

South Georgia State College
Douglas Campus
Small Teaching FLC

NOTE: SGSC's two Small Teaching FLCs had combined face-to-face meetings; therefore, the following information relative to those meetings is common to both reports.

When the SGSC Chancellor's Learning Scholars issued the invitation to faculty to join either a Mindset or Small Teaching Faculty Learning Community, we had no idea that Small Teaching would be so appealing. We ultimately had enough participants to populate one Mindset FLC and two Small Teaching FLCs, one on the Douglas Campus and one on the Waycross Campus. It was difficult to find time to meet physically because the Spring semester is overloaded with extracurricular activities (Science Fairs, Math Tournaments, Honors Ceremonies, etc.) that require faculty time commitments, so we decided to take advantage of monthly dates already set for academic division meetings and have the two Small Teaching groups meet together for face-to-face discussions. We built a course shell in GeorgiaVIEW to deliver readings and web links and to encourage asynchronous discussions, and we made clear to participants that both facilitators were available for individual consultations.

During our first meeting in January, we used portions of the Faculty Learning Communities Overview PowerPoint to introduce the concept of the FLC, and we distributed the Small Teaching Inventory to introduce the concepts found in James Lang's book. Our faculty is small, so we did not spend much time getting to know each other; instead, we engaged in a lively conversation about goal-setting and deliverables. The goals the group identified were to:

- Learn something
- Share
- Improve teaching/learning
- Improve student retention
- Generate meaningful discussions among colleagues
- Promote personal growth

We ended the first meeting by introducing the GeorgiaVIEW course (called Achieving Course Enrichment with Small Teaching FLC), where we had already uploaded the Small Teaching Inventory and links to Lang's Small Teaching article series from the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and other articles, as well as a written description of the end-of-term product expected from each participant.

By our second meeting, in February, we had made arrangements to purchase copies of Lang's book to place on reserve in the libraries of both campuses, and we focused our efforts on a discussion of what participants planned to do to enrich their courses. Some participants were still a bit confused about what constituted Small Teaching, so we spent some time reviewing the principles and exploring what sorts of things they may already be doing. Many participants shared strategies, and the multiple academic disciplines represented made for a diverse and lively conversation.

Both facilitators noticed after the first two meetings increased engagement in informal pedagogical discussions in the hallways and faculty offices, as well as individual questions via phone and email from FLC participants. By the third meeting, in March, most participants had begun to make changes in their classes and were trying to determine how to assess those changes, which was the focus of that meeting's discussion, which was, again, very lively and productive. Participants were asked to deliver their end-of-term reports to the facilitators by May 1st.

Institutional assessment activities prohibited a face-to-face meeting in April, but several of our participants attended the USG Teaching and Learning Conference, where conversations continued. The FLC facilitators delivered a presentation on "Small Teaching, Big Learning: Using D2L Tools to Achieve Course Enrichment" that was well received by not only our own colleagues but many others across and beyond the System.

The Douglas Campus Small Teaching FLC began with eleven participants, though one withdrew well after halfway into the semester. Two others attended every meeting and were engaged in discussions but failed to submit final reports. To illustrate that the smallest of changes can affect student learning, I shared with the group a change that I made in an effort to curtail late submissions of work during Fall semester to an ENGL 2121 (British Literature I) course I taught in hybrid format. Prior to that semester, I had never used the Announcements tool in GeorgiaVIEW to any great extent other than to post important messages, but after reading Lang's book, I decided that that tool could be useful in providing explanations and support or in reinforcing expectations. I developed the habit of posting an announcement immediately following the weekly F2F meeting of the class to remind students of assignments due prior to the next meeting, even though I had already included that information in both the course assignment schedule and the checklist for each module of the course. I really didn't expect my use of announcements to make much difference, but my expectations were surpassed when I did notice a decrease in the number of late assignments and an increase in student preparation. I was most surprised, though, to read this student comment on a course evaluation at the end of the term: "My favorite part about this class is how accessible all of the content has been and how organized content is. I barely ever questioned what I needed to get done every week and this made the class more enjoyable and less stressful, which overall helps my work to be of better quality." As a result of that small change, I now use the Announcements tool on a regular basis for both hybrid and F2F classes.

