Planning Your Course: A Decision Guide

1. Where are you? Size up the situation.

A. What kind of students enroll in this course? (number, prior knowledge and experience, motivation, etc.)

B. What role does this course play in the overall educational experience of the students who take it? (GE, elective, required, majors-only, lower or upper division, prerequisite for other classes, etc.)

C. In what kind of curriculum is this course embedded? (How does it relate to other courses? What courses does it build on? What courses follow it?)

D. What external professional standards need to be met?

E. What kind of learning space will you have? (classroom, lab, other? fixed desks? movable chairs? media equipment?)

2. Identify 3-5 general goals for the course.

A. What do you want students to be able to DO, once the course is over?

B. What would students have to KNOW in order to do the items listed in question "2.A" above?

3. Assessment of Learning:

A.How would you know if the students achieved these goals? (How can you assess student learning/achievement?)

4. Determine how you will assess student learning and achievement.

A. FOR EACH GOAL specified above, what information can you gather that shows how well the goal was achieved for each student individually? For the class as a whole?

B. For which goals are multiple-choice exams sufficient? Essay exams? Project assignments? Writing assignments? Other "products" or valid evidence of learning outcomes sought?

5. Determine the specific learning activities for the course. What are the students going to do?

A. FOR EACH GOAL listed in #2, what learning activities will generate the kind of learning you envision?

B. Is "hearing" sufficient? Or "reading"? Or "doing"? Or does the learning goal require some combination of activities?

6. Choose appropriate teaching strategies to achieve your goals:

A. How can you help your students achieve the goals you have set? (What general structure of learning activities will best assist the students in achieving the goals you have established?)

Example strategies:

A. Continuous series of lectures and reading assignments, periodically interrupted by 1 or 2 mid terms.

("hear - read - test")

B. Sequence of reading, reflective writing, and whole class discussion (sequence repeated for each topic).
("read - write - talk")
(A variation is "read - talk - write")

C. Start with lab or field work observations, followed by readings, and whole class discussions.
("do/look - read - talk")
(Write-ups of lab/field work are sometimes included)

D. Present lectures, followed by field work or lab observations.
("hear - see/do")

E. Students do assigned readings, followed by mini-tests done individually and/or in small groups; then move on to group-based application projects.
("read-individual/group tests - DO")

F. Work through a series of developmental stages: build knowledge and/or skills (3-5 weeks); work on small application projects (3-5 weeks); and then work on larger, more complex projects (3-5 weeks).
("know/know-how - do - DO")

G. Contract for a grade: (for example; read text and pass exams = C, + do research paper = B, + extended project = A).

H. Other?

7. Develop a sequence of activities, a week-by-week schedule for the whole term. When are you going to do what?

A. What activities need to come first?

B. What activities do you want to conclude with?

C. What activities do you need in the middle?

8. Identify Resources: Who/What can help?

What resources do you need (and can you get) to support each of the goals listed in #2? (people, places, and things, including media)

9. How are you going to grade? Develop your grading system.

A. Your system should reflect the full range of learning goals and activities. (Remember, NOT everything has to be graded.)

B. The relative weight of each item on the course grade should reflect the relative importance of that activity.

10. De-bugging the design: What could go wrong? Analyze and assess this "first draft" of the course.

A. What kinds of situations might arise as you implement this course? e.g., Will students be motivated to do the work? What if they're not?

B. Does the design encourage student involvement?

C. Will students get sufficient feedback on their performance?

D. How can you prevent (or at least minimize) problems?

E. Make the necessary modifications in the design.

11. Plan an evaluation of the course itself and your own teaching performance. How will you know how the course is going? How it went?

A. What kinds of mid-term and end-of-term feedback will you need?

B. What specific questions about the course do you have? How effective are the particular learning activities? To what degree are the goals for the course achieved? etc.

C. What sources of information can help you answer these questions?

audio/videotape, student feedback and interviews, questionnaires, peer observers, quality circles?

12. Write the syllabus.

Syllabus Checklist.

Consider the following items as a foundation for a syllabus that helps students understand a teacher's expectations as well as basic course information. Including each item may not be necessary. Use this checklist as a guide for what might be included in a course syllabus.

