

# Mini-Course Day: A Change of Pace

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**A** UNIQUE type of mini-course curriculum was developed this past year at the Iron Mountain Senior High School. All students were given a break from attending their regular classes for one day and were permitted to select from a variety of mini or short courses.

In September the faculty was asked to consider the merits of setting one day aside for the purpose of teaching something different from their normal assignment. Basic suggestions offered to stimulate thinking were proposals to teach hobbies, special skills, or interests outside of teaching areas. Discussion produced both the enthusiasm and interest of staff members, which facilitated planning very early in the year for this innovation. Most of the staff favored either late March or early April, when the school routine often seems to approach the educational doldrums. Staff members believed that a change of pace at this indolent time of the year could be good for both students and faculty.

In later faculty meetings after teachers had been given ample time to consider their respective schedules, ideas for mini-course offerings were prodigious in number. Many teachers were considering more course offerings than could be scheduled in one day. Questions were raised about the amount of time allotted for each course and it was decided not to permit any kind of regimentation to interfere with planning or scheduling

classes. If a teacher needed a two- or three-period block to teach, for example, a course entitled "Clothing Selection for Girls," then that amount of time would be given without question.

The problem of an English teacher who needed more space than his classroom offered to teach fly casting was quickly solved by scheduling his presentation in the gymnasium. In this switch of teaching stations, the physical education teacher used the English teacher's classroom for the purpose of a mini-course in "enjoying football and what to look for." A biology teacher was willing to permit a business teacher to use his lab for the purpose of a mini-course on "how to fillet fish" while he taught the biological effects of radiation in a regular classroom.

Some teachers appreciated the opportunity to meet with students who had not previously taken classes in their department. They saw the possibility that existed to whet these students' interest in their department or teaching area. Vocational instructors were especially motivated and decided to offer short courses such as auto tune-up, basic timing for automobiles, amateur radio, home repair tips, and handicraft, with the expectation that many of the college preparatory students would select these courses because of their practicality.

When faculty members finally decided just what they wanted to teach, the list of courses proposed and approved was as fol-

lows: introduction to conversational German, caricature drawing, analysis and appreciation of modern music, the roaring seventies, culture cuisine (how to make real Italian sauce), introduction to anthropology, brainwashing techniques, personality development, the status system in the United States, how to learn to crochet in three hours, knitting, math puzzles and games, Ann Landers hour, slalom skiing tips, agriculture today, lamp construction, government jobs, clothing selection, coin collecting, the slide rule, curve stitching, scuba diving, aquarium fish, trapping for fun and profit, basic topographic map reading, retailing and department store operation, theory of basketball, officiating football, classics of children's literature, books for young adults, reference books you should know, personal law, office machine demonstration, French operatic narrative, overseas student travel, the Nuremberg war crimes court, Vietnam questions answered here, basketball rules, income tax short and long forms, stocks and bonds, controlled reading, fly casting, fly tying, lathe turning, how to apply for a job, fashion merchandising, new careers for the seventies and eighties, harmony and theory of music, and use of drafting reproduction equipment.

A number of faculty members indicated that, when they discussed this innovation, the students too were interested and requested permission to teach or at least assist. Therefore, additional short courses were added such as motorcycle safety and equipment, seeing Alaska with slides, anyone can golf, snowmobile maintenance, babysitting do's and don'ts, A.F.S. summer in India, cross country skiing, anyone for chess?, real Italian pizza, canoeing in Michigan, and grooming for girls.

Another unexpected request to teach came from the superintendent's office. He asked to teach public school finance, public school administration, basic philosophy of teaching, and the fundamentals of tennis.

Three weeks prior to the actual mini-course day, the master schedule of teaching assignments, room designation, and subject offering was posted in all rooms and in corridors so that students could begin planning

their individual class schedule for mini-course day.

A brief announcement was made the first period over the P.A. system to inform the students about the future mini-course day. Teachers who had not picked up their morning mail quickly sent runners to the office to get the mini-course class schedule. The teachers later reported that few if any of them were able to continue with their normal class presentation due to the many questions raised by students.

Between classes that day, the corridors were blocked in places where the schedule for the mini-course day was posted on bulletin boards. At the office a number of extra schedules were put on the counter. Students somehow heard that these copies were to be distributed to them just for the asking. The principal then realized that if he wanted to see students linger around the office for purposes other than awaiting discipline, exciting innovations such as this could be the answer.

On the day before the mini-courses were offered, students were instructed to complete their schedule on special forms that were distributed to them in homerooms. Teachers had been answering individual questions. From the optimistic feedback on their observations, the teachers decided not to have any "check" to see if students were attending classes. Teachers reported that most students were taking more than the normal five periods of instruction required.

The most eloquent evaluation of the mini-course day was perhaps in the enthusiastic conduct which the students exemplified the entire day. The halls were alive with comparative discussions about what transpired in the different classes.

Perhaps this novelty break from normal routine, change of pace, or opportunity to explore other departments, or a combination of all these caused the excitement. Suffice it to say that the rewards in terms of "turning kids on to school" was worth the fortitude and ambition to try something new.

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