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Nutritional science: A topical excursion relevant to real life proves critical in promoting student interest in science and technology

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Our NSF-funded project seeks to promote student interest in science and technology (S&T) through topics that are relevant to everyday life. The field of nutritional science and food technology remains popular with students. We use a two-prong approach: online learning communities and seminars by professionals. The online communication technique bodes well with today's Net generation college students. Seniors, trained by project directors write blogs about topics that are relevant to the freshman generation to arouse their interest. The pedagogy and topics are carefully chosen for their appeal to diverse populations. Seminars by professionals address current topics like nutritional science, food technology, and the role of computing in augmenting technical research. Current research suggests that using topics that relate to real life is crucial to demonstrating the value of S&T especially to women and minority students. The seminars and online blogs together create an atmosphere of intellectual exchange and a high level of student involvement in learning. In a pretest-posttest control group design, an attitude scale was administered at the beginning and end of a semester. Students also completed a five-item survey instrument at the end of each seminar. The data were analyzed to assess the impact of the guest speakers. The author will present the goals, implementation, and findings of this study and a discussion will follow. The model exemplified in this project has the potential for replication.

Biography

Anu A. Gokhale has completed twenty years of teaching and is currently a professor at Illinois State University. Originally from India, she has a master's degree from College of William & Mary, and a doctorate from Iowa State University. She was a Fulbright Scholar in 2001, and was recently honored with the 2011 University Outstanding Researcher Award. Dr. Gokhale presents and publishes her peer-reviewed research, and pursues multi-year projects funded by agencies like the US Department of Education, US Department of State, and National Science Foundation. She is a recipient of the IEEE Third Millennium Medal.

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