Celebrating Teaching at American University: Best Practices
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction........................................................................................................................................3

Creating a Course Syllabus...............................................................................................................7

Syllabus Components
Course Goals
Student Learning Outcomes
Textbooks and Required Reading
Grading System
Course Policies
Assignments
Course Schedule
Making Changes to the Syllabus
Links to Campus Resources
Encouraging Students to Read the Syllabus
Sample syllabi and boilerplate sections

Who Are Your Students?.....................................................................................................................27

Class Introductions
What’s in a Name?
Students at American University
Teaching Diverse Learners
Learning Styles

Engaging Students in the Learning Process.......................................................................................39

Using Technology to Enhance Teaching
Mid Semester Evaluations
Facilitating Discussions
Innovative Teaching Strategies
Celebrating Teaching at AU: Best Practices

Introduction

According to Ken Bain, (2004) author of *What the Best College Teachers Do*, best practices relate not only to knowledge but to action. Bain describes excellent teachers as those who:

- Know their disciplines well;
- Reflect deeply on the nature of thinking within their field and
- Understand how knowledge is acquired and what motivates students to learn.

At American University, teaching excellence is embedded within the strategic plan. The following goals illustrate the importance of effective instruction:

- “Epitomize the Scholar-Teacher Ideal and Maintain Highly Effective Teaching”
- “Provide an Unsurpassed Undergraduate Education and Experience & Encourage Innovation and High Performance”

These goals are also part of the mission of the Center for Teaching, Research and Learning (CTRL). We have created this guide as a resource for new and existing faculty who want to explore innovative and creative ways to engage students in the learning process. It also provides a way for faculty to share strategies and approaches that have worked well in the classroom.
CTRL staff members are creative senior professionals and highly skilled consultants who are committed to facilitating and supporting faculty teaching, research, learning and advanced technology needs. Our Teaching and Learning Resources Group collaborates with faculty and doctoral students to ensure that cutting-edge pedagogical techniques are widely available in AU classrooms and that faculty are supported in their research programs. Our Faculty Corner offers one-on-one faculty consulting and support services in a comfortable environment. Our AV Systems & Services group provides high-quality assistance for everything from daily classes to special events with national stature. Our computer laboratories and Training Center cater to thousands of student clients each year.

In CTRL, we believe that empowering faculty to achieve their highest human potential, in teaching, knowledge creation, and creative professional practice is our calling. It is the goal—and privilege—of each Center for Teaching, Research & Learning professional to support this calling at American University.

~ Bill DeLone, Director

What are Best Practices at AU?

We reviewed course syllabi, spoke with faculty who present workshops at the annual Ann Feren Teaching Conference and solicited ideas of ways faculty engage their students. The document includes ideas and recommendations about:

- Ways to create course syllabi that clearly state faculty expectations and course focus;
- Value of using technology to enhance instruction and assignments;
- Ways to create community within a course that encourages students to share opinions, ideas and perspectives;
- Benefits of getting to know students as individuals and exploring ways they can take ownership of their learning;
- Creating cohesion within a course so that students see the relationship between course goals, student learning outcomes and course assignments.

Teaching excellence is also described as a “mindset” or “attitude”. In her book, Learner Centered Teaching, Maryellen Weimer notes that when asked, “Are you interested in how much and how well your students learn?” faculty generally respond “yes” and the conversation about translating what we know about learning into instructional practice can begin.

**Using this Guide:**

This guide is written in chronological order, beginning with areas of immediate concern to new faculty and moving throughout the semester. It is supplemented by two documents:

**Best Practices Blog:** [http://bender.library.american.edu:8083/celebratingteaching/](http://bender.library.american.edu:8083/celebratingteaching/)

The blog is designed to be a living document where faculty can sharing teaching tips learned through experience. Faculty can pose questions, brainstorm techniques and exchange innovative solutions to common challenges. The blog will be activated at the start of the fall semester. CTRL staff will manage the site, posting questions, sharing news about upcoming workshops and training and encouraging instructors to participate in the exchange of ideas.

**Tech Tote:**

The Center for Teaching, Research and Learning (CTRL) focuses on both learning pedagogy and on creative uses of technology. **Tech Tote** provides a valuable resource for new faculty by cataloguing the many technology resources that exist within CTRL and on campus. Contact information is listed for each of the following resources:

- Campus Technology Resources
- Cisco Clean Access (CCA)
- Projectors
- Blackboard 9
- PowerPoint
- Wimba
- Skype
- Headsets and Webcams
- Voice Recorders and Podcasting
- Pocket Video Cameras
- YouTube and Vimeo
- Clickers
Assistive Technology

Additional information and technical support is available for each of the above strategies. Staff is available to help you select and use technology to support your teaching. Throughout the year, CTRL holds a series of noontime conversations, workshops and the annual Ann Feren Teaching Conference. All of these are designed to promote teaching excellence an innovation at American University.