_____ A brief statement of overall course objectives that introduces students to what they should know and be able to do by the end of a course. Consider the personal tone set here as an important aspect of this statement.
_____ A few words about course format, so that students know what to expect about how the teacher will be using class time.
_____ A brief statement of expectations in terms of student responsibilities, clearly stating what the teacher expects (such as participation and the level of work).
_____ A statement of what assessment techniques will be used to evaluate students, including information on grading policies.
_____ A schedule of class dates and topics, along with week-by-week reading assignments.
_____ Due dates for papers, exams, projects, and so on, including any policies about late assignments.
_____ Any pertinent information about academic policies and procedures (such as class attendance, making up assignments, and university-wide policies).

"Nuts-and-bolts" information:

_____ Course title, course number, and prerequisites.
_____ Building and room number.
_____ Instructor's name, phone numbers, e-mail address, and office hours.
_____ Text(s) and supplemental readings; course web site.
_____ Suggested bibliography.

[Course Title]

[Interesting quote, motivating information].

[Semester/Year]
[Class location]
[Class Meeting time(s)]

Instructor: [Name] [Office, e-mail, phone]
Office Hours: [scheduled + by appointment? Virtual Office Hours?]

Grading: [options: SU/Letter, choice of credit hours?]

I. Rationale:
Why does this course exist? How does it fit in with the rest of the field/area's curriculum?

II. Course Aims and Objectives:
Aims
Thinking from the prospective students' point of view, what general outcomes is the course designed to achieve? How will it contribute to them professionally?

Specific Learning Objectives:
By the end of this course, students will:
List as specifically as possible the learning outcomes the course is intended to produce. It is helpful here to think about the kinds of evidence you will need to assess the students' learning as your objectives should drive your assessment and grading schema. Kinds of evidence can be manifest in what students say, do, think and/or feel. What they say (as on an exam, paper, project, homework, etc., or in class discussion) is a reflection of their thinking. Feelings are often neglected in specifying course or class objectives, yet the research on the role of affect (emotions and feelings) in learning has been well documented and has been shown to have a significant influence and integration with cognitive learning. For example, if you were teaching a course on ecology it would be difficult to do without addressing human values, which have an affective aspect to them. If certain psycho-motor skills are intended to be developed, the evidence will be in doing (as in a lab course where actions like titration, completing successful assays, collecting meaningful data and analyzing it are regular expectations) they should be articulated as clearly as possible. A well stated objective has two components: substance (content/subject matter like osmosis or absorption) and form: what action must the student perform with regards to the substance (compare and contrast, evaluate, analyze, apply, etc.)

III. Format and Procedures:
How is the course structured and how will classes be carried out? What behavioral expectations does the instructor have for the students in class? This is where specifications for attendance, participation, respect for others, etc. should be spelled out to act as a behavioral guide. If the course has multiple formats (like lecture & recitation, lab and discussion, group learning projects and/or presentations) these should be explained clearly

IV. My Assumptions
This is a section where the instructor can communicate his or her personal assumptions and/or biases regarding the course content to set it off from other similar courses and other instructors. Does the instructor have a unique operational definition for some of the core course concepts? What principles and/or beliefs about either the content or how to effectively learn the content held by the instructor would it be helpful for the students to know up front?

V. Course Requirements:
1. Class attendance and participation policy:

2. Course readings:
(a) Required text:

(b) Background readings, course packet available in the university bookstore ? Use of Course info? Download and bring handouts to class?

3. Assignments based on the number of credits for which the learner is enrolled:
(a) One credit – What are the minimum requirements if the student can choose to take the course for one credit?:
(1)

(2)

(b) Two credits – In addition to those activities for one credit, students electing two credits will . . .

(c) Three credits – Those selecting three credits must complete the work for the first two credits, but in addition they must . . .

V. Grading Procedures: Grades for the different credit options will be based on:
1. One credit option:
(a) (%)
(b) (%)
(c) (%)

2. Two credit option:
(a) (%)
(b) (%)
(c) (%)

3. Three credit option:
(a) (%)
(b) (%)
(c) (%)
(d) (%)

Keep in mind, as you decide the weighting for the different assignments and tasks you give students it will have a major impact on their effort distribution. For example, if you have many homeworks and/or quizzes, but not any one of them will count significantly toward the final grade, students may invest less time and commitment to doing them. If a certain percentage of the students' grades is based on class participation, what criteria will be used to make that assessment: quantity or quality? If quality, what determines quality?

