What rules?

Classes led by award-winning teacher
Devine are anything but by the book

Bill Arnold

How do you keep loyal UW football fans from watching their beloved Badgers in action — an earthquake, a tornado, an uncrowded ticket booth?

Sometimes all it takes is one talented teacher.

Psychology professor Patricia Devine once so transfixed a group of visiting moms and dads with a "Parents Weekend" lecture that they lingered long afterward asking questions and discussing the material — almost missing a bus waiting to shuttle them to a big game at Camp Randall Stadium.

These were parents, mind you, with no reason to be trolling for brownie points.

Devine is a member of UW-Madison's Teaching Academy, which was established by the Faculty Senate in late 1993 to serve as a gathering place for the university's most effective teaching scholars and as a forum for issues that are unique to a large research university. Devine's teaching style embodies the many attributes that are the focus of one of the academy's study groups — the Task Force on Celebrating Effective Teaching (see box, right). Throughout this year, Wisconsin Week will report on the work of the academy's task forces and feature faculty who excel.

If you visit one of Devine's Introductory Psychology lectures, you'll likely see colleagues and passersby file into the back of the room. Devine's natural dynamism and enthusiasm has a way of drawing them in.

For starters, they hear plenty of laughter in the class. You might think that from a psychology class, but Devine is not one to shy away from finding humor in the material and in the classroom. For instance, during a recent lecture in Brogden Hall, an audio glitch caused strange pager and radio transmissions to periodically blurt out over the room's public address system. After several interruptions, Devine quipped that the class hadn't "even (started delving) into psycho pathology yet."

No matter whether she's using visual aids or humor to make a point, Devine doesn't allow her students to be passive recipients of knowledge. She challenges students to think critically and speak out, even when she's teaching a traditional "power lecture" actually trying to stimulate their curiosity and capture their imagination — and that needs to happen when I'm in a room with 400 students or 40.

Devine says students learn quickly not to sit on their hands in her class. "I expect students to say things in big lecture course, and when I ask a question, they almost always realize that I won't go ahead until they answer," she says.

Then there's Devine's energy level. During a recent 75-minute Introductory Psychology lecture, she was in constant motion, walking back and forth at the front of the hall and commanding — with her voice, gestures and steady eye contact — the full attention of the 300-plus students. Basic concepts outlined on Powerpoint-generated overheads were broken up by colorful stories and fresh takes on decades-old research. During one of her lectures, there is no wasted time, no wasted motion.

The Teaching Academy is alerting anyone who'll listen that UW-Madison has a problem as well as teachers.

It's safe to say that Alan Knox is eager to dispel the belief — held by some — that good teaching is on the decline at UW-Madison.

In fact, Knox — professor of continuing and vocational education and chair of the Teaching Academy's Task Force on Celebrating Effective Teaching — is on a mission. He's banging the effective teaching drum whenever and wherever he can, sharing the message that UW-Madison is home to talented, dedicated teachers in every discipline and in every school and college.

"The Teaching Academy is alerting anyone who'll listen that UW-Madison has a problem as well as teachers. It's a time when the public has become wary of the teaching habits of university faculty members," he says, noting that some news reports have contained raw statistics and survey data that reflect only classroom teaching time — with little mention of research, committee work, outreach and other duties.

Comprised of seven academy fellows, the task force has received assistance from several graduate assistants and from offices with faculty development staff. In addition to compiling videotapes and publications, now housed at the Instructional Materials Center, the task force has created a directory of Teaching Academy fellows, a preliminary bibliography of books on higher education teaching and a directory of campus resources on teaching improvement.
Policy change will end tuition remission charges

Jeff Leeming

In an action that should gladden the hearts of principal investigators everywhere on campus, the university will stop charging federal grants for tuition remission — the difference between in-state and out-of-state tuition for RAs and PAs — beginning Jan. 1, 1997 (see For the Record, page 11).

For many years faculty members have expressed concern over the high costs charged to federal grants to support RAs and PAs. These costs include stipends, fringe benefits, indirect costs and tuition remission.

