

Teaching Excellence at Yale

When a scientist and a clinician teach together, students are able to “see” the science at work in their future patients.

Patrice O’Neill-Wilhelm, a full-time lecturer at the School of Nursing, and **Sharen McKay**, a bench scientist and research lab manager at the School of Medicine (both pictured left), team teach a biomedical course for the Graduate Entry Prespecialty in Nursing (GEPN) program. McKay, the primary instructor, delivers a comprehensive overview of the biologic sciences while O’Neill-Wilhelm provides clinical examples that illustrate the relevance of the science in specific medical conditions.

This teaching partnership began as a suggestion from the director of the GEPN program and has evolved organically to become a unique course. Not surprisingly, one of the challenges - for professors and students - is the pace. “Because I’m a researcher and not a clinician,” states McKay, “Patrice has been essential in keeping the material clinically relevant.” O’Neill-Wilhelm adds, “Biomed is a science course. Students have to understand chemistry and cell biology before they have a picture of what’s going on in the body. By giving them a corresponding clinical picture, it gives them a better idea of how that science works.”



Co-teaching requires a high degree of coordination, sophisticated planning, and a willingness to attend and participate in each other’s classes. Having experts work together to provide appropriate and relevant clinical correlations to facilitate students’ science comprehension should lead to better learning, and ultimately, of course, better patient care. When O’Neill-Wilhelm explains something at the applied level – for example, how abnormal chemical reactions in the body alter normal metabolic processes, resulting in diseases such as obesity or Type II diabetes – students seem to soak it up. She continues, “It’s like you can see them saying to themselves, ‘That’s why I’m here, that’s why I am in this program.’”



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Research exploring the potential of using co-teaching in higher education classes:

Jayne Crow and Lesley Smith, from the School of Community Health and Social Studies at Anglia Polytechnic University in Essex, UK, report the findings of their work as co-teachers to a multidisciplinary group of students in the article, “Using co-teaching as a means of facilitating interprofessional collaboration in health and social care.” Their data illuminates the process of using co-teaching to role model collaborative working, as well as the importance of careful planning and use of instructors’ different knowledge bases and styles. They conclude that there is “considerable potential” for using co-teaching in many higher education disciplines.

Read the article online:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1356182021000044139>

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