

NEW CHALK TALK

Exploring Teaching Challenges at AUC

Caroline Mitry, Center for Learning and Teaching

Reham Niazi, Center for Learning and Teaching

In October, 2016, the Center for Learning and Teaching (CLT) surveyed AUC faculty to explore the challenges they encountered in their day-to-day classroom teaching. The survey used was adapted from one conducted by *Faculty Focus*¹ in which they surveyed instructors across the world including the United States, Canada, Australia, India, New Zealand, South Africa, Malaysia, and the Philippines (Bart, 2016). The questions on the survey were modified to fit the AUC context, and help CLT better tailor its services to the various needs of AUC faculty. Respondents were asked to identify the number of years of teaching experience, the number of courses they teach, number of students per course, students' level (graduate or undergraduate), as well as to identify the challenges they face in their classrooms and to indicate how CLT could help them address those challenges.

The survey was sent to all faculty towards the end of spring 2017 and was open to responses till the end of summer 2017. A total of 101² faculty from various schools and departments responded to the survey reporting on 283 courses.

Figure 1 illustrates the response distribution according to School. Participant profiles also varied in

both their teaching experience and the number of courses they usually teach. Almost 60% of respondents reported experience between five and 20 years, almost one-third of the respondents had more than 20 years, and a minority of 10% had one to five years of experience. The number of courses they taught also

varied, where more than half (55%) reported teaching two or three different courses, and the remaining spread almost equally between teaching five or just one course.

The challenge of having **students come unprepared to class** scored highest among respondents, for nearly half (47.7%) of the courses they teach (Figure 2). This coincides with the *Faculty Focus* survey results, in which respondents reported unprepared students highest among their challenges (Bart, 2016)³.

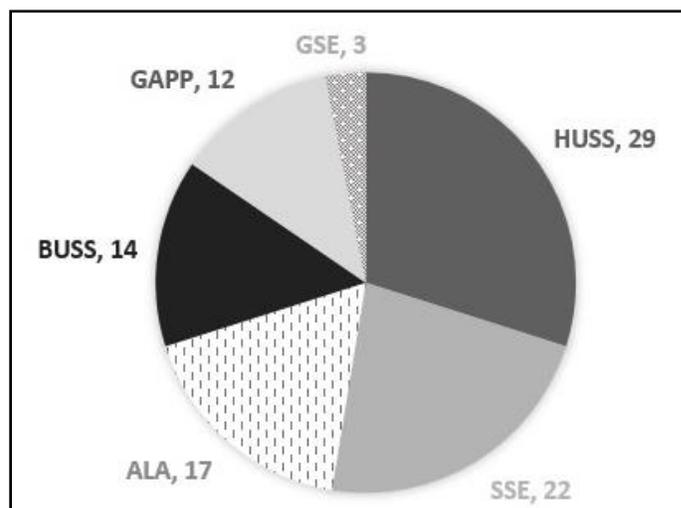


Figure 1

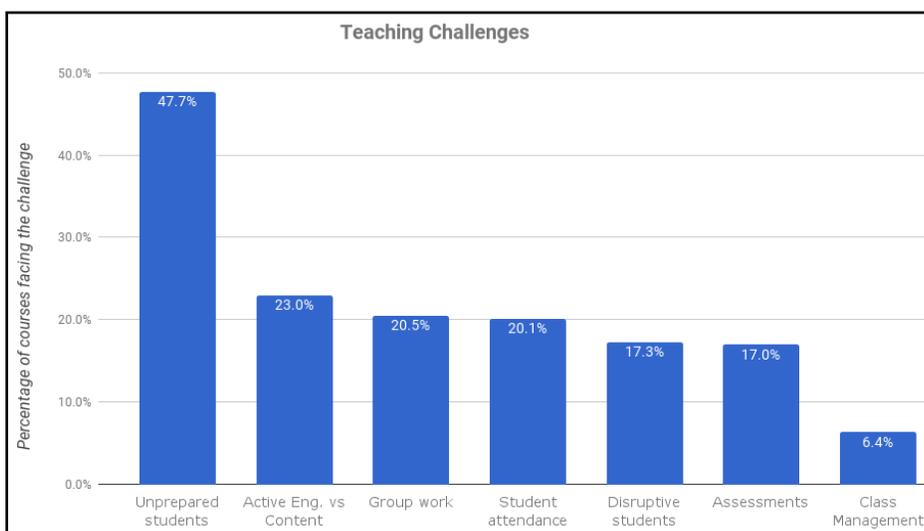


Figure 2

1 A product of Magna Publications that publishes online articles on effective teaching strategies for the college classroom.

