

Relative to Teaching...

University of Arkansas

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Using Class Time for Optimal Learning: Some Practical Suggestions

We are slaves to time and space in all that we do, but we CAN choose to use every precious minute we have -- to encourage and enhance learning in all of our classes. The Cordes Teaching Center Co-Directors did some brainstorming, and came up with the following possible time-use strategies. Maybe you have some of your own! If you do, we want to know about them. Send them in so we can add them to our web site; then they can benefit other teachers and students! tfsc@uark.edu.

BEFORE CLASS BEGINS

Many times we find ourselves in the classroom or in the hall with our students before the bell rings. Let's let the learning begin right away. Here are some ideas you might try.

1. How about putting something on the board for students to consider? It might be appropriate to put up a problem from the last exam; consider writing a question relating to the day's readings/lab; maybe use a 'thought-provoking' question to stimulate discussion.
2. Some faculty like to talk informally with the students before class: You can find out where they're from, what classes they are taking, what they're majoring in, etc. You can let them ask you questions about class, campus activities, etc. You could chat with them. Some faculty sit with them. You could let them know that you are glad to interact with them. They'll probably pay more attention in class if they see that you know who they are and if you show an interest in their lives.
3. Some of us use mini-presentations that require a student to put some information on

the board before class. This will form part of the day's lesson, and the other students can immediately begin to engage with the day's material by writing it down or thinking about it. The class could start with "A word of the day"; some students might react well to a riddle or guessing contest; we could include here something from the homework; this might be a good time to re-emphasize a concept important for the class.

4. We can use our time to connect with students while handing back papers before class formally begins. This can give us the opportunity to use our students' names; we could use the time to comment on the work and to get student reaction.
5. Maybe we can use the time before class begins to react to student feedback. This could mean going over student feedback cards from a previous class that include their questions, concerns, and suggestions. During this time we could talk about student activity on course chat rooms, listserv, or discussion board. Sometimes it can make them feel good to actually talk about all the e-communication that they do with other students and with you.

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Beginning Class

The first few minutes of class will set the tone for the entire lecture. We need to use our time wisely and creatively. The beginning of class can be a good time to discover what students need to help them learn the material of this class.

1. Some faculty try to establish, very early, any connections with the previous lecture.
 - What were we supposed to learn?
 - What questions remain?
 - To what did the last lecture lead?
2. Some faculty ask for questions.
 - Did students understand the readings or assignments?
 - Did students have difficulty with the homework?
 - What in particular do they think the teacher needs to address?
3. Some classes work well with regular review quizzes at the beginning of class. This can get students to the room on time.
 - It can "open their brains."
 - It can communicate high expectations
 - It can give them a way of assessing their standing in the class.
4. Some of us hand out warm-up questions on small slips of paper. These can be open-ended questions that can set the tone for class; you might prefer simple true-false questions to help them review the homework; sometimes multiple-choice questions can challenge their knowledge.
5. In many fine arts and humanities classes, professors might play some appropriate music at the beginning of class to establish the mood.
6. In SMART classrooms, websites can be pre-loaded with interesting features,

i.e. stock market quotes, online news clips, photos, etc.

In the Middle of Class

So, you've gotten off to a great start. Brains are open. Learning is proceeding. How do we maintain the momentum? Here are some common strategies. Send us some ideas that you have, so we can add them to the list.

1. Allowing for spontaneity can help us to avoid falling into the same routine: doing the same things day after day in a rigid format. Try to break things up and go along with ideas that occur to you or your students as class proceeds.
2. Some faculty are able to use drama to capture and retain student attention. We can use examples, dramatic moments, hyperbole, and interesting quotations to help change the pace.
3. A popular strategy is to ask a question or pose a problem, and let the students pair up and work together to solve them. The "think-pair-share" strategy.
4. You might want to find and share relevant web links to daily world events.
5. In some classes it's appropriate to present a controversy or difference of opinion. You can ask for student opinions, arrange students in groups to develop and present arguments for and against each side.
6. Planned interruptions during the lecture can help to re-focus and re-energize. How?
 - o Tell an appropriate joke
 - o Show a picture, and ask how it relates to the class
7. After a particularly difficult topic, take a break and have students sitting side by side compare notes, make corrections, and ask questions.

