



This Teaching Tip is one of a five-part series from a Faculty Learning Community at Pennsylvania State University.

Fulfilling on-campus teaching and off-campus extension responsibilities using co-teaching

Summary:

University faculty with extension and teaching appointments can find it difficult to participate in off-campus extension events during the academic year. We use co-teaching to maintain on-campus courses and participate in off-campus extension events.

Key Concepts:

- We use a co-teaching format where we both attend every class.
- When extension events are known in advance of the academic semester, syllabi are organized to allow one of us to be absent from class to participate in events while the other teaches.
- Topics that either of us can teach or that can easily be rearranged are also included in course syllabi to allow participation in extension events we are invited to after the academic semester begins.
- A disadvantage to co-teaching at our institution is that we each only receive 50% credit for co-taught courses even though we both attend nearly every class.

Co-teaching can assist university faculty with resident education and extension appointments fulfill their teaching and extension responsibilities. Extension responsibilities include presenting educational topics at stakeholder meetings most often located off-campus. Instructors with teaching and extension appointments can find it difficult to travel off-campus during the academic year. Co-teaching can be used to attend off-campus extension events while maintaining on-campus courses.

Co-teaching can take various forms. In general, different instructors may be present in the classroom for only a portion of the academic semester or they may attend every class

session but only teach a portion of the course materials. We have taken the later approach to co-teaching two courses since 2016.

Gardening for Fun and Profit is non-major, 3-credit, sophomore level course with a general education designation in natural science. The goal of the course is to provide students with science-based knowledge in designing, installing and maintaining home landscapes. Hydroponics and Aquaponics is a 3-credit, senior level elective course for Plant Science majors. Students learn the principles and practices for hydroponics and aquaponics systems, design, management, and crop production in the course. Each course is offered every Spring and Fall semester and includes a weekly laboratory session.

Our extension stakeholders are commercial farmers. One of us has responsibilities in vegetable production and the other in floriculture and greenhouse production. Extension meetings in our region (Mid-Atlantic, Northeast) are held at off-campus venues commonly during late fall and winter months to correspond to a slower time for farm activities. This season overlaps with the beginning of the Spring and the end of the Fall academic semesters.

A key reason co-teaching has helped us participate in extension events is that meetings corresponding to our specialties are often held on different dates. These scheduling differences allow for one of us to attend an extension meeting while the other maintains classes. If instructors are invited to present at the same meetings, co-teaching could still be an effective strategy for meeting on-campus teaching and off-campus responsibilities but with more coordination between instructors needed. One instructor could accept the invitation with the other declining.

When commitments to present at extension events are known prior to the start of each semester, we organize course topics on syllabi accordingly. However, requests to present at extension events commonly occur after the academic semester begins. Our courses are designed to include topics that both of us can teach or that can easily be rearranged. This allows flexibility for one of us to be absent from one or several classes while the other maintains in-person interaction with students.

As an example, both of us can teach about the fundamentals of pruning ornamentals in the Gardening for Fun and Profit course; however, one of us regularly presents the topic to the class. When that instructor needs to be absent from class to attend an extension event, the other instructor teaches about pruning ornamentals to the class. Or, one of us regularly presents about tomato production methods and the other about specialty cut flower production methods in the Hydroponics and Aquaponics course. These topics can easily be rearranged to allow for one of us to present at an extension meeting.

An additional benefit to this approach to students, as well as instructors, is that upon returning to class the person who was absent often shares information gained while at the extension event. Students enjoy learning about the experiences of farmers and new technologies.

Co-teaching allows us to participate in off-campus extension events that occur during the academic year. A drawback, at our institution, is that instructors each receive 50% credit for each course in administrative reviews despite attending class nearly 100% of the time. In our view, benefits to students, instructors and stakeholders explained in this tip offset this disadvantage.

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