

Teaching

A series of practical and innovative teaching tips for college faculty No. 12

The Top 10...

Mixing Things Up in Mid-Semester

Mid-semester. Students cannot quite see themselves making it to the end of the course. This is one of the “red zones” where we can lose students. Breaking the routine of even the most student-centered course freshens the course and can reinvigorate students to make that final, crucial push.

- ✓ “Flip the classroom” by having students outline how they would teach key points to someone who knew nothing about the subject.
- ✓ Start the lesson by having students interview each other. Depending upon the topic, questions can be about their personal experience with some key points, or their reaction to key points. Have everyone share one significant thing their interviewee mentioned so you can weave their backgrounds and understanding into the lesson.
- ✓ Ask students for their ideas. Tell them that you are looking for input about different things to do to mix up the lessons. Ask them what particularly engaged them that another instructor did.
- ✓ Start a lesson by asking students to work together in groups where at least one student has a smartphone. The task is to generate ideas about using the phone to learn more about what they are studying, such as creating an online scavenger hunt with course topics. After groups share their ideas have the class vote on which one to actually do in class.
- ✓ Creating a script for a scene in a pretend movie which explains key concepts in the lesson engages students on many levels. Assign small groups to create a scene for a horror movie, action-thriller, comedy, musical, or perhaps using a Disney family theme.

- ✓ Working in small groups, have students create a set of visuals that teach key parts of the lesson. If you have access to computers, they can use PowerPoint, but remind them to be almost entirely visual.
- ✓ Ask small groups to create a superhero representing the lesson. What powers does the hero have, what weaknesses? What does the superhero fight against?
- ✓ Music engages many senses. Appeal to the inner songwriter/musician in students by assigning small groups to each compose a song that explains or applies some key concept(s) in the lesson.
- ✓ Ask students for feedback on your teaching by creating something that illustrates when they think you are at your teaching best. A song? A diagram? A picture? A short script? Not an essay! (And, pay attention to what they do NOT feature.)
- ✓ Change the physical venue. Go outside. Switch classrooms with someone who uses a classroom set up very differently from you.

Bonus!

- ✓ Have music playing when students arrive that features something covered in the lesson. The first person to correctly name the song and artist gets to privately request the song for the next class.
- ✓ Give extra credit for being in class for the full period for all sessions from now until the end of the course.
- ✓ Bring in an outside speaker. As an alternative, use Skype or a similar service to bring an outside expert to the class. Perhaps students can find someone to “bring” to the class via Skype?
- ✓ Have students diagram key concepts in the lesson and how they link with each other. Doing this alone first, and then improving upon individual diagrams by you doing one during the lesson enables students to strengthen this important thinking skill.