

Facilitating the Learning Process with UF Graduate Students in the Tropical Conservation and Development program (<http://www.tcd.ufl.edu/academics/certificate-and-concentration>)

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The wealth of intellectual capital and the extraordinary diversity of world-class expertise on the UF campus present an unprecedented opportunity to pioneer interdisciplinary research and training methods that forge linkages between disciplines, and build connections between university and real-world practitioners. My vision of excellence for UF graduate learning encompasses 1) developing bridges among different units to provide synergy and stimulation for student and faculty learning and innovation; 2) international and domestic service-learning programs that build on graduate and advanced undergraduate training; and 3) incorporating alternative techniques into classroom teaching.

Beginning in the 1980s I set out to diversify my classroom teaching beyond the conventional lecture format. Non-lecture strategies are especially suited to training students to effectively bridge the gap between the theories and methods of knowledge creation and the application of knowledge to real-world problems. To accomplish this goal I received training in business-style case study teaching, in adult and experiential learning theory, and in other techniques, such as small group exercises, role playing, team projects, and activities that build on students' own experiences and interests. The literature on personality as it relates to teaching and learning styles provided further guidelines for tailoring approaches to students with a diversity of interests, capabilities, and cultural backgrounds.. In the course of experimenting with these approaches for the past 25 years, I have seen first-hand the creative energy that can be unleashed in students, and have found that the methods greatly enhance my own teaching experience.

In addition to promoting new teaching formats, I have explored innovative ways to provide graduate students service-learning opportunities, especially in international settings and in projects that involve interdisciplinary groups and collaboration with partners overseas. The TCD program offers graduate-level classes in professional skills such as group facilitation, collaboration, and conflict management. TCD practitioner grants and innovation grants provide support to graduate student projects that add a practical, collaborative component to their research activities. From these experiences students learn to communicate their ideas with, and learn from, diverse groups, and to ground their research in a real-world context. The opportunity to negotiate research ideas, methods and results with an audience beyond the academy complicates graduate studies, providing valuable experience for post-graduation work both inside and outside academia.