



The Benefits of Team-Teaching in the Collegiate Classroom

By Dr. Erin Bell, Assistant Director of Educational Development

Team teaching, also called co-teaching or collaborative teaching, allows students to learn from more than one instructor in a single course. The faculty in a team-taught course may have different teaching styles and content area knowledge which leads to a more inclusive class experience. The team approach also encourages an environment for [active learning](#).

The teams may be made up of faculty from a single discipline or of faculty from across the disciplines. Some instructors may co-teach during the same course meetings while other teams may choose to assign and schedule course sessions based on content area. The number of faculty in a team-taught course varies as well. Faculty can choose how to distribute grading duties, instructional duties, and other logistics before the course starts.

Team teaching may “look” different from institution to institution, but most team-teaching models include similar characteristics that are meant to lead to similar outcomes for students.

Team teaching is considered a [constructivist approach](#) in that it promotes the exchange of ideas and encourages seeing subject matter from different points of view. According to Anderson & Speck “team teaching encourages multiple perspectives, promotes dialogue/increased participation, and improves evaluation/feedback. What is quite amazing about all these benefits is that they crop up in disparate teaching situations in which various teaching strategies are employed” (673). There are practical benefits to team teaching as well. The content and expertise shared within the context of the class meeting is expanded while time *in* the class is reduced for the individual instructor (Wenger and Hornyak, 1999).

Team Teaching at the University of Detroit Mercy

In the sciences, [Dr. Rachelle Belanger](#) (biology) and [Dr. Greg Grabowski](#) (biology) co-developed and co-taught a histotechnology laboratory course. The professors received a grant from the [National Institutes of Health](#) to transform a traditional histology lab experience (looking through microscopes and naming tissues) to an undergraduate research experience (developing projects and testing hypotheses using histological skills students developed).

“We both had amazing ideas for the lab transformation that came together nicely in our NIH grant,” explained Dr. Belanger. “We have subsequently submitted an iUSE grant to the NSF

to build a network of courses like this and reach students at lower levels (e.g. introductory courses in Nursing and Biology)."



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<https://www.pexels.com/photo/photo-of-woman-writing-on-blackboard-3182745/>

Dr. Belanger noted that she and Dr. Grabowski's unique areas of expertise enhanced the course experience for students. "Greg and I have skill sets that are complimentary and help advance the teaching that we are able to do. We work synergistically to mentor and teach students in a dynamic and changing environment. Greg has deep knowledge about colorimetric dyes and enzymatic staining, while I am trained more in immunohistochemistry and in situ hybridization."

So far, the high-impact, team-teaching techniques have been extremely effective. "Students really do gain a lot by having two dynamic professors in the lab and our teaching evaluations reflect that," stated Dr. Belanger.

In the English department, [Rose Gorman](#), [Kelly Fordon](#), and [Dr. Nick Rombes](#) took a novel approach to team teaching. Each of the three taught one discrete unit of English 3850: Intermediate Creative Writing. Dr. Rombes noted that the class structure and its order of

scaffolding were by designed with a purpose. “We began with poetry, moved into experimental writing, and finally into fiction. Students were able to use the tools like imagery and texture from poetry and bring them into fiction writing.”

Fordon, who is an award-winning author and who also teaches at Springfed Arts and The InsideOut Literary Arts Project in Detroit, began the semester with a five-week poetry unit. Gorman, who is the Director & Resident Fellow at [The Tuxedo Project](#), a literary and community center in Detroit and a teaching artist for [InsideOut Literary Arts](#), followed the poetry unit with a five-week unit teaching hybrid and experimental creative writing. Dr. Rombes finished out the semester with a five-week unit covering short fiction. According to the team, this course was a pilot program to explore experimental collaborative teaching. Work that students produced in the course was also featured in an anthology project that was published at the end of the course.

Fordon explained that the scope and scaffolding of the course allowed for student exploration of different genres of writing. This was beneficial because students might not yet have a clear understanding of which genre of creative writing they wanted to pursue. “To have five weeks of poetry, and then hybrid and poetry, that seems ideal to me,” said Fordon. “We met online so I had a couple of guest speakers come in, including some pretty well-known poets, so that helped break things up a bit.”

Gorman noted that the course size was quite large for a creative writing course section and that students in the course arrived with different levels of interest and experience in creative writing. The roster included English majors as well as students who were taking the course to fulfill a core requirement which reinforced the need for a student-centered approach to teaching the class.

Peer review and feedback was a critical component of the course. As such, Gorman paid particular attention to modeling effective peer review. “At the top of my unit, I gave them workshop guidelines and that included things to listen for and also to comment on things like imagery, rhythm, dialogue building vocabulary while also listening to and sharing their writing in their small groups,” explained Gorman. Such a framework helped students to move the critique beyond simply saying, “I like this.”

“I wanted to build in enough space for them to have a piece that they felt comfortable submitting for the class anthology, so I made it part of the class, so we had a conversation about revisions,” explains Gorman.

The team-teaching approach led to additional benefits and outcomes for students in the course. Dr. Rombes said that experiencing the different teaching styles also led students to develop [meta-cognitive](#) practices. “Students could think about and identify which teaching styles worked best for them. There was learning about learning.”



References

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Wenger, M. S., & Hornyak, M. J. (1999). Team teaching for higher level learning: A framework of professional collaboration. *Journal of Management Education*, 23, 311-327.

Additional Resources

Crossman, D. M., & Behrens, S. G. (1992). Affective strategies for effective learning. Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Association for Educational Communications and Technology.

Hale, V., & Klaschus, C. (1992). Team teaching: Adventures in pedagogy. In Reithlingshoefer, S. J. (Ed.), *The Future of Nontraditional/Interdisciplinary Programs: Margin or Mainstream?* (pp. 299—306). (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 346 789)