

TEACHING FIRST YEAR STUDENTS

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AUGUST 23, 2021



AGENDA

- Check your expectations
- Discussion: What are the challenges for first-year students?
- You are a model: be genuine and approachable
- Set explicit expectations
- Provide meaningful feedback early and often
- Help students develop effective in-class learning strategies and out-of-class study skills
- Vary your methods
- Revisit your expectations: reinforce first-year growth

CHECK YOUR EXPECTATIONS & ASSUMPTIONS

- Students are from a variety of educational and social backgrounds
- FY students are likely young, bright, ambitious, and intellectually ready, but may lack maturity, self-discipline, and disciplined thinking
- Big fish in small ponds – now what?
- Be prepared to adjust the pace of your course
- Consider administering a diagnostic the first week to determine where students are
- Practical day-to-day life management vs. intellectual growth/enlightenment

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES FOR FY STUDENTS?

- Logistical
- Social
- Cultural
- Intellectual
- Identity

BE GENUINE AND APPROACHABLE

- Arrive at the classroom early / leave late
- Learn students' names and notice when they contribute, when they hold back, when they miss class, etc.
- Be interested: ask students about themselves and remember what they've told you
- Be consistently available for office hours and explain the benefits of attending. Word spreads quickly, so be reliable and consistent.
- If students don't come to office hours, suggest to those who are struggling that you'd like to see them.
- Consider mandatory one-on-one meetings with first-year students during their first semester to break the "office hours" ice, especially two or three days before a big assignment or exam.

SET EXPLICIT EXPECTATIONS

- Keep deadlines. Mean what you say.
- Model promptness and attendance in class: start on time / end on time
- Require attendance by using class time in a meaningful way. If they can pass the course without attending class, consider restructuring your class.
- Set high standards for academic integrity and file a Code of Ethics report for each infraction
- Be clear about opportunities (or lack thereof) for making up work missed / extra credit
- Demonstrate the value of understanding rubrics
- Failure is inevitable and an opportunity for growth

PROVIDE MEANINGFUL FEEDBACK EARLY AND OFTEN

- Feedback is a teaching tool to provide guidance for improvement
- Help students learn how to use and apply feedback in the future.
- Provide positive and neutral comments as well as directive/corrective feedback
- Feedback should reinforce what's been covered in class
- Provide opportunities for students to revise their work based on feedback
- Provide feedback as soon as possible and before moving on to more complex content

HELP STUDENTS DEVELOP EFFECTIVE IN-CLASS LEARNING STRATEGIES

- Provide guidance about note-taking and consider providing detailed notes on the first two or three lectures
- Consider asking students not to take notes while you lecture or work through a problem/example, then provide a few minutes of quiet time for them to write notes / ask questions
- Outline major points at the beginning of each class, summarize and reinforce them during class, and review them again at the end of class and in follow up notes after class
- Consider forming in-class discussion groups to summarize / present main points of a lecture or develop questions about the content

HELP STUDENTS MANAGE THEIR TIME & DEVELOP EFFECTIVE STUDY SKILLS

- Discuss the time/hours they'll need to spend outside of class, reading, studying, preparing for exams. This likely far exceeds their previous experience.
- Consider establishing a routine (or rhythm) for deadlines so students know to set aside a specific block of time for their work in your class
- Provide frequent, brief, low-stakes scaffolded assignments to help students stay focused on your course and be prepared to work on longer, higher-stakes assignments
- Require students to take and submit notes while reading and then refer to their ideas in class discussions. Guide students to identify **main** ideas and the BFMI

VARY YOUR METHODS

- Lecture, questioning, board work, group work, peer review, writing, listening, watching, modeling, projects...
- Emphasize relevance. Use analogies, real-world examples, and provide ample opportunities for students to relate course content to their prior experience
- Encourage student-to-student interaction

OTHER IDEAS

- Provide a bowl with small sheets of paper near the door—have students jot down questions about content anonymously and drop them in the bowl on the way out
- Half-way through the semester, have students provide feedback about what's working and what's not and make adjustments
- Other???

REVISIT EXPECTATIONS

- Reinforce that students met the expectations set out at the beginning of the course:
 - They *can* be prompt, meet deadlines, and manage their time
 - Class time *is* meaningful
 - Plagiarism/cheating is wrong and squanders opportunities to learn and grow.
 - It's **crucial** to follow instructions and understand expectations
 - Rubrics provide clear criteria for performance
 - Instructors are interested, compassionate, caring, and human: they want students to succeed!

SOURCES

- *Best Practices for Teaching First-Year Undergraduates*, Eberly Center for Teaching Excellence, Carnegie Mellon University
- *Teaching First-Year Students*, Center for Teaching, Vanderbilt University