

# Teaching

*A series of practical and innovative teaching tips for college faculty* No. 1

## The Top 10...

### **The All-Important First Day of Class**

Think for a minute about why you love what you teach or why you think it is important for everyone to know or be able to do. Why not use the first class to create an experience for students that welcomes them as learners into this important subject and makes them feel like they belong in your class?

- ✓ Do the unexpected. When you surprise your students on the first day with an activity or approach to the course that they wouldn't expect, you create a memorable and intriguing experience (ingredients for attention and learning). You also shatter any expectations they have about school being predictable and boring and signal to them that this course will be different.
- ✓ Take the pressure off of yourself to go over the course syllabus in detail... or at all. Yes, students need and deserve to know the course requirements and your expectations, but you can highlight the important things during the last fifteen minutes of class and ask/require them to read the syllabus for the next class. Answer questions about the course and syllabus at the start of the second class. Give a syllabus quiz with prizes.
- ✓ Get students hooked on your subject right away by connecting it to their lives right now. Break them into groups and have them do something right from day one. Get them discussing or experience on a question, problem, or challenge. Are students already experiencing your subject without knowing it?
- ✓ Make students feel invested in the course by knowing their classmates and being known. Play a name game that can be modified according to the ability profile of your students. For example, students can introduce themselves and share something about themselves in small groups, and the groups can nominate one person to introduce the group to the class (or another group). This gives you more opportunities to hear and learn your

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students' names and, more importantly, it lays the foundation for connections between them.

- ✓ Resist the urge to talk your way through nervousness or to establish control. Try this: appoint three students who tell you when you have talked for 12 minutes. If they catch you, stop talking and give students something to do. You'll use your time more deliberately, and more students will pay attention.
- ✓ If you are teaching online or using an online course platform at all, post an announcement that says that any student who e-mails or messages you three interesting things about him or herself will earn X points toward Y. This gets them using the platform and communicating with you.
- ✓ If you have repeat students in the room, be mindful of how you acknowledge or interact with them on the first day. Good rapport signals to new students that you are approachable and that other students like you. Too much familiarity or informality can suggest to new students that former students are trying to gain favor with you early or that you already have established favorites while new students must lag behind.
- ✓ Consider carefully how you will introduce yourself to the class, what you will share about yourself (personally or professionally), what you ask the class to call you, how you characterize your availability for help outside of class, and why you teach. If you share your credentials, ask yourself which ones and why. Whether you are formal or informal, ask yourself why.
- ✓ Pass out slips of paper or note cards and ask student to anonymously write down one thing about which they are most worried, wondering, or scared in terms of the course, you as an instructor, or college (especially for first-year students). Tell them you will read aloud and answer any appropriate questions. Then do it.
- ✓ Take your class on a fieldtrip to your office. If students see for themselves where your office is and can imagine you sitting in it, they will be more likely to come for help if they need it.