



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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PRACTICING BEST PRACTICES

Recently, the Alabama Adult Education Program was moved from the K-12 system to the two-year college system; instead of a network of individual programs, Adult Education is now one large program with a unified vision for assisting adults in learning and developing skills for employment and self-sufficiency. Unlike K-12 public education, Adult Education classes are not guaranteed to all.

Shelton State Community College, under the direction of the Alabama Department of Postsecondary Education, is embracing the state's E3 Initiative of Education, Employment, and Economic Development. The program provides services to a five-county area and has the ability to meet the needs of local businesses by providing education and skills improvement for workers and potential workers by embracing the cultural differences and unique education and training needs that challenge many non-traditional learners.

The shift from the K-12 system and expanding the focus of the program to include employment and economic development required professional development for instructors. Instructors needed to understand and buy into the new focus as they are the ones responsible for the classroom atmosphere and daily instruction. Instructors are polled quarterly and asked for input in training topics.

Once the training needs are identified, presenters are selected. Whenever possible, we try to utilize our department staff to provide the training. We have found that the instructors in the program recognize the educational needs of the students and the site restrictions of the classes. When an instructor shares with his/her peers, the segment of the training is called "best practices." During this segment, instructors actually participate in the learning activity, allowing them to experience it first-hand so they can easily replicate it in their own classrooms. Many of these "best practices" have been observed "in action" when program staff make site visits to classrooms. As program staff see students respond positively to these activities, they take note, and then invite the instructor to share the activities at a later in-

service training session. The most effective activities are constructed around a central theme, yet contain items of varying degrees of difficulty, allowing all students in the adult education classroom to participate in the activity, regardless of ability level.

In addition to the Quarterly Instructor In-service Training, best practices are spotlighted in the program's quarterly newsletter. The newsletter becomes much more than a communication device; it becomes an actual curriculum tool. So, whether through in-service training sessions or newsletter spotlights, sample lessons and techniques are demonstrated, and all program instructors, as well as their students, receive valuable benefits. Involving instructors in the in-service training allows them to teach each other, thus helping them buy into the new focus while sharing proven instructional techniques.

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TELEPHONES AND THE PROFESSOR

Professors really do want to hear from students. I have developed some guidelines for students who prefer to visit by phone.

- If you call and I do not answer, leave a clear and distinct message. Tell me exactly who you are (full name), which class you are in, and briefly explain the reason you are calling.
- Make sure that the telephone number you give is enunciated well, is actually your phone, and that you will answer when it rings. Avoid playing telephone tag.
- In your message, make sure you say when you will be available, and be there, whether it is at home or at work.
- Write out your questions beforehand, and have them handy.
- Make sure you have exhausted other sources of information first; other students who generally have the answer, the syllabus, the library, and the tech support.
- Do not ask questions that were already asked in class, unless you really do not understand now, or you, with a reason beyond your control, were not in class.
- Do not call to give an excuse for not coming to class or the reason you were not there unless directed to do so, and certainly not during the time for the class session.
- Excuses are not good telephone conversation; get to the point right away.
- Manners and pleasantries are important, but should be kept to a minimum.
- Remember to say thank you.

For the student who prefers to use e-mail, the same rules apply. In addition, I tell students:

- Do not send jokes, smilies, or other superfluous materials.
- Send material in the exact format the teacher requires.
- Make sure your work has identifiers (name, class and section, assignment name and number) in the body of the attachment; not just in the e-mail message.
- Make sure your proper e-mail address is hyper-linked, especially if you are using a library or someone else's computer to send mail.
- Make sure your message and attachments are virus-free.
- Do not rely on spell check; proofread and correct everything before you send it.

- Do not send anything in anger.
- If the work is due on a certain date, that does not mean to send it at 11:59 p.m.
- Make sure you type in the professor's e-mail address correctly, as we are not responsible for your errors.

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