

FACULTY FOCUS

HIGHER ED TEACHING STRATEGIES FROM MAGNA PUBLICATIONS

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Teaching Strategy Mirrors Workforce Expectations

As an instructor of Cisco Networking Academy training for 12 years, I've tried many types of teaching strategies. The students in this area of the CIS Department bring various technical and soft skills to the classroom, from less-than-fundamental to exceptional. In relation to these skills, The National Business Education Association (Glenn, 2011) reported that workforce requirements suggest that educational institutions should do more to help their students develop the "four Cs": critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration.

When I read this, I thought about ways I could help students better understand these workforce expectations, and began to look at assessments from the perspective of these expectations as well. Within the context of the Cisco networking material, I provide network design assignments that require each student to master specific skills. I also give group assignments that require each group/team to function as critical thinkers and creative network designers, as well as collaborate for team success and communicate strategies and outcomes in a manner similar to what's expected in the workplace.

For example, to design a network, I give each student the same design task and assess these individual assignments. I then assign a team to the same design task and require a consensus on the outcome to meet customer needs (a workforce expectation). In terms of grading, I average the two assignments for an individual grade.

How does this mirror workforce expectations? My goal is to help students recognize that they must perform both as an individual and a team in order to gain maximum points from the averaged scores. In other words, the better the person is prepared, the better the team will perform, and the better the individual scores. This teaching strategy mirrors workforce expectations because the workforce requires innovative individual and team performance for organizational success.

One negative side effect of this teaching strategy is that some individuals have used the team assessment to hedge their scores via lack of preparation. To address this, I provide the students with feedback on their individual assessment portion if their scores indicate less preparation than was achieved by the group. I use this opportunity as an instructor to provide the same type of feedback an employer would to note both technical issues and workforce issues.

As part of this grading process, I listen to group discussions and talk to members of the team as if I were their "boss." I use tact, insight, and workforce experience to determine from these discussions how the team is doing and I make constructive comments and suggestions without embarrassing any individuals or the group. Making negative blanket statements on team success or struggles is detrimental when building workforce expectations in individual students and student teams.

At present, these individuals are receiving points in lieu of salaries; however, the strategy is to instill in the future employees both technical skills and the 4Cs—from an individual and group perspective. The strategy brings to the individual and the team the reality that workforce expectations are "happening" in real-time in the classroom—and they are getting paid for their individual and team performance in points.

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Reference

Glenn, J. (2011). Strengthening students' communication and collaboration skills. *Business Education Forum*, 65(3), 6-13.