

Fall 2011 MATYCONN meeting – October 21, 2011

Herb Gross

Presentation #1 - “The Calculus of Everyday Living” or
“Today is the Tomorrow We Worried About Yesterday”

Imagine a reel of movie film being unraveled and we are looking at it frame-by-frame. Without a powerful magnifying glass we see that the first frame and the second frame appear to look exactly the same; the same is true about the second frame and the third frame and so on up to, say the 50,000th frame. Yet even though the change from frame to frame seems to be unnoticeable, the 1st frame and the 50,000th frame do not look at all alike.

More generally, in a real life situation by the time we notice that there is a change, the change has been occurring for a long time. In today’s presentation I will try to compare the problems that the community colleges faced when I first became involved with them in 1958 and the problems that exist today. The changes are enormous but have taken place so gradually that we might not have noticed what has been happening on a continual basis. In particular we have gone from an era when students would ask such questions as “How do you derive the quadratic formula?” to an era when students now ask “Why do I have to know the quadratic formula?”

The point is that it is far more difficult and far more subtle to have to address answering the question of “why?” than it is to answer the question of “how”; and what this means to us as community college instructors will be discussed in this presentation.

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Presentation #2 – “The Teacher as Coach”

In sports we recognize that good players do not automatically become good coaches. Yet academia persists in hiring its coaches (i.e., instructors) based on their player’s credentials (degrees, publications, etc.). The community colleges are facing an enormous bimodal distribution where at one end of the spectrum there are students who by the standards of previous generations would never even have considered coming to college and at the other end of the spectrum there are students who in previous generations would have enrolled directly to a senior (i.e., four year) college upon graduation from high school. Both of these groups require us to develop special technics to help these groups attain their objectives.

In this presentation I will discuss what in my mind distinguishes the teacher as coach from the teacher as researcher. More specifically:

- (1) The teacher as coach makes the material relevant to the needs of the student as the student perceives the needs to be.
- (2) The teacher as coach develops a delivery system that allows the lower half of the class (and there is always a lower half) to compete more successfully with the upper half but without holding back the progress of the upper half.
- (3) The teacher as coach provides a live support system that encourages students to remain in the course and strive toward their goals. This must be done in addition to teaching the content rather than at the expense of stressing the content.