

THE SELF-LEARNING CENTER

Over 25 years ago when Dr. Walter McCulloch was preparing to migrate from Michigan State to O.S.U., he received a suggestion from an M.S.U. colleague that when he reached Corvallis he make the acquaintance of a Dr. Robert Reichart, professor in the School of Education. "You'll like Bob," the source stated. "He has ideas." Well, Bob Reichart was among the first people Mac met when he arrived in Corvallis, and Reichart did indeed prove to be a man with ideas. Out of that association grew some of the most innovative experiments in Education ever to hit the O.S.U. Campus.

It's difficult to say exactly where the concept of a self-learning center first came from, but it's fair to give credit to at least four men: Bob Reichart and Dean McCulloch of O.S.U., and David T. Mason and Al Heckman, representatives of the Louis and Maud Hill Family Foundation. When they first put their heads together in 1962, even they didn't know exactly what could be done to improve teaching in the School of Forestry, but they were confident that if they worked together things would happen. There were new philosophies of education being discussed throughout the country, and there were new technologies just waiting to be tried. These gentlemen sincerely believed that the School would benefit from such trials.

From the discussions of those four men, a modest proposal was sent to the Hill Foundation that allowed Bob Reichart to explore, on a part-time basis, potential applications of some of those philosophies and techniques in the School of Forestry. The beginnings of the Self-Learning Center, as it was soon to be called, were humble: a little-used locker room in the basement of Moreland Hall, several home-made learning carrels, and a set of audio-visual equipment that included, in the words of Dr. Reichart, "one 16 mm film projector, occasionally used: a dusty tape recorder, much in need

of repair; a folding overhead projector, too complicated for daily use; two antique opaque projectors, both used by the same instructor." The most important ingredient, however, was that man with ideas. From the foundation laid by Bob Reichart rose the Self-Learning Center and Forestry Media Center of today.

Literally hundreds of ideas were explored under that first grant, all based on the premise that each of us learns best by using a variety of techniques, and that under the proper conditions, self-paced, independent study was a viable alternative to the group-paced study that had long dominated American universities. The successes that Dr. Reichart experienced would fill a book, and the failures perhaps even a larger one, because everything he tried was new - no one else in the country had ever attempted what was being tried in the School of Forestry. In his first few years at the School, Reichart established an audio-visual access center for students, helped write an introductory text and slide-tape on careers in forestry for entering freshmen, gave many seminars to faculty and students on innovative educational techniques, increased phenominally the use of educational media, recorded on both audio and video tape hundreds of student and faculty presentations that would later be transformed into self-sufficient learning packages, prepared slide-tapes and video tapes for forestry students in the areas of physics, math, chemistry, and computer science as well as forestry, and helped improve the communications skills of hundreds of students by helping them produce slide-tapes for class projects. The list could go on and on.

Although now commonplace, it's important to realize that when the S L C was first conceived no one in the School, and few people anywhere in the country, were talking seriously about improving instruction, using instructional hardware to increase teaching effectiveness, or producing

self-contained learning packages for independent study. The early successes of Reichart and his colleagues were large, but at the same time often intangible. In the words of Dean McCulloch in an early report to the Hill Foundation, the most important result of this Project has been "the renaissance of teaching interest and effort by the staff and myself. Not that we were indifferent or indolent before, but we are encumbered by a variety of activities which compete for our time... All encroach upon our primary duty, instruction, and undoubtedly decrease our efficiency as teachers. The Project has encouraged us to put these other items into proper perspective and to attack our instructional objectives with renewed zeal."

In 1973 with a sense of confidence gained from a decade of experience within the School, the Self-Learning Center embarked on a project to produce audio-visual materials suitable for use outside the School. Under the direction of Phil Crawford and again funded by the Northwest Area Foundation (Hill Family), the S L C sought to produce and distribute A-V teaching packages that would help small woodland owners, mill owners, foresters, home owners, and a variety of other audiences solve pressing forestry-related problems. Looking back, the problems facing Crawford and his staff were immense. To their knowledge no one else in forestry had ever attempted to produce such teaching materials on any organized basis, let alone figured out a way to get them to the intended audiences. Progress was often slow, but demand for the final product was always high. People needed the information available from the School and felt that A-V packages were an effective way of getting that information. Since those first stumbling efforts in 1973, about 90 slide-tapes and films have received publication credit from the School and are now being distributed throughout the world. It's estimated that in the last year alone over 95,000 "students" outside the University system saw these presentations.

During the 70's this media production function became so prominent that the SLC's name was changed to the Forestry Media Center (FMC) to reflect its importance. Teaching improvement was still of paramount importance to the School, however, so the FMC followed up the experiments that seemed to work for Reichart, and tried a large number of their own. Two projects deserving special attention were the Criterion Referenced Instruction workshop, briefly described in the section of this report on improving instruction, and efforts to use student feedback as a source of information in improving instruction. At the time student feedback was first collected in the School of Forestry in 1969, we were the first School at O.S.U., and one of the first in the entire nation, to try such a move. Since that first attempt, student input has grown into a formal part of the evaluation of teaching and, most importantly, has resulted in some significant changes in teaching effectiveness.

In the past several years, under the direction of Ed Jensen, the FMC has continued to carry out many of the programs instituted under Reichart and Crawford (faculty development, SLC, media production, etc.) and has been particularly active in attempting to educate the general citizenry of Oregon about forest management practices. The single project most deserving of attention is an on-going attempt to develop a forestry curriculum for public schools, again funded by the Northwest Area Foundation. The final output of the project will be a set of lesson plans and learning materials that will allow teachers at any grade level to teach forestry through other subjects such as math, art, history, or biology.

From the above paragraphs one might conclude that a primary characteristic of the Self-Learning Center/Forestry Media Center has been change. That would be a good observation. But beneath that change has always been the conviction that teaching could be made more effective and learning made more

efficient, and that the primary beneficiary of our efforts would be all those concerned with forestry education.