, society, student needs), (3) interest in obtaining more information related to planning. (Questionnaire attached.)

2. A limited number of faculty will be asked to participate in interviews to discuss (1) the results of the questionnaires, (2) personal attitudes toward the influences, and (3) personal approaches to course content selection.

Participants -- A random sample of faculty in Arts and Sciences from three Southwest Virginia institutions of higher education will be selected to receive the questionnaires. As a follow-up, interviews will be conducted with a limited number of faculty at each institution who have volunteered to participate.

Risks -- No questions of a highly personal or revealing nature will be included. No sensitive topics will be covered.

Benefits -- No benefit will be promised to participants. Because of the study’s cross-institutional nature, participants may feel that they want their own institutions to be well represented. They have the option of requesting results from the study.

The larger societal benefits involve a better understanding of planning related to teaching. As institutions of higher education increasingly focus on teaching, faculty decision-making about courses must be examined so that those decisions may be understood, shared with new faculty, and/or improved. Understanding the place of student needs among the other influences will help faculty and administrators determine the need for change and/or faculty development.
Confidentiality -- Confidentiality is guaranteed to every participant. The questionnaires will be coded only for follow-up purposes; respondents will not be identified when results are compiled or discussed. Accordingly, interview participants will be identified only by a code number when the interviews are analyzed or discussed. Minimal non-identifying information may be used to set a context for the interviews.

All materials will be handled only by the investigator and will remain confidential. Any audio tapes may be transcribed by the investigator and will be labeled with code numbers assigned randomly. All materials will be stored off campus at the investigator’s residence, where they will be inaccessible to any other faculty or administrators. Tapes will be used only by the investigator and will be destroyed once the project has been completed. Articles and reports may be prepared from this data.

Compensation -- No compensation will be provided to any participants.

Freedom to withdraw -- Respondents to the questionnaire may omit any items. Interview participants may choose not to respond to any question. They may decline any follow-up interview or may request that their interviews be withdrawn from the study without penalty.

Informed Consent -- Interview participants will be required to sign an informed consent form, specifying the terms of the study as described here.
March 3, 1996

Dear Dean _______:  

As a faculty member in Communication Studies and a doctoral candidate in the College of Education, I am requesting your permission to survey the faculty in the College of Arts and Sciences. I would like to send a questionnaire to faculty to generate information about their course planning.

The coursework I’ve completed both in Higher Education Administration and in Curriculum and Instruction led me to a literature search about faculty selection of course content. Although much has been written about how information is delivered to students, the literature about higher education and instructional design include little about the ways in which they choose course content.

My cross-institutional study would include questions about the factors which influence faculty decisions and the factors about which they would like more information. I am particularly interested in how or if they use information about students. I’m hoping to find that faculty are more student-centered in their planning than they are often given credit for. My work in the Center for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching has increased my confidence in the depth of faculty concern for students and in faculty interest in improving their craft.

I will be glad to furnish you with a copy of the questionnaire and more details about the study should require them before granting permission. Of course I will provide the results to you upon completion of the study.

If you could leave a message for me with your assistant, I will phone your office this week. I hope to get the questionnaires to faculty just after spring break.

If you approve, I can arrange with your assistant to get the mailing information that will enable me to contact the faculty in our college.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Marlene M. Preston  
Communication Studies 231-3154  
CEUT 231-9109  
mpreston@vt.edu
Informed Consent for Participants of Investigative Projects

Researcher’s process
I. Please participate in a study of faculty decision-making about the course content. The study will focus on the influences affecting those decisions and the information faculty would like to pursue in an effort to make fully informed decisions. Because you have experience with the focus of this study, your participation in this research will be of value in my determining the factors influencing decision-making.

II. Interviews will be conducted at the convenience of the participant. They will be audio-taped. Participants will be asked to comment on questionnaire results and on personal attitudes about content selection—influences and practices.

