

# A Student's Perspective of ACUBE

Jill H. Kruper

Department of Biological Sciences  
Murray State University  
Murray, Kentucky 42071

My first attendance of an ACUBE (formerly AMCBT) meeting (1994) occurred during a hiatus in my academic career. I had completed my Masters degree and was teaching part-time at a community college and a university. I was enjoying my teaching experiences and Terry Derting cajoled me into attending the meeting. I found the first ACUBE meeting to be engaging and inclusive, and most importantly the meeting inspired me to think about how I teach. This was a new concept to me because I had been concerned with simply giving a coherent lecture, let alone thinking about how I was presenting the information. Since then I have entered a Ph.D. program so that I can teach at the college level on a full-time basis. I now look forward to each ACUBE meeting as a means of "jump starting" my teaching skills.

The 1997 ACUBE meeting was particularly meaningful for me. I was at a point (probably one of many) in my Ph.D. program where I was questioning why I was putting myself through the rigors of academia just for another degree. The 1997 meeting was a reassuring reminder that it is challenging and rewarding to teach and facilitate a student's learning process. In particular, I was struck by one of the keynote speakers, Jeanne Narum. She stated that we should not be so concerned with how we teach, rather, we should be concerned with how students learn. Such a common sense statement, I thought, but yet a powerful one for me. When I first started to teach I did teach from the students' perspective rather than from my own. This was inevitable because some of the information I presented was new to me also. Therefore, I was learning the information right along with my students and I was constantly thinking about whether I was able to understand my own lectures. After Jeanne's talk, I realized that I had been losing the "student perspective" on learning. I had been forgetting what it is like to be a student and feel overwhelmed by the simplest of information. My academic mantra now is "Remember to think about how students learn, not how I should teach." I hope that 20 years from now I will still be using this mantra.

The 1997 meeting also reminded me that even simple concepts can be exciting. During Karen Klyczek's workshop on DNA labs, I was clearly excited to be able to spool DNA from the testis of a sheep. It was a simple lab, requiring Woolite detergent, meat tenderizer, and ethanol, yet it was exciting for me from

a student's point of view. Why? First, the information was new to me. Yes, I had known and taught about DNA for quite some time, but I had never spooled DNA onto a glass rod. Second, the concepts of the exercise were accessible both physically and intellectually. I had always assumed you needed to order special chemicals to remove DNA from cells and here I was using products found in my own house. Karen's workshop taught me to remember that I may be providing information to students that is new, intimidating, and often hard to visualize. As an educator, therefore, if I can provide the basis of a biological principle and subdue any fears or mystique associated with the principle, then I may be able to have a student say, "Wow! This is interesting." I now believe that once you have "The Wow!" within the student, you have set the foundation for more complex information to be considered.

As I looked ahead to my future career as an educator, I observed participants at the 1997 meeting and thought about what made these educators different from others. Two points came to mind. First, you must be willing to try new ways of teaching with your students. Change is beneficial, yet it can also be intimidating and risky for the instructor, especially if "nothing in the lab worked." Students, however, can benefit from such an experience because they need to learn that science is not always exact nor predictable. Second, teaching well takes time. I am always astounded by the time educators must take in order to develop a new course, new labs, or simply a new lecture.

Finally, I would like to formally thank ACUBE for my selection for the John Carlock Memorial Award. The award supports graduate students who are interested in becoming effective educators by helping to fund their attendance at ACUBE meetings. The award reminded me of why I am slugging through my Ph.D.; because I believe that I have the potential to become a very good facilitator of learning.

I look forward to future meetings and to adding to my academic mantras. I strongly encourage anyone who knows a graduate student who is interested in "how students learn" to please bring them to future ACUBE meetings. It could change how they teach for a lifetime.