VI. Academic Integrity
The work you submit in [course name/number] is expected to be the result of your individual effort only. The use of a computer in no way modifies the standards of academic integrity expected under the University Code.

You are encouraged to study together and to discuss information and concepts covered in lecture and the sections with other students. You can give "consulting" help to or receive "consulting" help from such students.

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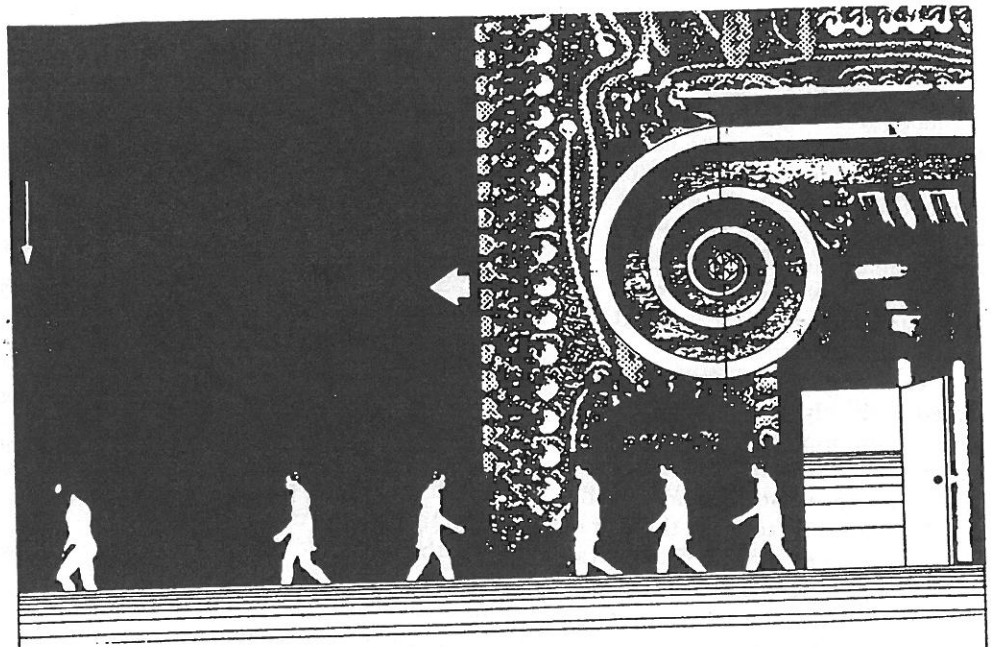

Motivating with the Course Syllabus

Mary McDonnell Harris, Professor
Center for Teaching and Learning
University of North Dakota

As instructor of a graduate course on college teaching, I recently assigned two readings, "What Theories of Motivation Say About Why Learners Learn," (McMillan & Forsyth, 1991) and "Practical Proposals for Motivating Students" (Forsyth & McMillan, 1991) and coincidentally followed the reading with a class discussion of syllabus construction. This happy juxtaposition of experiences led to important insights for all of us. The students in my class are faculty and graduate students from a variety of disciplines who typically come to a course in college teaching expecting to learn which methods work best and other tricks of the trade. In past years they, and I, have talked about the course syllabus as a semi-contractual document which includes certain elements, such as the ones listed by Altman and Cashin (1992). In this discussion, however, our recent thinking about the readings on motivation led us to a different conception of the syllabus. We found ourselves asking and answering the question, "What would a motivating syllabus look like?"

Our answers will lead us to write a different sort of syllabus in the future. We concluded our discussion of this topic by listing ten rules for syllabus construction that reflect new understandings of the motivational properties of a course syllabus.

1. The syllabus conveys enthusiasm for the subject. Nothing draws students into a course as much as the teacher's love for the subject matter. Most college teachers do truly love their subjects. Especially at the introductory level, this love is one of the teacher's greatest resources. Let it show! A good syllabus would say, "I want to share with you my fascination with . . ."