III. Interview participants will not be at risk and will not be asked questions of a sensitive nature. Participants may elect not to answer any question.

IV. Participants will not receive immediate tangible benefits from participation in the project, but they will be contributing to a study which may help faculty and administrators examine faculty planning. The results of such a study may be used to affirm or improve planning processes to the benefit of faculty and students. Data may also be used to design faculty development programs.

V. All materials will remain confidential. The audio tapes and/or notes from interviews will be transcribed only by the researcher. Interviews and materials will contain proper names, which will be replaced with identifying markers. Audio tapes will be erased upon completion of the project. All materials will be used only by the researcher. Articles and reports may be prepared from this data.

VI. No compensation will be provided to participants.

VII. Of course, you may discontinue your participation at any time. If you have questions regarding any aspect of this study or if you wish to withdraw after signing the form, please contact the researcher, Dr. Magliaro, or Dr. Stout (numbers below).

VIII. This research project has been approved, as required, by the Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University and by the College of Education.

Participant’s agreement:
I. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

II. I have read and understand the Informed Consent and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions about this study answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent for participation in this project. If I participate, I may withdraw at any time without penalty. I agree to abide by the rules of this project.

Participant’s signature ___________________________ Date __________

Should you have any questions about this research or its conduct, please contact:

Marlene Preston, Investigator mpreston@vt.edu 540-231-3154, 540-345-0224
Susan Magliaro, Advisor sumags@vt.edu 540-231-8338
E.R. Stout, Institutional Research stout@vt.edu 540-231-9359
APPENDIX D
QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS: TABLES

Table D2.1 Society as an Influence
Table D2.2 Department as an Influence
Table D2.3 Academic Discipline as an Influence
Table D2.4 Institution as an Influence
Table D2.5 Students as an Influence
Table D2.6 ANOVA: Students by Preparation
Table D2.7 ANOVA: Students by Institution
Table D2.8 ANOVA: Students by Teaching Experience
Table D2.9 ANOVA: Students by Discipline Groups
Table D2.10 Regression: Relationship of Influences to Student-Centeredness
Table D2.11 Future Planning/Development

