

## Creating Significant Learning Experiences: An Integrated Approach to Designing College Courses

By L. Dee Fink

Published by Jossey-Bass, San Francisco 2003, 255 Pages

Reviewed by Susan Stephenson

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In *Creating Significant Learning Experiences: An Integrated Approach to Designing College Courses*, Fink offered an inspiring vision of how higher education can improve the practice of teaching. His vision was based on three major ideas: significant learning, integrated course design, and better organized support. Furthermore, he provided valuable recommendations how faculty can shift from a content-based approach to a learning centered approach. He also provided design tools to aid the transition and enable the creation of powerful learning experiences for students. Finally, he offered recommendations on how institutions can effectively support better teaching by focusing on the six key needs of faculty.

First, in chapters one and two, Fink gave shape to his idea of significant learning experiences. He started in chapter one by describing the current state of higher education, the need for change, and ideas for change. Next, in chapter two, he laid out the vocabulary and the taxonomy of setting significant learning goals. Fink divided significant learning into six categories: foundational learning, application, integration, human dimension, caring, and learning how to learn. Foundational knowledge provided basic understanding, while application makes knowledge useful. Integration gives the learner the power to make new independent connections on their own. The human dimension assures that learning is a function of interaction and framed within the context of significance to self, others, and society. Caring is touching something that sparks within the learner greater energy and desire for understanding. Lastly, learning how to learn is about effective lifelong learning techniques. Fink described these categories as interactive and dynamic.

In the next two chapters, Fink identified the key ideas of integrated course design necessary to achieve more challenging learning goals. Throughout this section, he showed great awareness that many of the design ideas represent a dramatic shift from the planning of a traditional course. He described three key components and three-phase, twelve-step design process. The three key components of the integrated course design were learning goals, learning activities, and feedback. The three-phase design process takes the reader through twelve steps designed to build strong primary components, assemble a coherent whole, and ensure all peripheral tasks are completed.

To build strong primary components, Fink used five steps to focus on situational factors while establishing learning goals, determining feedback measures, and generating

learning activities. An in-depth look at the specific context, expectations, nature of the subject matter, characteristics of the teacher and the learners, and pedagogical challenge provided context and laid the foundation for answering important design questions in the steps that follow. Within the primary components, Fink also expanded and reorganized the traditional idea of active learning to a holistic view of active learning, incorporating information, experience, and reflection.

To assemble a coherent whole, the second process phase focused on course structure, instructional strategy, and overall learning activities. Fink went through proper sequencing of topics, strategies for maximizing in and out-of-class time, and overall integration into the instructional strategy.

In the final phase of the design process, he covered the remaining tasks to complete and refine the course. Topics discussed included determining the grading system to use, identifying possible problems, pulling it all together in the syllabus, and planning for the course and teaching evaluation.

In chapter five, Fink addressed suggestions for adopting changes in teaching style. In this chapter, he considered if change was in fact possible. To respond to the question, he presented a case study, lessons learned, and specific ideas for handling risk and accepting change. Overall, Fink's made persuasive comments on the difference the process can make.

In Chapter Six, Fink discussed the importance of and the need for institutional support. According to Fink, in order for faculty to have the time and opportunity to create significant learning experiences, six needs of faculty must be addressed. First, institutions need greater awareness of faculty members' needs for self-development. Second, faculty members need encouragement and signs that improvements in teaching are valued. Additionally, members of faculty need time for learning about teaching and for revising courses. Faculty members also need access to support personnel, materials, technical services and other resources necessary for development and change. Additionally, members of the faculty need students who understand and value good learning experiences. Finally, faculty members need formal recognition and rewards for improved teaching. Fink described these needs as critical and mutually reinforcing for influencing faculty to make change and redesign courses to include significant learning experiences.

In the last chapter, he shared his dream of what higher education might look like after the adoption of learning centered teaching techniques. He called not for a wholesale discarding of traditional methods, but instead for a review and transformation that integrates the best of traditional teaching and new ideas for significant learning experiences. Finally, Fink concluded the text by giving the reader practical assistance. The Appendices provide a "Decision Guide" for planning a course and additional suggested readings on key topics covered within the text.

Overall, the book took existing ideas concerned with improving college teaching and added a new taxonomy to demonstrate a strategic approach to creating significant learning experiences for students. The book contains valuable insights into what institutions, funding agencies, accrediting agencies, professional associations, and

journals on college teaching can do to provide better support for teaching. For these reasons, the book is highly recommended for faculty, administrators, and others who seek to improve the quality of teaching and learning on college campuses.

## **Reclaiming the Game: College Sports and Educational Values**

*By William G. Bowen and Sarah A. Levin*

Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003, 490 pages

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*Reclaiming the Game* is a sequel to William Bowen and James Shulman's book *The Game of Life*. The work's major premise was to provide further examination into what many professionals believe to be a growing separation between intercollegiate athletic programs and the academic missions of colleges and universities devoid of "big-time" sport programs. In so doing, the authors expanded their previous database and quantitative analyses in order to broaden their examination of the potential negative impact that athletic programs may pose on institutions placing a high value or premium on their academic mission and reputation.

Data for the investigation was collected from selected schools in a number of athletic conferences, leagues, and associations. Included for study were member institutions in the Ivy League, the New England Small College Athletic Conference (NESCAC), and the University Athletic Association (UAA). In addition, three women's colleges were represented in the research project along with several coed liberal arts colleges located throughout the United States.

Part A of the book, chapters two through six, offered an objective view of student-athletes within the aforementioned campus settings. Recruiting has become the lifeblood for today's successful athletic programs, perhaps to a degree that talent is deemed more important than coaching. This emphasis on recruitment, in turn, has enticed schools with selective admission policies to "yield" an admission advantage to recruited athletes versus "walk-on" athletes or non-athletic peers. The principle reason for this is because athletic programs want to field competitive teams within their local, regional, and national spheres of competition. The authors have indicated that if you combine an admission advantage with other related factors, i.e., academic credentials, the changing scenes underlying athletic participation, existence of an "athletic culture" within the institution itself, interests and priorities of the recruited athlete, and so forth, academic underperformance becomes a prevalent reality. Data revealed through this research also shows academic underperformance to be consistent as well as statistically