

Creating An Effective Lecture

Much of the literature on college teaching discusses alternatives to the lecture format and ways to bring active learning activities into the classroom. Even if you want to create and teach courses which use discussion, group work, and other student-centered learning activities, however, writing and presenting an effective lecture is still a useful and necessary skill. Combining short lectures with active learning keeps students engaged as full participants in the class, while still giving the instructor the ability to provide context and information. Some types of courses may necessitate lectures to cover the material, and as you move from graduate student instructor to faculty member, you can expect to be called upon to lecture to undergraduates, regardless of the type of institution at which you teach.

To develop and deliver effective and interesting lectures requires skill. Graduate students, particularly in the humanities and social sciences, tend to become quite adept at writing papers, but they may not realize that a paper doesn't transfer into a lecture easily, and the kinds of things that may make for a good paper, like analytic detail and a fine-grained argument that engages with the literature in depth, does not make for a good presentation. Inexperienced lecturers may try to cram in all of their knowledge on a given subject, but the purpose of a lecture is not to show how much you know or present your excellent analytic skills; it is to help your students learn, and you can do that best by limiting the number of points you make and the information you provide. Students will retain more if you provide them with less material.

A lecture should have one central topic and a few main points. At the beginning, you should announce the objectives of your lecture—what you will cover, and how you will do so—and explain the significance of what you are trying to convey. In other words, relate the central concept of the lecture to the course as a whole; put the material in context for students. Give students an

Final Exams and Academic Integrity

The following tips can help to prevent cheating on final exams:

- Check student IDs against the roster to make sure that no one takes an exam for another student.
- Have students sit with empty space around them, if possible. Consider assigning seats so that students can't sit near friends with whom they may try to collaborate.
- Print out various versions of the test, with the same questions given in a different order, so that students can't copy off their neighbors.
- Be alert during the exam. Walk around the room occasionally, and watch the class from the back, if possible. Let students know you are paying attention.
- Don't allow students to keep cell phones with them. They may use them to text message other students or take photos of the exam. Warn students in advance not to bring them to class and to wear watches if they usually use their phones to check the time.

Lecture...

(continued from page 1)

overview or outline of the lecture up front, or perhaps develop a PowerPoint presentation, to help them follow along. Remember that students are listening, not reading, so they can't go back and re-visit a confusing sentence or look up a difficult word. Avoid complex sentence construction. Use simple, direct language, and offer aural guides along the way, with expressions like "the second argument against..." At the end, reiterate the main points.

In discussing your main points, try to provide illustrations and memorable examples. Instead of just describing a concept, try to demonstrate or apply that concept to a particular situation. Don't use the lecture to simply go over the textbook or reading material. If you spend the lecture explaining the readings to the students, they will quickly learn that they need to *either* do the reading *or* come to class, but not both. A lecture can and probably should make connections to the text, but instead of recapping it, amplify important points, explain tricky concepts, make connections between the reading and other issues or

concepts, or link the reading to real-world examples.

You may be tempted to write down, word for word, what you plan to say in your lecture. This is a bad idea. Prepare an outline, a list of major points, or whatever type of notes you prefer and write down examples that you want to remember. As you gain experience, you will become more comfortable speaking from notes. A script can make you feel secure, but you will probably end up reading to your students instead of talking to them. If you do this, you are guaranteed to lose your students' attention, and you won't be able to make eye contact with students or gauge their reactions to the material. You need to look at your students to see whether they are nodding along, looking confused, or worse, falling asleep.

Remember that students' attention will wander after fifteen or twenty minutes, so you need to find ways to break up the time and switch tasks every so often, instead of trying to lecture straight through an entire class period. Every once in a while stop for a few minutes and give students a chance to ask questions, pose a question to the class, ask students to reflect on the issues you're discussing and write for a minute or two, or have students break into small groups or pairs to discuss an issue or a problem. An effective way

to recapture student attention, illustrate an idea, and engage students with various learning styles is to interject some kind of media into your lecture: show a very short film clip (30 seconds to a minute or two), play a piece of music or an audio clip, or project a picture, image, map or graph that relates to your topic.

In delivering your lecture, think about how you sound to your students. Make sure you are loud enough to be heard, especially in a large room, and enunciate clearly. Modulate your voice by varying your pitch and tone, so that you don't drone in a monotone. Be sure to speak slowly; nervous people often speed up, and you need to be sure your students can take notes. Probably the most important thing, in terms of delivery, is to show your enthusiasm for the material. If you are excited and interested in the subject, it will help your students be interested in it. If you seem bored by your own lecture, your students most certainly will be. Teaching with enthusiasm can make the difference in whether or not your students become engaged with the subject matter and the class.