Work Cited

Creating a Course Syllabus

Student Voices: “A comprehensive syllabus is the most important tool for a student. It tells the student how many points each assignment is worth, when things are due and what we do in class that day. It is really helpful if the main projects are listed and explained.”

Effective Course Syllabi

Course syllabi traditionally provide students with an overview of the course, topics that will be covered, a list of readings and assignments and due dates, a description of your grading system and class attendance policies.

An effective syllabus is your blueprint for the course. It can provide clarity for both students and instructors by clearly noting:

- When and where class will meet
- How and when to communicate with the instructor
- Expectations for student engagement in the learning process
- How assignments will be evaluated and when they are due;
- What the course will cover and what the instructor hopes students will learn.

Syllabus Components

Students need information about the following:

- Your course
- Department expectations, as applicable
- University policies
- Campus-wide resources
The clearer you are in the syllabus, the more pro-active you can be in addressing student questions and concerns. The syllabus provides a written record of your assignment, schedule and expectations for student work and engagement. It is a document that students can refer to throughout the semester. Within Blackboard, there is a place to post course syllabi.

*Student Voices:* “One professor clarified course objectives and shared her vision...she reminded us of how each day's lesson related to our overall goals... (This) motivated me to think about the course overall, and to view the content and assignment more holistically.”

Viewing a syllabus as a “road map” can provide coherence to the course and further engage students. It creates a context for the course which helps students view their work in a broader, more meaningful manner.
Student Voices: The average student is taking five courses per semester. That means five differently constructed syllabi to interpret and follow. The more transparent you are about your expectations and schedule, the more strategic your students can be in their responses.

What is typically included in a syllabus?

There is no set template although your department may have requirements about what to include. In general, the following information should be included:

- Course information
- How to Contact the Instructor
- Course Goals and Student Learning Outcomes
- Texts and Reading Material
- Assignments
- Class Schedule
- Grading System
- Course Policies

Course Information: course name, number and number of credits; class time and location; an overall course description (this can be from the university catalogue or the on-line schedule of courses.)

How to Contact the Instructor: when and how students can reach you; office location; office hours, other times that an appointment can be scheduled; email address; phone number, specific times that are best for them to contact you; location of your mailbox.

For adjunct faculty there are several options for establishing office hours:

- Meet with students prior to or directly after class
- Establish office hours and meet in the Faculty Corner: Hurst Rm. 204B
- Meet with students in the library, in Mary Graydon;
- Establish on-line office hours when you will be available via e-mail, g-chat etc.

Interacting with Students: how do you want students to contact you: via email, phone or through a course blog? Are there times of day you will not be available? How soon can they
expect a response? Are you willing to meet with students at other times if office hours conflict with their schedule?

Course Goals and Student Learning Outcomes

- **Course Goals**: are broad statements create the course overview/big picture. These can be listed or written as a paragraph. Terms often used to describe goals include: **appreciate, value, explore, consider, take into account, understand, and become familiar with... etc.**

- **Student Learning Outcomes**: (often referred to as objectives) are specific statements that describe what students will do to demonstrate competency. The number of outcomes is based on the content you teach & the skills you want students to master; there is no set number.

Learning outcomes connect directly to your method of assessment; i.e. exams, quizzes & course assignments should be based on your course objectives & student learning outcomes. Outcomes are typically written following the phrase: “Students will be able to” and use measurable terms like the following: **define, apply, describe, identify, compare & contrast, categorize, explain, demonstrate, perform, write, evaluate, report, create, analyze, synthesize.**

How do Course Goals and Learning Outcomes Differ?

Course goals are broad, general statements that provide a framework for the course. They can be presented in narrative form as part of the course description or listed separately. Goals help frame your content and approach to learning, but do not specify **what you expect students to learn or how you will assess their mastery of course content.**

Examples of Course Goals:

This course will:

| Improve your understanding of _____________________________.  |
| Help you gain an appreciation for multiple, global perspectives within _____. |
| Help you see the value of _________________________________. |
| Explore the relationship between _________ and _______________. |
| Encourage students to become reflective, critical learners by: ___________. |
| Provide opportunities for collaboration, investigation and _____________. |
Other terms used to define goals: consider, take into account, become familiar with, examine, take a look at, participate in; these are all “big picture” statements that cannot be measured. They often focus on attitudes, perceptions or feelings or make general statements about topics to be addressed.

