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NEW AGE LEARNING: NUANCE OR NONSENSE

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ABSTRACT

This session will be a roundtable discussion that will critically assess several of the new pedagogical paradigms. The authors will focus the discussion on the applicability of these paradigms to the instruction of courses in schools of business. Several contemporary teaching techniques will be considered. In each case the presenter will briefly describe the technique, cite recent literature that purports to support its use, and provide personal anecdotal evidence. This should foster a lively "ABSELesque" discussion in which other panelists and members of the audience will be encouraged to provide their own evidence that support the efficacy or lack thereof, for each technique.

WORKSHOP

Anyone who reads the literature on the changes and new innovations in learning theory can not help but wonder, which of the changes are positive and have value for schools of business. It seems that we are being presented with a virtually limitless list of new approaches and venues for instruction (e.g., non-linear learning, cooperative learning, web-based learning, team-based learning, etc.). Since the roundtable will ultimately rely on the collective knowledge and experience of the panel's six educators as well as a number of interested participants from the audience, it is not possible to anticipate with great precision in which direction the panel discussion will flow. To illustrate the anticipated format for one of the pedagogical techniques that has received recent attention, it may be helpful to walk through the process.

A review of the literature reveals the emergence of a new pedagogical paradigm predicated on the concept of non-linear learning. Does this paradigm have a place in contemporary business education? To address this question, one needs to have at least a rudimentary knowledge of the meaning of non-linear learning and some knowledge of learning theory. In addition, educators should consider the implications of non-learning for the teaching environment. This workshop, if successful, will address the first of these two issues and, hopefully, if nothing else, challenge the audience to consider the second issue.

Two recent occurrences in education, (1) the ready availability of PC's to virtually all business students and (2) the availability of "authorware" software to faculty, provided an environment which will ultimately force educators to ponder the significance of non-linear learning. Non-linear learning, as opposed to linear learning, is predicated on the proposition that students will learn something when they are damn well good and ready. *How preposterous!!!*

What if a student wanted to figure out, what are the key factors that affect a firm's ability to generate a profit before Dr. XYZ had gotten to that issue in his/her syllabus? The notion of "just in time" inventory management may very well have implications for our students. Our students may very well approach education from a "just in time" perspective. For example, students may wish to learn about the impact of the marketing mix on sales potential and the implications of various approaches to inventory before an instructor is prepared to address those

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issues in a course, if in fact, they are ever to be considered. Contemporary educators have coined the term “teachable moments” in recognition of these opportunities in which the student is especially receptive. It seems reasonable that students will strive to learn exactly that information that they find crucial at that point and as a consequence they will not process or not process well other information. Students may want to know only what they desire to know. To the extent that this describes a situation that may be present, the lecturer employing the traditional well-rehearsed and well-oiled presentations is not likely to be pedagogically effective. The issues are far reaching and will be explored at length in the panel discussion.

Although the results are not pre-ordained and definitely not predictable, the panelists will address many of the contemporary issues relating to the new pedagogical paradigms available to school of business instructors with considerable expertise and panache.