Early in your teaching career, it may be helpful to make some notes after each lecture. Write down which examples seemed to work and which fell flat or caused confusion, and make a note of student comments or questions. This can help you prepare for the next time you teach the course and refine future lectures.

TapTalk is produced by the Teaching Assistant Project (TAP), Graduate School—New Brunswick.
Editor: Melissa T. Brown
Letters, submissions, calendar items, and suggestions for articles should be directed to the Editor.
TAPTalk
25 Bishop Place
New Brunswick, N.J. 08901
(732) 932-7747 tapweb@rci.rutgers.edu

Reflecting on the End of a Course

At the end of the semester, TAs are likely to feel seriously overworked. Final exams and papers to be graded come rolling in, deadlines for graduate coursework loom, and summer teaching or a research trip may require preparations. By late April, most graduate student instructors are simply ready for the course they are teaching to end, so they can get on to other things. Instead of leaping mentally ahead, it can be helpful to you and your students to pause at the end of the semester and reflect on a course that is coming to an end.

In a recent issue of *College Teaching*, Professor Christopher Uhl describes ending his semester with a final class that gives students a chance to reflect on the course.¹ Professor Uhl asks students to think about their disappointments, figure out what they might do differently in future classes to enhance their learning, and consider how the knowledge they've gained in the course will influence their future actions. He also invites students to explore their feelings and engages in some rituals like playing celebratory music and ringing a bell. Most graduate student instructors would probably opt to avoid the music and bell-ringing, but taking some time on the last day of class to look back over the semester can be a useful and satisfying exercise for you and your students. Even if you need to spend part of a final

class session reviewing for an exam, you can take time at the end of the class to talk about your own feelings and invite your students to talk about their experiences in the class. To get students focused on the topic, you can ask them what advice they would give future students taking the class. You can also ask them what one or two concepts from the semester stick out the most in their minds and why, and whether knowing those concepts will influence them in any way in the future.

While ending a course with some kind of reflective activity can provide a sense of closure, you can also engage in a personal end-of-semester wrap-up that's more practical in nature. Around the time that classes end, while the events of the semester are still fresh in your mind, write a review of the course for yourself. Include the details of the course, such as how many students were enrolled and what the assignments were, but also think about what went well and what you wish you had done differently. Consider which readings you would assign again and which you would remove from the syllabus, as well as which discussion questions or group activities were productive and which went nowhere. This will help you when you teach the course again, or are trying to design another course—you will know that a particular activity worked well, but another one needs some tweaking. You may

assume that you'll remember such things, but classes that are vivid in your mind now may fade by next spring.

Having this kind of material on hand will also be useful when you are trying to put together a teaching portfolio or draft a teaching philosophy statement as you enter the job market. To further prepare for this, in addition to taking notes on the class, put together written materials like the syllabus, assignments, and handouts. Make a note of any activities, materials, or questions that you developed yourself. If you write a review of each class, you'll be able to trace out how your teaching skills have progressed and how your views of teaching have evolved, and you'll be able to demonstrate that based on your experiences in the classroom, you've refined your courses and your methods. For more information on the teaching portfolio, visit <http://tapproject.rutgers.edu/publications/Teaching%20Portfolio.pdf>.

¹Uhl, Christopher. 2005. "The Last Class." *College Teaching*. 53(4):165-166.

Get In Touch!
 Tap Office:
<http://tapproject.rutgers.edu>
 Graduate School - NB:
<http://gsnb.rutgers.edu>
 TA Helpline: 932-11TA

TA
Helpline
Call
932-11TA
Monday-Friday
between
the hours
of
8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

TAP Calendar

4/4	12:00-1:30 pm	International TAs Teaching a Class for the 1st Time	BCC
4/5	11:30 am-1:00 pm	Tips for Future Faculty Teaching Portfolio	CAC
4/18	12:00-1:30 pm	Job Talk: Sciences	BCC
4/20	12:00-1:00 pm	Teaching a Summer Course	CAC

Call 732-932-7747 for more information or to register for any of these workshops.

Want to be a Movie Star?

Get your class videotaped!

<http://taproject.rutgers.edu>
Call 932-11TA for details

The Master Faculty Observation Program

TAP has assembled a select group of outstanding faculty members who have volunteered to provide graduate students with the opportunity to observe their classes. The names, teaching schedules, and contact information of these veteran teachers are listed on our website. Earn a certificate by visiting three or more classes. For more information visit:

http://taproject.rutgers.edu/services_tips/Master_Faculty.php3

Teaching Assistant Project

Office of the Dean
Graduate School-New Brunswick
25 Bishop Place
New Brunswick, N.J. 08901-1181
(732) 932-7747