Learning Outcomes focus on what you expect students to learn in the course. They are often referred to as Student Learning Outcomes. These statements are specific and translate your course goals into measurable outcomes. They help you determine how students will demonstrate mastery of the material and skills covered in your course. They typically begin with the phrase:

Students will be able to:

\[
\begin{array}{ll}
\text{Define} & \text{the relationship between } \underline{\text{_____}} \text{ and } \underline{\text{________________________.}} \\
\text{Examine} & \text{diversity within } \underline{\text{________________________.}} \\
\text{Present} & \text{alternative theories of } \underline{\text{________________________.}} \\
\text{Apply} & \underline{\text{________________________}} \text{ to } \underline{\text{________________________.}} \\
\text{Analyze} & \text{the relationship between } \underline{\text{_________}} \text{ and } \underline{\text{__________.}} \\
\text{Compare and contrast} & \text{the following theories with regard to}\underline{\text{________.}} \\
\text{Critically examine:} & \underline{\text{________________________}} \text{grounding their own opinion in theories covered in the course...}
\end{array}
\]

Other terms used to define learning outcomes: describe, identify, compare & contrast, categorize, explain, demonstrate, perform, write, evaluate, report, create appraise, synthesize, construct, design etc.

Learning outcomes also express the sophistication of your expectations. Bloom’s Taxonomy of Learning provides a hierarchy of cognitive skills that are reflected in your learning outcomes.

How do you decide which learning outcomes work for a given course?

Figuring out which and how many learning outcomes to include can be based on the following:

- What are the most important content topics for students to learn?
- Which specific skills do you want students to acquire or refine in this course?

There is no set number of recommended learning outcomes, but should be at least one or two per course goal to ensure that you have the information you need to assess student performance.

Here are some examples of course goals and specific student learning outcomes from faculty syllabi:
Overall Course Goals and Focus

Prof. Chris Edelson, SPA

Welcome to Civil Rights and Liberties. The Supreme Court and cases involving constitutional rights raise controversial and fascinating issues. Court decisions and nominees are often themselves a subject of political debate. In this course, we will look at how, and why, the Supreme Court decides, and has decided, cases involving civil rights and liberties. This includes landmark cases like Brown v. Board of Education, Roe v. Wade and Lawrence v. Texas, and controversial issues related to free speech, religion, privacy, and equal rights for women, members of racial minorities, and gay and lesbian Americans, to give a few examples.

Prof. Elizabeth Cohn, SIS

When we wake up in the morning and eat breakfast, chances are that we give little thought to the origins of the coffee, sugar, bananas and other products we consume. How did they get to our breakfast table? Who picked the coffee beans? Who owns the banana plantation? What kind of lives do the sugar workers and plantation owners have? Once the coffee beans leave the hillsides of Guatemala or Colombia, how do they get to us? What are the environmental effects of production? How did the relationship between United Fruit Company and the governments of Latin America and the United States in the 20th century affect Latin America?

In this course we adopt an interdisciplinary approach, examining the political economic, cultural, environmental, and social historical issues surrounding the commodities of coffee, sugar and bananas. We will do cross cultural analysis by looking at the lives of people who produce the commodities, own the companies, and consume the products (us). We consider how our consumer practices affect the lives of those involved in the production of these commodities, as well as how the environment is affected. We'll also explore the political economic conditions such as globalization, commodity price fluxes, terms of trade, corporate social responsibility, and the labor conditions of workers in Latin America producing these products. And we will trace the role these commodities have played in the historical development of this hemisphere.

Course Learning Objectives: Prof. Elizabeth Cohn, SIS

This class is designed to:

1. Encourage critical thinking (e.g., foster independence of thought; help individuals embrace ambiguity and complexity and challenge their assumptions; develop the ability to justify one’s beliefs).
2. Help students embrace a multiplicity of perspectives (e.g., interdisciplinary connections; the roles of different actors engaged in commodity production; the significance of environmental issues).
3. Improve students’ analytical reading, thinking, and writing skills, and ability to conduct research. Further develop students’ presentation skills.
4. Increase students’ knowledge of the historical significance of commodities in Latin America’s political, economic, cultural and social development.
Textbooks and Required Reading

Student Voices:

Textbooks are becoming increasingly expensive. Many students order them on-line, buy or rent used copies or rely on library reserves. If a text comes with on-line resources, they usually cannot be accessed if a student has a used copy or an earlier edition.

Selecting Course Texts and Readings:

When listing texts on your syllabus, be as specific as possible about:

- Which texts are required and which, if any, are optional;
- If there is a particular edition of the text students need; some publishers update texts frequently;
- Whether students can access on line resources from the book without purchasing the most recent edition;
- Additional resources or required fees: e.g. lab fees, art supplies; sheet music; field trips, etc.