Note: In tables showing descriptive statistics, the highest means are typed in bold. In the tables showing inferential statistics, raw data was provided to provide a full picture of the results.
### Table 2.1
Society as an Influence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean, Stand.Dev</th>
<th>Not Important</th>
<th>Minimally Important</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5 professionals in the field</td>
<td><strong>2.910</strong> .906</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>23.4%</td>
<td>39.9%</td>
<td>29.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 responsible citizenry</td>
<td><strong>2.43</strong> 1.021</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
<td>34.4%</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 volunteerism, service learning</td>
<td>1.56 .797</td>
<td>59.9%</td>
<td>28.3%</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 social problems</td>
<td>2.02 1.008</td>
<td>40.2%</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
<td>22.8%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 legislative trends</td>
<td>1.80 .932</td>
<td>49.5%</td>
<td>27.1%</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 economic development</td>
<td>1.48 .777</td>
<td>67.6%</td>
<td>19.1%</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 business, industry</td>
<td>1.90 1.017</td>
<td>46.5%</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td>16.6%</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 global marketplace</td>
<td>2.09 1.007</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
<td>28.9%</td>
<td>24.6%</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 experience outside academe</td>
<td><strong>2.81</strong> 1.103</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
<td>31.7%</td>
<td>33.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item</td>
<td>Mean. Stand.Dev.</td>
<td>Not Important</td>
<td>Minimally Important</td>
<td>Important</td>
<td>Very Important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 conversations with colleagues</td>
<td>2.88 .839</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>24.3%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 consistency--dept., catalogue, faculty</td>
<td>3.08 .854</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>18.3%</td>
<td>41.4%</td>
<td>35.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 content of prerequisites</td>
<td>2.44 1.158</td>
<td>30.4%</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 content of next course in sequence</td>
<td>2.40 1.214</td>
<td>33.9%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>22.8%</td>
<td>25.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 department chair</td>
<td>1.87 .993</td>
<td>48.4%</td>
<td>25.8%</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 promotion, tenure</td>
<td>1.46 .718</td>
<td>66.3%</td>
<td>22.3%</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 budget for course implementation</td>
<td>1.74 .931</td>
<td>53.7%</td>
<td>24.5%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 2.3
Academic Discipline as an Influence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean, Stand.Dev</th>
<th>Not important</th>
<th>Minimally important</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21 colleagues, other institutions</td>
<td>2.63 .948</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>29.3%</td>
<td>36.7%</td>
<td>19.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 personal research</td>
<td>2.51 1.04</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
<td>26.2%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>19.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 personal education</td>
<td>2.99 .873</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td>44.1%</td>
<td>30.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 journals</td>
<td>2.50 .913</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
<td>34.6%</td>
<td>36.2%</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 conferences</td>
<td>2.46 .924</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 texts</td>
<td>3.04 .907</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>43.1%</td>
<td>34.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 personal teaching</td>
<td>3.59 .626</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>30.9%</td>
<td>64.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 2.4
Institutional Administration as an Influence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean, Stand.Dev</th>
<th>Not Important</th>
<th>Minimally Important</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>28 mission</td>
<td>2.27 1.027</td>
<td>28.9%</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
<td>12.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 instit. initiatives (e.g. technology)</td>
<td>2.19 .953</td>
<td>27.7%</td>
<td>35.3%</td>
<td>27.2%</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item</td>
<td>Mean, Stand.Dev</td>
<td>Not Important</td>
<td>Minimally Important</td>
<td>Important</td>
<td>Very Important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 learning styles</td>
<td>2.94 .845</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
<td>41.4%</td>
<td>28.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 career choices</td>
<td>2.6 .967</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
<td>31.9%</td>
<td>33.0%</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32 prior knowledge</td>
<td>2.74 .893</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
<td>47.6%</td>
<td>18.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33 interests, preferences</td>
<td>2.67 .818</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
<td>29.3%</td>
<td>47.3%</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34 cultural backgrounds</td>
<td>2.20 .938</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
<td>32.6%</td>
<td>31.6%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 student expertise with technology</td>
<td>2.23 .889</td>
<td>24.1%</td>
<td>35.3%</td>
<td>34.2%</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36 course evaluations</td>
<td>2.52 .985</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>32.1%</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37 alumni surveys</td>
<td>1.76 .952</td>
<td>52.2%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38 students’ programs of study</td>
<td>2.0 .951</td>
<td>34.2%</td>
<td>33.7%</td>
<td>34.4%</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2.6
ANOVA: Student Influence by Preparation for Teaching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preparation Score (total of #54, 55, 56)</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std.Dev.</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>Cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>2.17</td>
<td>.462</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>.563</td>
<td>6.33</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td>.586</td>
<td>10.65</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>.400</td>
<td>7.04</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>.498</td>
<td>8.67</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>.520</td>
<td>5.13</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.00</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>.613</td>
<td>5.26</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.00</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>.678</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Between Groups: 2.98 Sum of Sq.; 7 d.f.; .425 mean square; 1.58 F; .143 Sig.
Within Groups: 48.0447 Sum of Sq.; 179 d.f.; .269 Mean square
### Table 2.7
Student Influence by Institution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
<th>Sum of Sq.</th>
<th>Cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comm.College</td>
<td>2.48</td>
<td>.618</td>
<td>16.83</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lib.Arts College</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>.413</td>
<td>7.84</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Univ.</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>.523</td>
<td>26.03</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** Between Groups: .545 Sum of Sq.; 2 d.f.; .273 mean square; .995 F; .3718 Sig.
Within Groups: 50.69 Sum of Sq.; 185 d.f.; .274 mean square

