The best of the promising professors workshop

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At the 2018 Promising Professors Workshop in Phoenix, faculty winners Dietram A Scheufele from Cornel and Patricia Curtin from UNC joined graduate winners Jennifer Jacobs Henderson, Kathleen K. Olson and Kelli S. Burns in sharing teaching tips. Here are some highlights:

* Use your own research to stimulate your students. Original data can be a perfect impetus for getting students to think.
* Make your students read theory. No matter how unwilling, they need to develop theory-based thinking. It is generalizable, abstract, integrated? It helps students move forward intellectually, even as conditions change. According to Neuman, all learning is either differentiation (bits of knowledge) or integrated (putting ideas together.) Theory helps students put knowledge together.
* Use an electronic bulletin board to facilitate student questions about complex readings.
* Give students an original research project and make them accountable to the public for the implementation and outcome of the project. Schufele has his students do a public opinion poll about issues identified in the local newspaper. They are responsible for reporting the results of their research in the paper (and then taking the inevitable feedback from readers).
* Active learning exercises are invaluable to students, but creating them takes focused planning and preparation. Hendersen recommends the following steps: Set the goal. What do you want them to learn? Get the facts to prepare the materials. Determine the form. Write a detailed set of instructor's notes for presenting the exercise. Figure out how to engage students with what they already know. Identify potential problems and what to do about them. Develop a mechanism for student feedback. Create an assessment tool. Ask questions on exams or directly and then use the feedback. But don't ask if you don't want to now.

Invited distinguished educator Dianne Lynch of St. Michael's College wrapped up the session with a pep talk and her thoughts on teaching. Her teaching philosophy? "You get what you give."

She told of taking college classes herself to because she believes being a good teacher requires being a good learner and holding ourselves accountable.

Accountability requires assessment, said Lynch, who chairs her department. Schools and departments should be conducting regular exit interviews and departmental assessments. Administrators need to create environments and departmental cultures that value teaching.

Lynch wrapped up the workshop by reminding us that teaching is a privilege.