To compound the problem, the National Institutes of Health recently capped costs associated with RA appointments. Since tuition remission has been calculated as part of a student's income, many RAs are at or over the NIH cap. Faculty can only supplement salaries in excess of the cap from nonfederal funds, a source not uniformly available.

And on top of all that, an IRS settlement last summer would have reduced RA stipends if not for another action taken to increase the percentage appointments of all RAs (see below).

"The increase in RA stipends and the elimination of tuition remission charges gives departments, programs and faculty greater flexibility in establishing competitive packages," said Virginia Hinshaw, Graduate School dean. "We really must do this to assist our current graduate students and to remain competitive for recruitment of future students."

Stipend increase will offset tax

For research assistants at UW-Madison, one of life's two inevitabilities — death and taxes — just became a bit more evitable.

Effective Sept. 1, the university increased the stipend for all RAs by approximately 6 percent. Why? To compensate for a reduction in the RA stipend imposed by the Internal Revenue Service.

As a result of a settlement with IRS last summer, the university must treat RAs as recipients of taxable scholarships under the tax code. No social security tax will be paid on their stipends, but the university will withhold and report income taxes on the entire RA stipend.

"We felt that a loss of income for RAs was not acceptable," said Virginia Hinshaw, dean of the Graduate School. "RAs are critical to the research and teaching mission of this university, and we want to stay competitive in attracting the best students and providing them with the most productive, positive learning experience possible."

REGENTS

from page 2

when a student has satisfied all of the applicable criteria.

Janet Vandenbroucke, associate dean for academic affairs in the College of Letters and Science, says she thinks the contract will benefit students by offering a clear, codified process that — if followed — will help them graduate within an undergraduate degree in four years.

"Most of our undergraduates receive their degree in four years, but I do think the contract will be the right fit for some students who want a more concise road map to finishing up in four years," Vandenbroucke says.

Currently, UW-Madison has the lowest average number of credits to degree (136 per student) in the UW System, and almost 50 percent of its graduates receive their degrees within four years. Another 40 percent earn their degrees within five years.

Prospective entering freshmen will be able to obtain an informational brochure about the four-year contract through most student services offices, such as admissions, registrar or student financial services.

In other business, the board unanimously approved a study of academic advising programs, with the goal of developing "best practices" recommendations for use by all UW System institutions.

DEVINE

from page 2

with alternative instructional formats — she's not a frustrated lecturer.

"Issue motivates students to comprehend and synthesize information when reading; she challenges students to exchange ideas, during active classroom discussion; and she requires students to formalize their ideas in writing," she says.

Originally from Schenectady, N.Y., Devine's B.A. comes from State University of New York-Plattsburgh, her M.A. and Ph.D. from Ohio State University. An expert in the field of intergroup prejudice, Devine makes a point of involving students in all aspects of research, from experiment design to data collection and analysis to interpretation. To date, she has received five Hilldale Undergraduate/Faculty Fellowships for her collaborations.

"I think that she sees her teaching and research as being inextricably interwoven, and I think she epitomizes the principle that excellence in teaching and research go hand-in-hand," Gernsback says.

Devine has a reputation among students as being tough and demanding — but fair. She is generous with her time, helping students with course material and often holding extended or alternative office hours. Recognizing that students learn from each other, she encourages them to set up study groups and to quite other on the material. In smaller classes, Devine sets up small-group presentations. "This gives the students a great deal of responsibility for contributing to the class, and they develop a sense of ownership in the class — it's their class as well as my class. The class, then, will be as good or poor as they make it," she says.

Group presentations have the added benefit of forcing students to learn how to speak well. And, yes, she assigns lots of writing, too. "I think it's the faculty's responsibility to provide the opportunities for the development of these skills," she says.

"I've found that most students develop a "love-hate" relationship with writing assignments," Devine says. "Although the assignments are difficult, students enjoy seeing their writing skills develop over the course of the semester."