

THE CAL APPROACH: AN ACTIVE LEARNING STRATEGY FOR THE IS CURRICULUM

TUTORIAL PRESENTATION

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Given the changes in work force requirements and in the characteristics of today's student population, community college faculty must explore methods of teaching beyond the traditional lecture. Currently, the lecture is the most widely used teaching method. However, it was devised "...to serve a different student population and was based on old assumptions about (teaching and learning)." Research has shown that today's college population "consists largely of concrete-active learners, who learn best from concrete experiences that engage their senses." This forum introduces an instructional strategy that was developed for use in the information systems curriculum. The strategy, the CAL (Concrete-Active Learning) Approach, combines three popular teaching methodologies to create a student centered environment.

With the lecture, the learning process is an activity where the learner passively receives information from the teacher and then demonstrates mastery of that knowledge through tests. Under this scenario the teacher does the organizing, the researching, the explaining, the summarizing. The teacher and teaching are the foci, rather than the student and learning. While listening is a form of active participation, the literature suggests "...that students must do more...They must read, write, discuss, or be engaged in solving problems."

It is our position that, in order for community colleges to meet today's challenges, the focal point of the classroom must move from the teacher to the student. Critical thinking and reading, writing, cooperating, and job content learning must all be addressed in the classroom. We support the use of an active approach to learning, where reading, writing, interacting and discussing are integral components of classroom activities. In addition, we contend that an active learning approach that is properly structured and includes the components above, fosters critical thinking and cooperative spirit. At the same time it allows for the use and development of writing, reading and problem solving skills. Finally we assert that, when the learning activities are based on the syllabus topics, the process by which students become more actively engaged can be structured in such a manner that students are required to search for and apply course information. This promotes knowledge acquisition in the subject area.

The CAL Approach combines skills and content learning using a set of tangible, structured activities. Our research shows that, in order to be successful in the field, skills cannot be divorced from content. To be a successful IS professional, graduates must be able to read, write, and think critically within the framework of the profession. Thus, to develop a meaningful activity for use in the CAL Approach, course content, knowledge level, and skills must be identified in combination and in support of each other.

The forum focuses on defining the significant components of the CAL Approach.

It begins with a discussion of the Approach and the main components required to develop a CAL Approach activity. The participants have the opportunity to analyze the structure of a CAL Approach activity by completing one that is typically used in an introductory information systems course. Next, a demonstration of one type of activity, which has been computerized, is shown to the participants. They will compare the activity in its standard format with its computerized form.

In the second half of the forum, participants use the principles learned in the first segment to develop a CAL Approach activity based on a set of materials provided to them.