



Teaching Learning Center

GREETINGS FROM CHINA

While on sabbatical, Tim Xeriland experienced educational practices in both rural and urban China. In both settings, he found four common threads that have helped students achieve exceptional results.

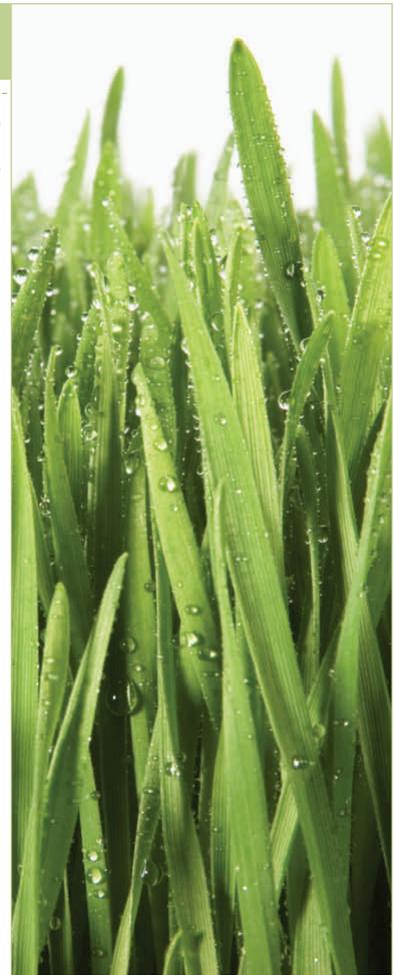
1) Commitment to Technology: The Chinese have put a great emphasis on incorporating technology into their instruction. In addition, China currently has more online users than the entire population of the United States and the number is growing exponentially. Because of this, institutions are rapidly ramping up their online delivery capabilities so they can compete globally.

2) Discipline: While it is true that Asian students in general are reared with more discipline in school than their American counterparts, higher education in China is not without its difficulties in this area. However, Chinese students quickly learn that counterproductive behavior is not tolerated. Expectations are made clear from the beginning of class and failure to meet those expectations is dealt with promptly.

3) Instructional Design: Instructors in China are very data driven. With their data, they can analyze where students are struggling and then use the services of an instructional designer to make improvements to their courses. With the help of an instructional designer, instructors learn to make directions more clear, vary the medium in which the information is presented, make assignments more effective, and much more.

4) High Standards: In China, students are held to very high standards. Although Xeriland has not met any instructors in China that specifically grade on a curve, their grade distribution closely matches the traditional bell-shaped curve. In other words, most students receive the average grade of C with far fewer students getting A's. Counter this with U.S. community colleges where grades tend to have a bimodal distribution (i.e.

students tend to do very well or very poorly in class). Chinese students pick up quickly that if they want to receive a top grade, they must do more than just complete the minimum standards laid out by the professor.



INTERESTING ENVIRONMENTAL FACTS:

- ◆ Every ton of recycled office paper saves 380 gallons of oil.
- ◆ Energy saved from one recycled aluminum can will operate a TV set for 3 hours, and is the equivalent to half a can of gasoline.
- ◆ By turning down your central heating thermostat one degree, fuel consumption is cut by as much as 10%.
- ◆ Recycling creates 6 times as many jobs as land-filling.
- ◆ If every newspaper printed just for one Sunday edition for the New York Times were to be recycled, we would save 75,000 trees.



EVALUATING STUDENTS

There are several schools of thought concerning the most effective method of evaluating students. Ken Bain of *“What the Best College Teachers Do”* prefers a learning centered approach which presents us with the fundamental question: “What kind of intellectual and personal development do I want my students to enjoy in this class, and what evidence might I collect about the nature and progress of their development?” There are a couple things to note about this statement:

- ◆ It assumes that learning is more than acquisition, it is a developmental process.
- ◆ It allows grading to become a way to communicate with students rather than solely rank them.

All too often professors and students focus on performance rather than the learning centered approach. In order to shift towards a learning centered classroom, the best teachers start by finding out as much as possible about their students:

- ◆ Begin by exploring students’ ambitions, their approaches to and concepts of learning, the ways they reason, the mental models they brought with them, their temperaments, their habits of the heart and mind, and the daily matters that occupy their attention.

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- Ken Bain, “What the Best College Teachers Do”

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Teaching Learning Center

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- ◆ The first day of class may present the perfect opportunity for a survey or pre-test informing the students of the top 5 – 10 questions the course will help them answer. Have the students rank their interest in each question.
- ◆ Many professors use anonymous feedback after 3 – 4 weeks of class which functions much the same as our Teaching Analysis Poll here at CVC (available through the TLC). A facilitator arranges a time with the professor to attend the class and divides them into small groups. Each group is given 3 or 4 question and asked to discuss them for 6 or 7 minutes then provide feedback to the facilitator. The information gathered is then presented to the instructor for review.

Getting to know your students is the first step. The second is helping students understand the criteria by which they will be judged. This is best accomplished by stating the standard as clearly as possible. The comprehensive exam can be one of the most effective methods of evaluation. Many of the best teachers choose to give a test then follow the first exam with one which covers new information plus the information learned for the previous exam. Students may use the new test grade to replace the old in the grade book. This encourages students to learn the material, not just memorize it for a single test. It forms building blocks to help them grasp the bigger picture.

From “What the Best College Teachers Do,” Ken Bain