

The Mountain States Conference on the Teaching of Psychology

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In October, 2005, two things came together: 1) the APS Teaching Fund which encouraged psychologists from around the country to plan conferences on the teaching of psychology, and 2) my long held conviction that an active, hands-on approach to teaching is much more effective than the traditional lecture method.

After several months of planning, mailings and organizing, the Mountain States Conference on the Teaching of Psychology was held in Albuquerque on Friday and Saturday, October 21-22. It was sponsored by the University of New Mexico, New Mexico State University and Albuquerque TVI Community College and emphasized innovative approaches in the teaching of the introductory course plus several advanced courses.

The morning sessions of the conference were held at the University of New Mexico Technology Park auditorium and featured talks by well known authors and distinguished professors from around the country: Douglas Bernstein, University of South Florida, Martin Colt, Calvin College, Michigan, James Kalat, North Carolina State University, and James Nairne, Purdue University, all of whom emphasized active learning in their favorite courses: general, cognitive and neuropsychology.

The afternoon sessions were held across the road at the Albuquerque TVI Arts & Sciences building and featured a half dozen workshops on innovative, discovery-oriented approaches to the teaching of both the introductory course plus developmental and abnormal psychology. A series of roundtable discussions were also offered during the two days, e.g. dealing with difficult students, team based learning, service learning, plus a variety of ways to enhance the introductory course.

Approximately 60 psychology faculty members and graduate students from both New Mexico and surrounding states — Colorado, West Texas, and Eastern Arizona — participated in the conference. It was noted that most of the participants were from small colleges and community colleges with a few from each of the two sponsoring universities, plus one or two local high schools. Both the written and verbal evaluations of the conference were very positive and included both suggestions for improvement and encouragements for holding future conferences.

Plans are already underway for an October, 2006 conference with several well known authors from around the country having been contacted for keynote presentations in the event. Given the positive response to the emphasis on participant involvement in both workshops and roundtable discussions, future conferences will definitely emphasize this feature throughout the sessions. t