### Table 2.8
Student Influence by Teaching Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience (years)</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
<th>Sum of Sq.</th>
<th>Cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-5</td>
<td>2.55</td>
<td>.619</td>
<td>8.80</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>2.24</td>
<td>.415</td>
<td>5.68</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>2.39</td>
<td>.606</td>
<td>11.74</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>.485</td>
<td>7.30</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 or more</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>.503</td>
<td>15.69</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** Between Groups: 1.67 Sum of Sq.; 4 d.f.; .418 mean square; 1.54 F; .193 Sig.
Within Groups: 49.212 Sum of Sq.; 181 d.f.; .272 mean square
Table 2.9
Student Influence by Discipline Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
<th>Sum of Sq.</th>
<th>Cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>natural sciences</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>.454</td>
<td>6.81</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>social sciences</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>.500</td>
<td>10.99</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>humanities</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>.601</td>
<td>23.81</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>math. sciences</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>.460</td>
<td>6.14</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Between Groups: 1.33 Sum of Sq.; 3 d.f.; .442 mean square; 1.54 F; .193 Sig.
Within Groups: 47.747 Sum of Sq.; 172 d.f.; .278 mean square

Table 2.10
Relationship of Discipline Group, Training, and Institution on Student-Centered Planning: Regression

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Career Length</th>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Preparation</th>
<th>Discipline Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.018</td>
<td>-.026</td>
<td>.131</td>
<td>.148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Length</td>
<td>.018</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.045</td>
<td>-.002</td>
<td>.022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution</td>
<td>-.026</td>
<td>.045</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>-.022</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation</td>
<td>.131</td>
<td>-.002</td>
<td>-.022</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline Group</td>
<td>.148</td>
<td>.022</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.159</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. B SE B B
Discipline Group | .081 | .040 | .15 |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Not Interested</th>
<th>Satisfied</th>
<th>Interested</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>39 match content to literature of discipline</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>64.7%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 include research in teaching</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>58.3%</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41 adding technology</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>30.4%</td>
<td>60.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42 learning theory</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>12.8%</td>
<td>33.2%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43 data about new students</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>28.3%</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
<td>35.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44 student interest, preference</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>47.1%</td>
<td>42.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 tying evaluations to content</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>53.6%</td>
<td>33.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46 content of prerequisites</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>24.2%</td>
<td>61.5%</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47 case studies, PBL</td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>42.5%</td>
<td>46.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48 initiatives-dept, institution</td>
<td>1.97</td>
<td>23.2%</td>
<td>56.8%</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49 document own planning</td>
<td>1.99</td>
<td>26.8%</td>
<td>45.9%</td>
<td>26.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 service learning</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td>45.5%</td>
<td>26.1%</td>
<td>29.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51 student choice of content</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td>31.6%</td>
<td>44.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52 relevant legislative action</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>32.3%</td>
<td>31.2%</td>
<td>36.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53 conversation opportunities</td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>56.1%</td>
<td>39.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX E
INTERVIEW RESULTS: TABLES

Table E3.1 Backgrounds and Preparation for Teaching
Table E3.2 Ranking of Influences
Table E3.3 Content Selection Processes
Table 3.1
Participants’ Backgrounds and Preparation for Teaching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community College</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant</td>
<td>TA training</td>
<td>formal educ. courses</td>
<td>years teaching</td>
<td>discipline group</td>
<td>degree</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C1</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>teaching cert.</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>natural sci.</td>
<td>&quot;ABD forever&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>teaching cert.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>math sci.</td>
<td>BS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C3</td>
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<td>MS in educ.</td>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>natural sci.</td>
<td>MS</td>
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<td>1 educ. course</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>soc. sciences</td>
<td>MS</td>
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<td>C5</td>
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<td>EdD in educ</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>humanities</td>
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<tr>
<td>C6</td>
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<td>soc. sciences</td>
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<td>TA training</td>
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<td>years teaching</td>
<td>discipline group</td>
<td>degree</td>
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<td>years teaching</td>
<td>discipline group</td>
<td>degree</td>
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<tr>
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<td>PhD</td>
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<td>11-15</td>
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<td>PhD</td>
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<tr>
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<td>16-20</td>
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<td>PhD</td>
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Table 3.2
Ranking of Influences