2. The syllabus conveys the intellectual challenge of the course. Many of the syllabi we reviewed were totally occupied with procedures. Drawing students into the course must capture their interest in the big questions that will be considered. Suggest what they are. What important life puzzles will be addressed?

3. The syllabus provides for personalization of content. Personalization relates the course to the student's experience, past, present or future. Show how course content applies to real life situations. Or, offer the students some choices that can tailor assignments to their background or interests.

4. The syllabus conveys respect for the ability of students. A teacher who touts a high drop-out or failure rate or who devotes considerable syllabus space to the consequences

Volume 3 Number 1 1993

of plagiarism or the support services available to failing students tells some students to expect to fail. Although it is important to help students find ways to be successful in the course, we believe that this is more helpfully done after the instructor knows more about the students than can be ascertained on the day they first meet.

5. Course goals are attainable and stated positively. The syllabus provides an opportunity for the teacher to state course goals which should convey what the student will know and be able to do at the end of the course. The syllabus of a general education course should convey its contribution to a liberal education, not apologize for being designed for non-majors. The best syllabi provide some space for students to write in their own goals, too.

6. Grading policies convey the possibility of success. Statements of grading policies often leave the impression that the teacher has anticipated a punishment for every student error. While agreeing that college teachers should not be naive, we think policy statements should guide students to do well. A tone of "Violators will be prosecuted," should be replaced with simple and optimistic statements of expectations. Policies such as dropping the lowest grade or permitting one late homework assignment encourage students at the same time they communicate limits.

Statements of grading policies often leave the impression that the teacher has anticipated a punishment for every student error.

7. Assignments are adequately specified. Poor student performance often results from lack of clarity about instructor expectations. Either in the syllabus or in a follow-up statement, the instructor who wants students to do well makes explicit the expectations for completion of assignments and the qualities that will be rewarded.

8. Assignments vary in type of required expertise. Literature on learning styles and multiple intelligences explicates the extent to which students differ in their approaches to learning. A course in which student success is maximized offers opportunities for outstanding performance to as many students as possible, not just those with one type of learning strength. Tests should have several types of questions. Cooperative group learning can supplement individual learning. Learning can be demonstrated in ways that go beyond traditional papers. Courses with one type of assignment offer success to one type of learner.

9. Student learning is assessed frequently. Students benefit from frequent opportunities for feedback and self-assessment. Frequent assignments minimize the consequences of poor performance on any one of them and maximize opportunities for practice, trial and error learning, and involvement with the course material.

10. The syllabus conveys the teacher's desire to help students individually. Most syllabi give the teacher's office location and office hours. A motivating syllabus will go beyond these in assuring the student of the teacher's availability for consultation. It tells students how and when to reach the instructor by telephone or e-mail, sets up help sessions, and/or actively encourages students to come during office hours for specified purposes. Many students are likely to do better if they have a relationship with the teacher outside of class.

The potential of the commonplace course syllabus for generating excitement about learning is considerable if student engagement is considered more important than tests, dates, and policies. Examine your most recent course syllabus for motivation of the student reader. Does it convey your love of the content? Does it convey flexibility and accessibility? Or is it just another syllabus?

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The Textbook Selection Checklist

Developed by Brian Hemmings and David Battersby

Ed.'s Note: How do we select textbooks? Generally we take a look at a number of available ones, maybe talk with some other instructors to find out what they use, and then try to find one that "marries" well with what we plan to teach in the course. In other words, we don't use clear-cut criteria. We don't submit potential texts to a systematic and organized review. We certainly don't consider texts in light of what research has discovered as to how students best learn from printed text. That is why we have chosen to include the only text selection checklist that we have seen which incorporates these concerns.

Please circle the appropriate response.