The eight participants who submitted reports incorporated changes that ran the gamut of Lang's structure, from Knowledge to Understanding to Inspiration. Most changes were designed to aid retrieval, make connections, and increase engagement. Several sought to move away from their traditional lecture format that they perceived as ineffective, and several designed effective group-work activities. All participants who incorporated changes found some value to what they did, and all provided positive feedback for the FLC.

Frank Pridemore, POLS 1101 (Intro to American Government) instructor, describes his frustration with his traditional lecture approach: "I constantly feel constrained by the need to cover a large volume of material versus utilizing unique and innovative techniques to grab and hold the attention of a majority of my students. Roughly seventy-five percent of my time in the classroom is spent lecturing while showing power point screenshots as I lecture. Only a handful of my students appear to engage with what I am presenting and stay engaged for the entire class session." He chose to "clarify from the very beginning of each class session a multitude of important points that students must understand" by creating "a list of bullet points of the most basic and prominent terms and concepts that [he] planned to present each day." Pridemore explains: "For the last five class sessions this semester, I listed those points on the board well before class began so that students could see them clearly. I then referred to them throughout my lecture, employing the Socratic method of asking questions which I hoped would lead them to connect what I was presenting in my lecture and the power point to the points and terms listed on the board.... I measured this by embedding fifteen questions taken from the material I posted on the board in the Final Exam." He made this change in only one of the five sections of the course he taught; students in that section "achieved the highest percentage of correct answers for eleven of the fifteen questions." Pridemore says, "I think that this is statistically significant, and indicates to me that presenting the major points on the board before class, and then referring to them and asking leading questions about them helped the students...to understand the material better than the other classes did. When I use this technique in the future, I will refine the material I put on the board and link it to material from previous class sessions to illustrate the cumulative nature of building the foundation" of knowledge necessary for success in POLS 1101. He found participation in the FLC to be productive, saying that it "has opened my eyes to small things that might have a big impact on how and what my students learn. It reiterated to me that I also need to be a continuous learner, constantly assessing what I am doing in the classroom, and constantly be on the lookout for small things that might connect with my students."

Ron Abercrombie, ACCT 2101 (Principles of Financial Accounting) instructor, had a similar dissatisfaction with his traditional approach, explaining that "My time before class was typically spent preparing the materials and visuals for class, and pulling the attendance report up on the computer so that I could take attendance and begin lecturing. Class was then mostly lecture with some demonstration of accounting processes. Class ended with [a] short Q&A session that rarely had questions." He changed his approach by incorporating "non-academic discussions with students" within five minutes before class began. Abercrombie reasons, "If I could get the students comfortable just talking to me, then maybe I could get them to continue with that comfort level during the class period." He notes that the conversations made a difference, saying that "the students that I could get into conversations with tended to participate in the lectures. These students were more interactive, and I was able to move from a lecture to more of a conversation." Some students, however, were difficult to engage. He explains, "These students are addicted to their cellphones. To get them into conversations before class took a constant push from me to get them to engage. I did start noticing students putting the phones away when I walked in the room. This did not happen until well after midterms. I never spoke academically during this before-class time. I would try to find

something that interested them and discuss that. There were a few times that the discussion actually cut into the class time, but I felt the conversation was more important. These students were much more willing to speak up during class." Even so, "there were students who wanted no part of speaking with me before class. These same students typically had no input in class discussions." He also began projecting images related to accounting in the classroom, "designed to get the students to start thinking about accounting concepts and skills before we started talking about accounting." He notes that "there was the occasional student that would pull out their notes and review before class, or the occasional students who would discuss the journal entry, but I am not sure that it got most of the students thinking about accounting." Abercrombie says that "the FLC was very helpful" and that he is "looking forward to the next one."