End of Class

It is five or ten minutes before class ends, and the students get a little restless. Some are thinking of their next class, or the phone call they want to make. How can we keep the learning going, and maximize the remaining time?

Here are some things to try if the students are starting to pack up before the bell rings:

“The best is yet to come – don’t leave yet!”

“I am easily hurt and will be crushed if you leave early.”

“I was just getting ready to reveal ‘The Secret of Life’ – you will miss everything if you leave now.”

But seriously folks, maybe the following tips will help, too.

1. Try talking about things you know they will want to hear, like the next exam or important upcoming activities
2. Try using a “one-minute quiz” to have students answer a question or give feedback.
3. Always end class on time. When students have another class immediately after yours, they should be allowed to get there on time. We should not cause our students stress by holding them beyond our allotted time. We owe it to them to use our class time efficiently. We want students to respect our class time. Let’s be respectful of their time also.

THANKS TO THE UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS TEACHING COUNCIL

We are grateful to our colleagues on the University of Arkansas Teaching Council for meeting with us last semester to help guide our activities. These folks have given us valuable perspective and advice, and we are very grateful for their time and their dedication to good teaching at the University of Arkansas.

This year's Teaching Council members are:

Norman Dennis (Civil Engineering)	Dick Oliver (Crop, Soil, & Environmental Sciences)
Ethel Goodstein (Architecture)	Bob Stapp (Economics)
Greg Herman (Architecture)	Cecelia Thompson (Rehabilitation, Human Resources and Communication Disorders)
Linda Jones (Foreign Languages)	Elliott West (History)
Sue Martin (Human Environmental Sciences)	

THANKS TO THE NEW FACULTY LUNCHEON ORGANIZING COMMITTEE

We are grateful to our colleagues of the New Faculty Lunch Committee, who met with us to help plan programs for our new faculty lunches. These folks have been faithful attendees and thoughtful counselors to our Center to assure that we address the concerns of new faculty in our luncheon programming.

This year's New Faculty Lunch Committee members are:

Fran Hagstrom (Rehabilitation, Human Resources and Communication Disorders)	Nann Miller (Human Environmental Sciences)
Jaili Li (Physics)	Mary Savin (Crop, Soil & Environmental Sciences)
	Song Yang (Political Science)

Welcome to Lauren Blake: Teaching Center Intern!

We are delighted that our Journalism colleagues Kim Martin and Katherine Shurlds have arranged for senior Lauren Blake to be our spring semester Intern. Lauren will help us to update our Teaching Center website. Watch for our new look and our updated calendar!
<http://www.uark.edu/misc/tfscinfo/>

More Teaching Lunches on the Way!

Mark your calendars for the following Teaching Center events:

March 3-4: New Faculty Lunches: “Your Teaching Portfolio: Why and How?” with our own David Longer, P. H. D. (Portfolio Handling Designer).

April 7-8: New Faculty Lunches: “Master Teachers.” Discussion of classes we will have observed, taught by two of our campus’ outstanding professors. Stay tuned for details!

April 21-22: Not-So-New Faculty Lunches: “Keeping it New: How to Maintain our Enthusiasm and Teaching Energy.” Professor Ro Di Brezzo, R. W. (Renaissance Woman).

TEACHING CAMP! TEACHING CAMP!

March 7 is our Deadline for applications for the 2005 University of Arkansas Teaching Retreat at Eureka Springs. We have only 50 places, so apply early. We will have an exciting program that will help you to come back to class renewed, refreshed, and with lots of new ideas for better learning!

Apply today: <http://www.uark.edu/misc/tfscinfo/programs/teachingcamp/2005.html>

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