

Spotlight on Teaching: Climatology Instructor Generates Interest For Non-Science Majors

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Spotlight Reporter

Katie Hirshboeck has made it her goal to get students interested in science by using a combination of different teaching methods.

Hirschboeck, associate professor of climatology teaches NATS 101, Introduction to Global Change. Few, if any, of the approximately 160 students enrolled in her course are science majors. Most of the non-science majors take her course to fulfill a general education requirement.

Hirschboeck presents the material she teaches in a variety of ways with the hope that she will reach more students who respond to different learning styles.

Students frequently work together in groups so they practice collaborative learning. As a teaching team affiliated with the University Teaching Teams program, class preceptors (or peer tutors), two teaching assistants and Hirshboeck facilitate group discussion. Groups also work together to find the best consensus answer on short, in-class tests.

Hirschboeck created an Internet homepage for the course containing extensive class information. From this web site, students can explore Web CT (Web Course Training), a popular web-based course management system. Web CT provides students with a suite of learning tools like a Calendar for assignments, Self-Checks and Study Guides, online Readiness Quizzes and Grades. Students also can post comments on a class Discussion Board or talk in the Chat Room.

Students can use Web CT for online "self checks" (with feedback on wrong answers) to gage their understanding of the readings, followed by online "readiness quizzes" on the readings to prepare them for material to be discussed in class. The information available through Web CT also helps enhance and individualize each student's learning.

Hirschboeck felt that one of her biggest obstacles was giving so many students quick feedback on tests and assignments. The Grades link on Web CT now allows students to view their current grades and test results. In addition, the Self-Checks and Readiness Quizzes also tell students when they answer a question incorrectly and why it is wrong. These features of Web CT act as a useful study guide so students learn more about the material.

Hirschboeck uses both high-tech and low-tech teaching tools in her class. One example is STELLA, a computer software program that introduces students to the concept of modeling. Computer models are extremely important to global change science. Using STELLA, students create their very own simple model of exponential