

Teaching center helps UNL faculty improve skills

By Bill Allen

Lynn Mortensen, a faculty instructional consultant, sits quietly in the back of the classroom, taking notes.

She is not so interested in what is being said by the instructor, but in how it is said.

Mortensen also is running a soundless videotape machine, recording every action and word of the classroom environment.

"We don't use the videotape machine that much, Mor-

tensen said. "Sometimes a teacher asks to be videotaped as part of our services."

Mortensen, along with Delivee Wright and Joyce Povlacs, is a consultant with the UNL Teaching and Learning Center.

This center is a service and resource center for all faculty members at UNL.

Mortensen said a major function of the center is working individually with instructors who are interested in improving their teaching skills.

The instructors can come to the center on a purely voluntary basis, she said.

Not a job evaluator

Mortensen emphasized that the center is a resource and a service for faculty members, not a job evaluator.

That is why the center is voluntary, she said.

"It would be presumptuous of us to tell an instructor that they need to use our help," she said. "We also don't want them to think that they should only come to us when they have problems."

All work done with instructors is confidential. Even the videotapes are erased after the instructor reviews them.

Mortensen said that in the last two years more than 500 faculty members have used the Teaching and Learning Center at least once.

The center sponsors workshops, provides materials on teaching, publishes a newsletter and has regular luncheon meetings to discuss teaching topics, she said.

Another much-used service is examination scoring, she said.

Mortensen said she is pleased with the center's work.

"We've just conducted a follow-up study and they're (faculty) overwhelmingly supportive," she said. "They said we are useful and helpful and definitely worth their time."

Teacher chooses service

When teachers come into the center, Mortensen said, they can choose the kind of services they want.

She said individual counseling can include just talking with a consultant, having the consultant observe them in a classroom, or being videotaped.

Mortensen said she usually sits in the class just like a regular student, which has practically no disruptive effect on the class.

The videotape draws attention for about two to five minutes, Mortensen said. The teacher may appear a bit nervous at the beginning, she said, but once the class gets going, they usually forget about it.

Mortensen said that in most cases the teacher evaluations that students complete at the end of each semester are more positive for teachers who use the center.

"One of the most rewarding situations for me was when I worked with three professors who have been teaching for over 20 years," she said. "They were kind of low and needed a shot in the arm, so to speak. After working with the center, their student evaluations went up."

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