MAKING DISCUSSIONS AND LECTURES MORE INTERESTING

Anticipatory Set

An anticipatory set encourages your students to engage with the material as soon as class begins. It will help them organize their thoughts and give them a sense of what you plan to accomplish during class.

- List your lesson objectives on the blackboard
- Give your students a question to answer
- Outline your lesson on the board before class (remember to summarize at the end of class)
- Have students bring 2-3 questions to class

Techniques to Promote Student Involvement

The following tips are simple, but often forgotten, hints on how to encourage your students to engage with your course.

- Take the time to listen
- Wait-time – Give students at least 10 seconds to respond to your question
- Redirection – Don’t answer all of the questions for your students. Help them think it through with other members of the class.
- Sit down – have one of your students lead the class.
- Relate the material to their everyday lives
- Ask more questions

Using Visuals

Help your students process course material more effectively by encouraging them to think visually. Some visuals work more effectively in certain courses than others. Experiment with each of them. It will help you and your students think about the material creatively.

- Graphs
- Photos
- Films or video clips
- Flowcharts – allow you to explore processes
- Logic trees – allow you to break down general concepts into their constituent parts
- Venn diagrams – allow you to explain the relationship between two concepts
- Concept diagrams – allow you to connect major concepts to minor concepts and particulars

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In-class Assignments

As a teacher, it is sometimes difficult to gauge the level of your students’ understanding. Consider taking a few minutes to administer a short, in-class assignment. You do not necessarily need to use it to grade your students, but it is a very effective way to test the level of their comprehension.

• Give pre-writing, five minute, in-class writing assignments
• Give quizzes
• Make time for peer evaluation of work

Computer Activities

Technology increasingly provides a range of instructional opportunities for teachers. Consider using the following exercises as alternatives to more traditional assignments.

• Organize listserv debates
• Assign PowerPoint presentations by groups of students
• Have individual students create website projects
• Have groups of students create website projects
• Have students create blogs
• Create Wiki projects for your students

Between Meetings

Teaching does not have to end when class is over. In large part, students’ success in class depends on the work they do to prepare for lectures and discussion sections. Consider the following exercises.

• Send students home with study questions
• Have students create learning logs, a two-columned notebook with their notes one side and their reflections about their learning on the other side.
• Hold mandatory office hours
Discussion

There are many ways to mix up your discussion sections while meeting the course objectives. Try the following techniques.

**General Techniques**
- Use the blackboard
- Prepare formal debates
- Have students discuss assignments and their purpose
- Use grading rubrics – Make students participants in establishing criteria by which they will be graded
- Encourage students to examine what we know and to anticipate what the next step in their learning might be
- Present a problem and have students break it down on the board
- Summarize the discussion with your students
- Brainstorm
- Set goals with your students

**Individual Activities**
- Self assessment – Have students consider their grades. What grades would they give themselves?
- Have students relate material to previous week
- Have students bring illustrative quotations of their reading assignment
- Have students reflect on what they learned at end of discussion
- Help your students establish goals for themselves
- Have students give reports as an assignment

**Small Group Activities**
- Promote collaboration – Assign specific tasks to small groups that you will then discuss together with the entire class
- Organize role-playing activities
- Fishbowl – Have students role-play in the middle of a circle of their colleagues. Their fellow students will discuss the exchange at the end of the role-playing.

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