I. Coping with difficult words/concepts

1. Is italic or bold type used? Yes/No
2. Are new concepts listed or defined? Yes/No
3. Does a glossary appear within the textbook? Yes/No
4. If yes, is it a 'running glossary' found in the margin? Yes/No
5. Are footnotes avoided? Yes/No

II. The use of instructional aids

6. Does an overview or summary precede each chapter? Yes/No
7. Is there a summary at the end of each chapter? Yes/No
8. Is there an advance organizer used at the beginning of the chapter? Yes/No
9. If yes, does it provide a useful framework that helps clarify the ideas ahead? Yes/No
10. Are behavioral objectives available for use? Yes/No
11. Are additional questions inserted into the text? Yes/No
12. If yes, do they adequately alert readers as to what information follows? Yes/No
13. Does the author, by the use of instructional aids, indicate to the reader what material is important? Yes/No

III. Typographical organization

14. Are the headings level and consistent within the chapters? Yes/No
15. Do major headings appear in lower case? Yes/No
16. Are subheadings written in the form of a question? Yes/No
17. Are spatial cues effective for scanning? Yes/No
18. Do chapters provide cues which are simple and clear to follow? Yes/No
19. Is the text 'chunked' to promote more efficient reading? Yes/No

IV. Presentation and appropriateness of illustrative materials

20. Are the illustrations used (i.e., pictures, diagrams, cartoons and photographs) relevant to the text? Yes/No
21. Do the illustrations help to explain the text? Yes/No
22. Do the illustrations provide crucial information for understanding the text? Yes/No
23. Does the illustrative material have captions that are clear and relatively self-explanatory? Yes/No
24. Is illustrative material positioned nearby to the text reference? Yes/No
25. If yes, is it referenced clearly? Yes/No

26. Does the author use a variety of materials (including flow charts, algorithms and information mapping) to maintain appeal? Yes/No
27. If yes, are clear instructions given as to how to use these illustrative aids? Yes/No

V. Provision for self-testing

28. Are questions provided at the end of each chapter to test understanding? Yes/No
29. Is the questioning aimed at an appropriate level? Yes/No
30. Are there answers available for the reader's use? Yes/No
31. If yes, is information available which pinpoints the answers within the text, e.g., paragraph 3/page 67? Yes/No

VI. Follow-up

32. Does the author provide additional notes and/or suggestions for further reading at the end of each chapter? Yes/No
33. If yes, does the author discuss the relevance of the reference? Yes/No
34. Are the follow-up materials appropriate for introductory students? Yes/No

VII. Clarity of the author's intent

35. Does the author suggest to the reader how the textbook should be read? Yes/No
36. If yes, does the author provide different instructions for beginning students and more advanced readers? Yes/No
37. Do the intentions of the author 'link together' well? Yes/No
38. If yes, do the cues provided by headings/subheadings assist in making the text more cohesive? Yes/No
39. Is there a logic and a consistency in the page and chapter design? Yes/No
40. Would the majority of readers find the reading required easy? Yes/No

Checklist Score. Total the number of Yes responses.
Maximum Score = 40.

Weimer, Maryellen and Rose Ann Neff. 1990. Teaching College: Collected Readings for the New Instructor. Wisconsin: Magna Publications.

Developing Daily Lesson Plans

1. Identify the key ideas the class will cover, and then organize them hierarchically and logically.

2. Look for connections with previous or upcoming classes. How does this particular class fit into the course as a whole?

3. How do you want to convey the ideas and connections you've identified? What are the main goals you want to accomplish in the class for your students? (Consider where your students are coming from, what they know, and how to bridge to new information in a meaningful way.)

4. Develop objectives that identify what you want your students to learn or be able to do as a result of this class period.

5. Identify the teaching strategies you will use to achieve these objectives (i.e., Will your goals be best met through a lecture, through a discussion, through a collaborative exercise, etc.?).

6. Identify the major blocks of material that you want to cover in order to achieve the objectives you've developed. How will you present each block? How much time should be devoted to each? Which material is essential to cover thoroughly and clearly and which less essential? Make sure the most important blocks receive the most time, but build flexibility into the schedule.

7 Consider transitions between blocks. Summarize, ask questions, and use organizational guage to distinguish and connect them.

8. Plan for closure—don't just let time run out. Decide how you will summarize, wrap up, and begin the transition to the next class.

9. After you have finished items 1-8, develop an introduction. (Think about the function of an introduction; it should capture student interest, present an "advance organizer" for the material, and help students build from what they know to what you want them to learn.)

10. When developing your own teaching notes, find the format that works for you. Mark key points clearly. Plan for examples and questions. Write cues to remind you to pause, ask questions, look at students, and move around the room.

