Bordering on burnout? Need to enliven your courses? Energize faculty and students? Then consider the option of team teaching.

I team teach Introduction to Environmental Science, a 3-credit course, at Purdue University with a professor in the Department of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences. Students select and design the outline for this course from various environmental topics presented on the first day of class. For example, in the spring of 2004, some environmental issues chosen were population, water and air quality, hazardous waste management, environmental geology, alternative energy sources, and urbanization and sustainable cities.

What’s unique about the course is that it is taught by team-teaching. There are many types of team teaching techniques, such as tag team “My Turn Next.” This technique results in gaps/duplication of material, different messages from different professors, and lack of linkages. The method I have found most successful is having both/all instructors attend most/all sessions. This results in continuity and linkages in the course material. The role of the team member who is not in front of the class is to serve as a role model for students by reacting to the lecture material and asking questions, helping students get over shyness about asking questions, providing a different perspective on the material, and intervening to help clarify issues.

There are many advantages to team teaching. The team member who is not teaching on that day provides a model for student participation because he or she is enthusiastic about the material, well read, and eager to ask questions (a model for student participation). Team teaching provides a venue in which different examples and ways to explain important concepts are presented. This method of teaching also illustrates how experts have different perspectives on the same issue.

Weekly team meetings are an essential part of a team taught course. This is the time to talk about curricula issues, strategies for teaching particular concepts in the class, and general discussion about teaching philosophy. Team teaching forces teachers to have an explicit discussion of teaching styles, learning styles, and approaches. For many of us, this will be the first time we have had to explain why we do things as we do in the classroom. Finally, team teaching can prevent faculty burnout. Lecturing the same course every semester can lead to boring lectures and disengaged students. Team teaching livens up the course syllabus and outline and energizes the team members who are not actively teaching. Once it is their turn to lecture, they are enthusiastic, innovative, and engaging.

The model for team teaching was established 30 years ago by Professor James L. Ahlrichs for the Introductory Soil Science course at Purdue University. It has expanded to several other courses in the Department of Agronomy including Soil Ecology, Bioremediation, Plant Mineral Nutrition, and Seminar. For me, team teaching has been a successful pedagogical technique and one I hope to continue pursuing at Purdue University.

Your comments concerning the content of this editorial or other published materials in this journal are welcome at any time. Please send your Letter to the Editor to: John G. Graveel, Department of Agronomy, 1150 Lilly Hall of Life Sciences, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN 47907-2054, jgraveel@purdue.edu.