The Unique Challenges of Engaging and Teaching First Year Students

Kevin C. Clarke, Center for the First-Year Experience
Four Steps for Designing a Learning Experience

Who are first-year students?

What do we want them to know, think, or do as a result of our class?

How will we deliver the content?

How will we know students learned?

Adapted from University 101 Programs, 2011
Who are first-year students?
Born 1997/98
HOW WILL THIS IMPACT HOW YOU TEACH NEW STUDENTS?
High Expectations and High Support

Sanford, 1967
Creating a More Inclusive Classroom

- Evaluate your own biases
- Know students names (and how to pronounce them correctly) and help students learn each others names
- Develop a sense of community
- Develop community standards and strategies for addressing behavior that does not align
- Encourage students to work together (assign groups, partners, and seats) and participate fully in their own way
- Encourage authentic dialogue (I statements, speaking from own experience, avoiding hurtful language)
- Respond to and respect students’ experiences within and outside of the classroom
- Utilize varied, relevant and appropriate examples
WHAT DO WE WANT THEM TO KNOW, THINK, OR DO AS A RESULT OF OUR CLASS?
HOW WILL WE DELIVER THE CONTENT?
Today’s Lecture
Active Learning Strategies

This is a spectrum of some active learning activities arranged by complexity and classroom time commitment.

Prepared by Chris O’Neal and Tershia Pinder-Grover, Center for Research on Learning and Teaching, University of Michigan
Concrete Experience

Active Experimentation

Reflection

What
So What
Now What

Abstract Conceptualization

Kolb, 1984; Friedman, 2015
Address the... WHY?
# Relevance and Application

## K-W-L Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic: ____________________________</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What I <strong>Know</strong></td>
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<td>__________________</td>
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[whyospecial.com](http://whyospecial.com)
HOW WILL WE KNOW STUDENTS LEARNED?
Designing Engaging Assignments
(Exams, Projects, Papers, Presentations, etc.)

Content
- Knowledge is objective
- Instructor determines what is important
- Multiple choice/True false
- Memorization/Regurgitation
- Knowledge is subjective
- Students make meaning
- Students help determine which information is important to know
- Open-ended

Motivation/Relevance
- For sake of a grade
- Busy work
- Check a box to get it done
- Not relevant to course learning outcomes
- Interested in project
- Would want to keep it
- Make an impact/Leave a legacy
- Connected to multiple learning outcomes

Choice
- Instructor dictates all aspects & topics
- Students have options on how to complete the assignment
- Students have options on which assignments to complete

Structure/Guidelines
- All done at one time
- No status updates
- Vague descriptions
- Broken into chunks
- Timeline given
- Clear & concise rubric
Scaffolding and Instruction on how to be successful

Rubrics

Examples of good work

Days spent on skill development

“Students don’t do optional” – Jillian Kinzie, 2013
Giving Feedback

1. Timely

2. Relevant

3. Understandable

4. Digestible

5. Accurate

6. Thought-Provoking

Friedman & Clarke, 2015
Learning is Enhanced When...

Structure and expectations are set at appropriately high levels
Students publically demonstrate competence
Students get frequent feedback
Students reflect and integrate their learning
Apply their learning to the “real-world”

Kuh, 2013
Why it matters

It is important to understand the students you have, not the ones you wish you had or used to have, or the ones that are like you.

Students will engage if you ask them to (especially if you force them to).

Students respond to relationships that invoke trust, respect, kindness, empathy, and care (as well as high expectations).

Help them help themselves, and your life will be easier now and later.

The first day of class matters – set the right tone and level of expectation and support.
QUESTIONS, COMMENTS, THOUGHTS
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