11. Plan your questioning strategy. Make your questions thought-provoking and open-ended. Use a cognitive grid like Bloom's Taxonomy to design questions that assess different levels of knowledge. Remind yourself to wait long enough for students to formulate an answer.

12. Budget your time. Try to think realistically about the amount of time you will devote to each portion of class.

13. Plan your boardwork or overheads.

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* apted from Lavon Gappa & Barbara Gill (eds.) *Teaching at FSU: A Handbook.* (1991) Program for Instructional Excellence.

A Survivor's Guide
to
Teaching the First Day

At the First Class Meeting

1. Put important information on the board such as:
   - The course number (someone may be lost).
   - Your name (what you would like to be called?).
   - Your office number and office hours.
   - An extension where you can be reached or for messages.

2. Introduce yourself and the course.
   - What is your background?
   - What are you studying as a graduate student?
   - Handout a syllabus or course outline.
   - Discuss why the course is interesting/important.
   - What can the students look forward to learning?

3. Become acquainted with your students.
   - Start learning names.
   - What do the students hope to get out of the course?

4. Establish the structure of the class and present guidelines.
   - Are students expected to participate, prepare in advance, etc.?
   - How will the students be graded?
   - What are the policies for late work, attendance, cheating?
   - Are there any special procedures (i.e., safety).

5. Answer student questions.
   - Remember to give the students an opportunity to ask.
   - It's ok not to know all the answers; but return with answers.

6. Start the class as you mean to continue.
   - Don't let students out early or they will come to expect it.
   - Start out as an authoritarian, then relax.

What to Do the First Day of Class

by
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From: *Teaching Pedagogy to Teaching Assistants: A Handbook for 398T Instructors.* 1992. Karron G. Lewis, Ed. The Center for Teaching Effectiveness. The University of Texas at Austin.

The first day of class is an anxiety producing time for almost all teachers. We wonder how large the class will be, whether the students will be easy to get along with, whether the activities we have planned and the learning we hope to foster will be as exciting for the students as they are for us, and so forth. To help overcome this anxiety to a certain degree, careful planning is necessary. In general terms, you should accomplish the following three objectives on the first day:

1. Introduce yourself to the students and the students to each other.

2. Answer students' questions and calm their anxieties about the class.

3. Provide a sample of the course content.

   (Note: You will need the entire class period to accomplish these things, so don't plan on dismissing class early; you have important work to do.)

The following tips should help you get ready for that first class meeting:

BEFORE THE FIRST DAY

1. Make up a syllabus for your class.
   If your class is one of a number of lab or discussion sections, see if you can get a copy of a syllabus which was used last semester. Talk to your supervising professor to determine what is supposed to be covered in your section, and see if he or she has any suggestions about what to include in your syllabus. (See sample syllabus in this chapter.)

   The following items should be in your syllabus:
   - Course name and number
   - Course unique number
   - Meeting time
   - Your name
   - Your office number
   - Your phone number
   - Your office hours
   - Name of lab supervisor, his or her office number and phone number
   - Any materials students will need to purchase for the course
   - A brief description of the requirements
   - A description of how the students will be graded
   - Any additional information which you feel will help communicate the course requirements to the students

   As you go over the items in the syllabus, show the students how knowing what is in the syllabus can help them master the course material.

2. Go look at the room in which you will be teaching. Make sure everything you will need is in the room: chalk, erasers, overhead projector and screen (if you plan to use one), lab tables, equipment, working electrical outlets, and so forth. If you will be using special equipment or supplies, make sure you know where they are kept and how to get them.

3. Get a list of the names of the students who are taking your lab or discussion section. Go over the list so you will be familiar with the names. If you are unsure of the pronunciation of any of the names, ask one of your fellow graduate students or a faculty member to assist you. (Being able to pronounce the students' names will help you build rapport with your class.)

   Try to learn all of your students' names. Some instructors ask the students to provide a passport-size photo with their name on the back. Others take polaroid pictures during class. Still other instructors use a video camera and have the students file past the camera and say their name and something about themselves; they then watch the videotape over and over until they learn the students' names.