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<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>discipline group</th>
<th># years teaching</th>
<th>Influence #1</th>
<th>Influence #2</th>
<th>Influence #3</th>
<th>Influence #4</th>
<th>Influence #5</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>science</td>
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<td>disc</td>
<td>dept</td>
<td>student</td>
<td>inst</td>
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<td>soc.</td>
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<td>dept</td>
<td>inst</td>
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<td>disc</td>
<td>student</td>
<td>soc.</td>
<td>dept</td>
<td>inst</td>
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<td>R8</td>
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<td>11-15</td>
<td>disc</td>
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<td>soc*</td>
<td>dept</td>
<td>inst</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R4</td>
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<td>disc</td>
<td>student</td>
<td>dept</td>
<td>inst</td>
<td>soc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R5</td>
<td>humanities</td>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>student</td>
<td>dept*</td>
<td>soc*</td>
<td>disc*</td>
<td>inst</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>6to10</td>
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<td>inst</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>student</td>
<td>dept</td>
<td>soc</td>
<td>inst</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>16-20</td>
<td>soc</td>
<td>student</td>
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<td>dept</td>
<td>inst</td>
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<tr>
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<td>dept*</td>
<td>inst</td>
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<td>disc</td>
<td>soc</td>
<td>student</td>
<td>dept</td>
<td>inst</td>
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<tr>
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<td>comp.-math</td>
<td>21+</td>
<td>student</td>
<td>dept</td>
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<td>disc</td>
<td>inst</td>
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<td>16-20</td>
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<tr>
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<td>disc</td>
<td>dept</td>
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<td>21+</td>
<td>student</td>
<td>soc</td>
<td>disc</td>
<td>dept*</td>
<td>inst*</td>
</tr>
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<td>L2</td>
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<td>21+</td>
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<tr>
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<td>16-20</td>
<td>student</td>
<td>dept</td>
<td>soc</td>
<td>disc</td>
<td>inst</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* indicates ranking of two or more influences as equal by one respondent
### Table 3.3
Content Selection Process

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty</th>
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<th>Step #2</th>
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<th>Step #4</th>
<th>Step #5</th>
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<td>select readings</td>
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<td>topics</td>
<td>contacts</td>
<td>texts</td>
<td>organize</td>
<td>supplement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R3</td>
<td>description</td>
<td>texts</td>
<td>organize</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>sequence</td>
<td>instruction goals</td>
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<td>student interest</td>
<td>theory</td>
<td>assignments</td>
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<td>contacts</td>
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<td>texts</td>
<td>organize</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>texts</td>
<td>sequence, description</td>
<td>topics</td>
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</tr>
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<td>texts</td>
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<td>texts</td>
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<tr>
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<td>texts</td>
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<td>personal reading</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* text as departmental adoption
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Department of Communication Studies
34 Agnew
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

EDUCATION
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   Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 1993-present.

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Seminar Designer and Presenter, Roanoke City Office of Human Resources
   Professional Development for City Employees in Writing and Speaking, 1992-1996

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   Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 1994-95

English Instructor, Adjunct, Virginia Western Community College, 1982-1994
English Instructor, Adjunct, Dabney Lancaster Community College, 1978-1982
English Teacher, Eastwood Junior High School, Pemberville, Ohio, 1973-1976

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   Eastern Education Research Association, 1997

Committee Member, New Century Council Higher Education and Economy Committee, 1994-96

Committee Member, College of Education, Restructuring Committee, 1994-95
GRANT
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Center for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 1997

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Member, Botetourt County Library Board, 1983-1987.