Teaching Tip

The Individual Topic Expert

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1. INTRODUCTION

In a course with rapid changes or innovations, one technique that might lighten the instructor's load and enhance the student's learning is the *individual topic expert*. This technique can be used in introductory courses to encourage the student to be more involved in the course in the following ways:

1. Research one topic (i.e. piece of hardware, poet or psychosis) that will be covered in the course.
2. Write a summary paper describing their chosen topic.
3. Present a 3-5 minute description of their topic to the class.
4. Be the class expert on this topic if the class has a question.
5. Be involved in classroom discussion for at least one day.

The instructor receives benefits from this exercise by relying on the students to become an expert on their topic. The student is required to research the latest information and provide citations. Although the papers must be graded, both the instructor and student learn and benefit from this exercise.

2. USE OF THE INDIVIDUAL TOPIC EXPERT

In the past, the *individual topic expert* has been used by the author in CISB 101 (Introduction to Information Technology) by using these steps:

1. A list of topics, in the case of the CISB 101 course these included technical terms, hardware, software and technical innovations, was com-piled. Each topic was assigned a week (Week 3 of the semester was the first one used). The technical paper and presentation were due that week. Each topic should be very narrow in scope so the student has the chance to become an expert in a short period of time.
2. Students would sign up for topics on a first come first serve basis. In this case, a web site contained the topics. Students would log on and choose a topic. The topic name and week were shown to the student confirming their choice. If no web page is available, a simple sign-up sheet will work.
3. Prior to the week that their paper and presentation are due, the student must research their topic. Students are required to find three or more documented sources that include information about their topic. In the case of CISB 101, the students are expected to define the topic, find the most current information that has been reported about the topic, and report on the newest details.
   In technology courses, the student might report that the newest floppy diskettes could hold 10 Megabytes of data and cost $5.00 each. In a less technical field, the students might report the newest thoughts on a topic from an expert in the field. In the past, a page limit for the paper has been set.
4. Some classroom time prior to the presentation by the first expert can be allocated to discussing how to research the topic, what the expert should cover, and how the report should be structured.
5. When the week of the topic arrives, the expert is expected to give their presentation and answer any questions posed by the instructor or other students. This is why they are considered the ex-

pert. Anytime during the rest of the class period, the student is required to be the expert on this particular topic.

6. The instructor grades the paper including checking the sources. In the past, this exercise has been used for up to 5% of the student's grade for that course.

7. To emphasis the importance of the expert, the next test should include each of the topics covered by the student experts.

Personally, I have found this exercise works well with introductory classes. Students are forced to speak in class and be involved in discussions. If the instructor implements number 6 above, the student should get at least one question correct on the exam.

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