4. Prepare cards or a sheet on which you can get some background information about your students. See example at the end of this chapter. Think about what information you would like to have that will help you get to know your students a little better, and include those things on the sheet. With you collecting this kind of information, the students will feel like you are interested in them as individuals and care whether or not they succeed in your class.

Some teachers distribute a class roster, with names and telephone numbers, so that students can call one another when they have problems.

FIRST DAY OF CLASS CHECKLIST

There is a great deal of information which should be shared with your students on the first day of class. University regulations require that certain things be done, departments require others, and many things may occur which you should know how to handle.

The following is a list of the kinds of information you should know before the first day of class. Depending on the department, some of this information will be required on a first day handout. Some of the information can be found in the Undergraduate Catalogue; other information can be found in the Schedule of Classes; other information can only be found through consultation with the department.

Do You Know....?

1. Course name, number, and unique number.
2. Course prerequisites and corequisites.
3. Names of textbooks and other materials required for the class (bring copies of these to class to show the students).
4. Your name, office address, and office hours.
5. Course objectives, outline, and description.
6. A list of critical dates which may include the following:
   a. the last day to add classes
   b. the last day to drop classes without penalty
   c. the last day to drop classes with a grade
   d. date and time of the final examination (these are found in the Course Schedule)
   e. dates for other examinations
   f. any other special dates (field trips, speakers, etc.)
7. What to do in any of the following situations:
   a. a student attends and insists he or she is registered, but the name is not on your roster
   b. a student wants to add your class, but the class is full
   c. a student wants to add your class, and there appears to be space
   d. a student does not know where to go to drop or add classes
8. A detailed description of how the course will be graded (how many quizzes, what percentage of the overall grade is made up from each quiz, homework assignments, computer projects, the final exam, etc.) The University requires that this information be given to the students on the first day of class.
9. A list of assignments as far into the semester as you think is proper. Some departments may have the entire semester already planned.
10. A detailed description of major projects or assignments which may be required in the course.
11. Information concerning course/laboratory or lecture/discussion coordination if applicable.
12. Information concerning availability of tutors, course files, test files, etc., if applicable.
13. A statement concerning make-up work for missed classes or assignments. (You may want to check to see if there is a departmental policy on this.)
14. A statement concerning how absences and tardies will affect the final grade. (Check to see if there is a departmental policy on this one, too.)
15. Details on how homework will be handled, such as whether or not it will be graded, whether or not you will accept late assignments, etc.
16. The university policy concerning scholastic dishonesty in regard to both cheating and plagiarism. (These should be available from your department or the Dean of Students Office.)
17. Suggestions for notetaking techniques and study skills.
18. Format to be used for lab reports (if applicable).

On the First Day

1. Get to class a little early and write the following on the board:

• Course Name	• Course Number	• Course Unique Number
•Your Name	•Your Office Number	•Your Phone Number

2. Take roll and have students fill out information cards.
3. Talk to the students about the importance of clear communication. The following tips should help you get started:

In any classroom, there will always be times when communication requires an extra effort on the part of the teaching assistant and the undergraduates. Here are some suggestions to help you and your undergraduates with classroom communication.

a. On the first day of the course, share something about yourself with your students, such as where you are from and a little information about where you went to school. Information transfer increases as shared background increases.

b. Suggest some specific ways that students can let you know they missed something in your explanation. It could be a nonverbal signal that means the student would like to hear your last few sentences again, but would like for you to rephrase them because of interference from pronunciation or unfamiliar vocabulary. For instance, the student could hold up his or her index finger briefly.

c. Ask students to rephrase a question if you don't understand it the first time you hear it or if you're not absolutely sure you understood it.

d. You can also rephrase students' questions yourself in order to check that you have understood.

e. Rephrase students' comments to check your interpretation.

f. Encourage your undergraduates to visit you during your office hours so that they can learn more about you and your communication style from a one-to-one conversational experience.

4. Tell students something about the class routine and your expectations of them.

5. Teach something!!

It is a good idea to give a brief introduction to the subject by discussing the first topic they will be working on during the next lab or discussion section meeting. Then, leave about five minutes at the end of class to check for problems in communication or questions about the procedures which you have outlined.

Indicate that you are looking forward to working with them and that you hope to get to know each of them much better as the semester progresses.

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