2 Including three invalid responses and a response with no department.

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Applying **active engagement strategies** in the classroom without having to sacrifice content was a challenge faced by faculty in 23% of the courses. Managing **group work**, **student attendance**, having **disruptive students** and handling **assessments** were almost equally reported as challenges for approximately 20% of the courses. **Class management** represented the least of the challenges to faculty, which they reported to face in only 6% of the courses they teach. It is to be noted that the challenge of having unprepared students in class was consistently reported to be higher in undergraduates courses than graduate ones. No additional clear patterns were found to link between years of experience, number of courses taught as well as class size with the type of challenges faced in the classroom.

Some of the other challenges that faculty mentioned in the survey were related to students “multitasking” in class (e.g. distracted by their phones or laptops) and submitting late assignments. Miscommunication between faculty and students when it comes to students’ understanding of feedback causes problems as well. Some faculty members mentioned that students’ different backgrounds and language efficiency were also challenges that they needed to handle in their everyday teaching, along with students’ “obsession” with grades which was mentioned by several faculty members in the survey.

The AUC survey revealed that many faculty were concerned with issues relating to student engagement and applying active learning strategies in the classroom. Since fall 2015 CLT has offered 33 Active Learning workshops track in which several faculty were interested.

This semester CLT is offering 11 Active Learning workshops, including the new Active Learning II track which covers the following topics: *The Art of Discussion Leading II*, *Active Learning Tool Parade* and *The What, When and Why of Active Learning*. Faculty who attended previous Active Learning workshops (see cumulative attendance in Figure 3) as well as this semester’s new ones were highly satisfied with the content and the dynamics of the workshops. Between fall 2015 and this semester, more than

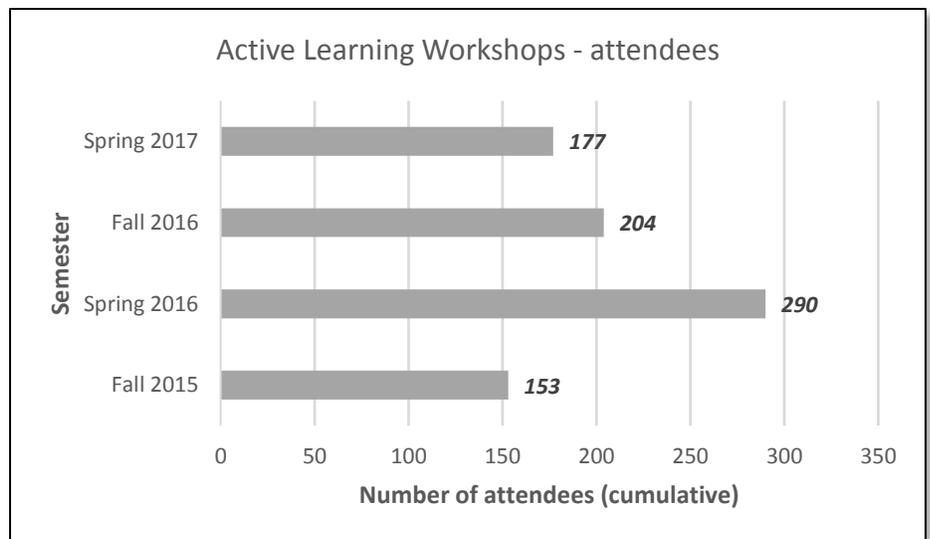


Figure 3

300 faculty provided CLT with feedback, where 79% rated the workshops “excellent”. On their expectation of how much they would use of the material that was shared with them during the workshops, 42% indicated that they expected to use all of what was presented while 45% reported they expected to use a good deal (more than 50%) of it. Through this exercise of identifying teaching challenges at AUC, CLT aims to respond to faculty needs by offering versatile, timely and engaging professional development opportunities as well as one-on-one consultations as needed.

References

Bart, M. (2016, October 3). Reader survey finds unprepared students a persistent problem. *Faculty Focus*. Retrieved from <https://goo.gl/F29Mee>