Elisa Johnson, ENGL 1102 (Composition II) instructor, chose to increase the frequency of quizzing in an effort to encourage more thorough reading and better preparation for class discussions. She explains, "in the Spring 2019 semester, I gave 6 quizzes instead of 4 quizzes on the readings for the course" and found that "the students' quiz grades (class averages) improved overall on each quiz, which I interpreted to mean that the students were reading the stories and play more thoroughly and retaining the information they had read." In addition, "the number of students who felt comfortable talking in class appeared to increase during the semester, and discussions became more lively." She notes, "The effect that this FLC had on my teaching was that it helped me realize that small things I do can help me reach my students better and get them more engaged in the class."

Susan Clement, NURS 2213 (Women's Health) instructor, also sought to increase students' preparation by ending one class session by "provid[ing] them with questions after each class meeting that would be discussed during the next class session." Clements says that "My hope was to have students read the material and have some basic foundation of the concepts we were to be discussing in class for that day....I gave a 10-item quiz to see if they had actually listened to the questions I had provided." The first quiz did not return the desired results, but the second quiz was more successful, indicating that "the students were starting to listen and read, maybe. I also had the students provide feedback if they found this new activity helpful." A word cloud of their responses included (in ascending order) review, informative, support, guidance, focus, prepared, and helpful. Clement notes, "The outcome for the students was that they were coming more prepared and could have a more lively and informative discussion about topics being discussed. They were also discussing more of the course topics amongst themselves during break and before class started." She intends to continue the practice and incorporate others, finding that "participating in this faculty learning community has given me new options to try and support and encourage my students.... it has also given me the opportunity to have a variety of new resources to enhance my teaching abilities. I also like having the...opportunity to see how...peers are providing education and learning opportunities to their students."

Guadalupe Madrid, SPAN 1002 (Spanish II) instructor, tried to increase students' speaking abilities by applying what she calls "'small talks' that aim to improve accuracy in

grammar and vocabulary in Spanish.” She explains, “I used this strategy in the Spanish 1002 course composed of only ten students. This activity consisted of four small conversations that the students had to prepare using the grammar points that we practiced in class....The procedure of the activity was the same for every presentation. First, students wrote a little paragraph using a specific grammar point. Second, I gave time (which was variable) to practice pronunciation and to memorize the paragraph. Third, they individually presented this paragraph to me or to the class orally.” She found the technique to be very useful, as it “represents an effective intervention to promote focus on form and subsequently the avoidance of persistent errors in oral production. Also, the student is encouraged not only to speak in a second language, but also to interact more with the culture in the classroom and receive feedback from peers, from self-assessment, and from the instructor.” Madrid says that her participation in the FLC gave her more confidence and “the pedagogical support for applying the small talk strategy in my classrooms.”

Julie Havens, BIOL 4501 (Senior Seminar) instructor, explains that “in past semesters, students enrolled in BIOL 4501 led class discussions summarizing primary literature articles chosen on topics of their choice. They also conducted an independent research project and presented results in poster format.” She chose to redesign the course “to serve as a capstone course for biology majors, and to align with BIOL 4500 (Introduction to Biological Research), which students take the previous semester.” As a result of the redesign, the former independent project became “a class research project, where students used a molecular technique (DNA barcoding) to identify (to genus and/or species level) a fungal culture. Pairs of students were given a fungal culture (an ‘unknown’). They extracted DNA from their culture, amplified a ribosomal RNA gene using PCR, purified the product, confirmed amplification using gel electrophoresis, quantified the sample, and sent for DNA sequencing. They constructed a poster describing their project and presented the results at the biannual SGSC Undergraduate Research Symposium.” Havens says that “Positive feedback included that [students] enjoyed working in pairs, using molecular techniques, participating in a structured class project, and being able to see the relevance of the material covered in earlier courses.” She notes that “Although I’ve outlined an effort to re-design an entire course, this ‘small teaching’ FLC has taught me to appreciate the importance of student feedback...Students were very appreciative of my solicitation of their input, and I think this inclusion made the course experience more valuable.”

