Final Report: Instructional Incentive Grant

Project: Developing SOC14 Deviant Behavior and Social Control for a Large Class

(Summer/Fall 2007)

Lutz Kaelber, Associate Professor of Sociology

1. Results of the Project

In Fall 07 I have been teaching SOC14 Deviance and Social Control for the first time to 150 students. Previously, I taught the course with a much smaller student enrollment. A large class size, especially with freshmen students, poses new challenges of getting students actively involved in their learning. Toward this end I developed new pedagogical strategies as my Instructional Incentive Grant project during the summer months of 2007. These strategies include using a variety of teaching and learning approaches.

Instead of using traditional paper handouts, I have developed Powerpoint presentations for my lectures, which allows me to add graphic illustrations and examples to the analytical terms I use. This addresses needs of visual learners, who may learn best from visual displays. Some of these visual materials derive from my own research and conference presentations to scholarly audiences.

For students who are auditory learners, I reorganized my lectures and highlighted concise summaries of major points, which I present more deliberately and attempt to repeat at the end of each class. I have also included short clips with historical illustrations of the types of deviance covered in the course, with an emphasis on those materials in which a narrator guides the audience.

Tactile/kinesthetic learners as students constitute perhaps the most challenging group in a “large lecture” course. For these students, I have attempted to come up with activities that involve some “hands-on” elements and provide opportunities for “mind mapping,” even though it is challenging to do so. I developed a few role play activities but mostly focused on case studies using historical materials. These case studies have allowed students to get personally involved in discussing relevant materials.

I have also further developed the WebCT aspect of this course. Some of the new elements will likely be incorporated in future courses, including an online version of this course I expect to teach in summer 2008.

For many of my lectures I used information from scholarly books that I was able to purchase with the budget for book purchase.

2./3. Evaluation, Evaluation Process, and Results
I am still fine tuning some of the project’s teaching and learning strategies, but one of the outcomes I have noticed is good attendance so far (even though I do not take attendance of have unannounced quizzes), and results for the first exam that were significantly better than for a similar exam used in the same course with a lower enrollment. A more extensive feedback questionnaire will be administered to the student at mid-semester.

I have also asked students to provide feedback via one-minute papers at the end of some classes and in-class short writing projects. WebCT allows students to provide additional feedback and provide additional feedback and participation options. In addition, I have begun asking samples of students to evaluate different components of my teaching and their learning, including

1) Students’ preference for teaching strategies;
2) Instructor’s use of powerpoints;
3) Students’ use of WebCT materials;
4) Students’ engagement in case studies;
5) Role play activities; and
6) Instructor’s use of audiovisual materials such as clips taken from historical documentaries.

Analysis of data gathered from the students shows the following results:

1) 75% of students prefer mixture of teaching strategies/learning methods to a single strategy or method such as lecture;
2) 100% of students indicated that the Powerpoint they evaluated helped them understand the material “very much” or “much”;
3) No Data yet (data collection is currently under way);
4) 83% of students rated the first case study as “very good” or “good”;
5) No data yet;
6) For three (and mostly short) audiovisual documentaries, 100% of students indicated that the length shown in class was “about right” (rather than too long or too short), and for 2 of the 3 documentaries, 100% of the students rated their educational content as “very good” or “good”.

One of the problems has been that the return rate for the questionnaires used has been inconsistent (between 33% and >80%), and some sample sizes have been small.