Dr. Danae Hudson (D) & Dr. Brooke Whisenhunt (B):

(D) Hi, I'm Dr. Danae Hudson, and this is Dr. Brooke Whisenhunt, and we're both faculty members in the department of Psychology and we're here to talk to you today about the new Psychology 121: Introductory Psychology that we've spent the last year and a half redesigning into a new format. Just to give you a little bit of background on why we started this project: back in October 2010 we participated in a statewide conference in academic transformation and collaboration where basically everyone in the entire state got together with the governor and decided that we wanted to pursue a new initiative in trying to improve student learning outcomes in a variety of college courses. For Missouri State University, Psychology 121 was a course that was selected to participate in this project. Traditionally, our 121 course was a large lecture format course where we had 153 students and one faculty member. A lot of the courses were taught by per course faculty and some of them were taught by our regular faculty members as well. So in that way, our ratio was one faculty member to 153 students. Some of the challenges that we had in that course was we had what was called the high DFW rate, so we had a large number of grades of Ds, Fs, or people withdrawing from the course. This is similar to some other traditional general education first year courses, but we thought that was something we could really improve on and wanted to focus on improving student learning outcomes in this course. In addition to addressing some of the course drift, some of the changes in the class between instructors, and then we had to deal with some issues and some barriers about using creative pedagogical tools when you have one instructor with 153 students.

(B): So the redesign format that we have developed is a blended course format, which means that we have a lecture one day a week for an hour and fifteen minutes and the other time is spent doing online learning activities and we've used my Psych lab for our particular class. And there is also some online learning groups that people are participating in. In terms of staffing this we had to be kind of creative and come up with an interesting staffing plan so that we have the one faculty member still, but we also have what we're calling a senior learning assistant, and this is either a graduate student or an adjunct teacher. And we also have five undergraduate learning assistants, so these are our top Psychology majors coming in and helping their fellow students in the class, and each undergraduate learning assistant is in charge of three small groups of twenty students each. So we have three hundred students total in the class, which doubled the size, but we actually have a ratio of 1:43 instead of 1:153.

Some of the pedagogical enhancements that we used first was the inclusion of the undergraduate learning assistants having someone who is basically serving as a peer leader to help out, and they are also sitting in the class and being there in the moment to help students with the lecture material. We've also been using clickers in the class to get everyone participating, it's been so far really effective way to get students involved in the lecture and provide the instructor with an interesting way to actually poll students as you are talking. We're also using peer instruction which is a pedagogical technique where you actually have students teaching each other with the difficult concept that they are struggling
with in the class. We’re tailoring our lectures which is something quite new, so that students are completing online quizzing prior to coming to class after they’ve already read their chapter and we’re able to get the information about what students are really struggling with so we can tailor our lectures to that content that they are already showing difficulty in. And then we’ve also included some new interventions for students who are struggling so for students, who miss classes, or students who don’t complete their assignments or any student who is struggling with a D or F, we are continually providing new interventions.

In terms of one week of activities, we’ve set this up so that students are actually interacting with the course material a lot before they even come to class, which means they are actually reading and doing assignments before they come to class so that they come a lot more prepared, they are able to engage in higher level discussions. And also, the instructor is also able to get information about what part of the material is actually difficult so you can focus your lecture on the part of the material that they struggled to learn on their own.

(D): So in terms of how we’re assessing the outcomes of this redesign: we’re looking at a variety of factors. Particularly we’re going to look at final grade distributions, and we’re going to compare our traditional section to the redesigned section. We’re also doing a pre-post comprehensive exam to measure learning over the semester. We’re also looking at things like retention, the number of withdrawals, lecture attendance, and students looking to pursue Psychology in the future, and we’re measuring both student and faculty satisfaction.

(B): In terms of student reactions so far, I’ve been teaching the pilot section of this class, and I would say overall student reaction has been positive, although there is constantly the comment about how much work there is. So I think we’ve increased the amount of work that students are putting into the course, which I also feel like has increased their learning. I’ve never been in lectures like this where students are so capable of engaging in higher level discussions during the class. Students have been particularly positive about the use of clickers and the use of undergrad learning assistants; there have of course been challenges. We’ve had a little bit of trouble with our online learning activities that are wiki projects. And that’s one of the things we’ll probably focus on for revision in the future.

(D): And in terms of the future for what we’re going to do with this course is, this summer our entire team is getting together to actually revise the course according to student feedback and the SLAs and ULAs, and the faculty feedback as well. Come fall 2012 all of our sections will be taught in this redesigned format for then and the future, and then spring will really be the time when we kind of wrap up our participation in the statewide project where we analyze all of our data and then present reports to campus and to the other participating institutions in the state.