Badr Abdalla, ASTR 1010 (Astronomy of the Solar System) instructor, describes his previous approach: “Usually, I give students [an] exercise at the end of each chapter... [and] two to three quizzes in each chapter. The exercise is a set of questions related [to] the concepts and the knowledge [the] student has gained. The quiz consists of one or two questions testing student information from the previous lecture.” He chose to incorporate group work into the class “to get all of the students engaged and learning from each other...and to make the class more interesting and fun.” He says that the strategy was “also to have them focused and responsible in order to contribute to their group.” Abdalla explains: “I divided my students into groups of four to five students per group, then I give them [a] problem which usually consists of

multiple questions that test their understanding [of] the materials presented in the class. Each student has a specific role in his/her group. The roles are as follow: *Scribe* (takes notes on the group's activities), *Proposer* (proposes explanations to the group), *Skeptic* (points out weaknesses in proposed explanations), *Moderator* (leads group discussion and makes sure everyone contributes). Students need to work as a group to answer each question." While he found assessment to be challenging, he says that "The learning outcome was assessed by their performance in the assignment. In conclusion, I would say the overall outcome is positive and met my expectations to some [extent]. I will improve the assignment structure next semester." Abdalla offers very positive feedback regarding the FLC: "The FLC of small teaching is one of the best FLC[s] I attended[;] I like the different ways I could make to improve and enrich the learning process. Besides the group work assignment, I also started applying other small teaching changes, such as talking to students before class starts, [and] I can see the result of doing so, [as] it breaks the ice and more students start talking to me. I would recommend this FLC to other faculties."

Nirmal Niroula, SOCI 1101 (Intro to Sociology) instructor, says that "Generally, a part of my pedagogy includes lecture and discussion. I try to give the students the gist of the topic under discussion and ask them several questions. Some students respond eagerly and take part in the discussion, but [the] majority sit quiet[ly] with no response. When I give them a quiz at the end of the class on the topic that was discussed, most students do not do well." Seeking to foster student engagement, he says, "I modified my lecture to contain the main idea of the topic in 30 minutes, and the rest of the time was devoted to small-group discussions on the issue of economic inequality." He made this change in only one section of the course. He further explains: "To make [students] aware of social inequality in real terms, I gave them a scenario of a single mother with a high school diploma working 40 hours a week and trying to eke out a living. I asked the students to make an expense budget for her based on all her needs. The second question related to the average income of CEOs and their hourly wage (CEOs don't work on wage but turning their salary into 40 hours a week makes it easy for comparison). They had to calculate the differences in income and compare what social benefits the woman has to forgo because she cannot afford them (education, health, entertainment, etc.). A third question related to her chance of moving up the social ladder, getting out of poverty and living the proverbial American Dream. And finally, they had to assign her a job based on her qualifications and rate her occupation on a prestige scale from 10-100. This way they had to identify the three elements of social inequality: power, prestige, and property. The goal was to make them understand how these interact to make one's social class, and how it affects one's life." Niroula was pleased with the results, saying that this small change "became a biggie for me." He elaborates: "I got a very positive outcome from this change. Upon getting the results of the quiz related to social stratification, I realized that more than 90 percent of the students [in the class where the change was made] had the correct answers. That is because, not only were students engaged in discussing the budget, but also were emotionally involved with her situation. They realized that the structure of society makes some people remain where they are (poverty), and odds of getting out of the misery are stacked against people like her." He intends to make this

change in other classes in the future and says that “This experience has given me a positive outlook for small innovative ideas, instead of the usual lecture. I will be looking for ways by which students learn effectively through participation and engagement.”

The Small Teaching FLCs were very successful in building a sense of community among the participants at SGSC, and most participants expressed a desire to continue to be a part of the community during the next academic year. The facilitators for both groups have an interest in continuing the exploration of small teaching practices, particularly with the upcoming publication of *Small Teaching Online*. Because we encountered some confusion as to how the funding of the FLCs would be accomplished internally and were thus delayed in being able to make purchases, we did not make the best use of resources, so that process should improve over the next year. We also felt that the whole experience was rushed, so we would like to be able to form the FLCs early in the Fall semester to facilitate training in the principles, which would then lead to implementation and assessment during Spring semester.

Submitted by Sara Selby