When you order texts from the campus bookstore, you can automatically request that a copy be put on reserve in the library. To order books, request reserve copies or discuss available texts, contact: textbooks@american.edu. If you do not order books from the bookstore, please remember to request reserve copies for the library.

Additional fees for technology: If you require students to use specific software or to have access to a movie camera or other specific technology, this should be noted on the syllabus as there are costs associated with some technologies.

Posting Course Texts: If you have ordered your course texts through the campus bookstore, they will automatically be posted under “Course Enrollment” information on the AU website. If you are asking
students to order books in any other way, they will not have the list until classes begin. You can decide to post them on Blackboard and send an email to students with this information. If you are planning to use at least half of a given text or resource, it’s reasonable to expect students to purchase the book. If you only want them to read a chapter, however, consider posting it on Blackboard. Students then have the option of printing out a hard copy. Publishers are also creating new technology for students included e-books. E-reserves through the library are yet another option to explore.

Since course materials may be a combination of text and on-line resources, it helps to be clear about where students can locate them. For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Required Texts: Prof Susan Glover SPA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All of the readings are available online—most of them are on Blackboard under “E-Reserves,” and are organized by their section number. The remaining readings have web addresses in the syllabus. If there is no link by the reading, you will know that it can be found on Blackboard. Please notify me as soon as possible if you find a non-working link!!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Assignments**

Course assignments enable students to demonstrate competency. The more clearly you state student learning outcomes, the easier it is to tie them to your assessment measures: tests, quizzes, research papers, reflections, presentations, internships etc. What will students need to do, create or write to demonstrate to you that they have mastered a concept or skill? For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Outcome</th>
<th>Assessment Measures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students will be able to investigate, critique, evaluate</td>
<td>Research paper, exam question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student s will be able to collaborate, identify multiple perspectives</td>
<td>Group task or project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students will be able to demonstrate, implement, create, apply</td>
<td>Internship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students will be able to analyze, synthesize, evaluate</td>
<td>Research paper or exam question or project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students will be able to describe, compare/contrast, critically examine</td>
<td>Research paper, exam question, demonstration, group project</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students want to know what the assignments are and when they are due. They want to create schedules based on all of their courses so they can track due dates and plan accordingly. Many professors like to include an outline of the major assignments for the semester, when they are due,
length, and number of sources to cite and how they should be submitted. This can be done in a number of ways, for example:

**WRITING STYLE  Prof. Anna Amirkhanyan SPA**

All assignments must be typed in Word, on a letter size paper with one-inch margins, double or single-spaced (as specified in the assignment), and “Times New Roman” 12 pt font size. Style, clarity and analysis count. It is not sufficient to merely summarize or re-state the ideas presented in/by a particular source. Express your own point of view on the subject, suggest new strategies, and defend your position using arguments. The following criteria will be used to grade all papers:

1. In-depth knowledge of the material covered in the readings, cases, and lectures, and ability to apply it in the analysis;
2. Writing quality (clear, concise, logical and well-organized and formatted paper with a title, subtitles, bullet-points, and other techniques assisting in the presentation of the material).
3. Innovativeness and creativity (ability to provide interesting, thoughtful solutions to proposed questions and problems applying the material covered in this and other courses).

**How are Assignments Weighted?**

What is the relative value of each course assignment and expectation? Are exams more important than in-class participation? Can students earn a higher grade if their work steadily improves throughout the semester or is it based solely on their average? Which assignments best demonstrate content mastery? How are your course goals and learning outcomes reflected in the way assignments are valued? In the two examples below, there are clearly differences in the emphasis the professor places on the same assignments:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course #1</th>
<th>Course #2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class participation</td>
<td>Class participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal Entries</td>
<td>Research paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midterm</td>
<td>On-line wiki</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this course, students need to perform consistently to earn an “A”. An A on the final does not guarantee an A average for the course.

In this course, class participation includes a lab; the research paper constitutes the major student work for the course.

**Here is an example from faculty in the School of International Service:**

Assignments will be evaluated using these criteria:

35% quality of analysis, thought, originality
30% ability to use **class readings and research evidence** skillfully in making your argument
(often, this will be in the endnotes depending on the assignment).

20% quality of writing and organization of paper
15% professional presentation (including proofreading) of paper

Class Schedule:

The syllabus should include a schedule of when and where class will meet with a notation about any times when class will not meet in a given semester. Changes to the schedule can be announced through Blackboard: if you post a course announcement you can request that it also be emailed to all students.

There are many ways to create the class schedule. Here are some examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| August 24, 27     | What is quality education? Who decides? Does values-free education exist? What are the current debates? | Tough: *What it Takes to Make A Student*  
*Key issues chart due 8/27* |
| August 31 &  
September 3       | Framing the debate: Academic Achievement vs. Human Development Models  | *31st*: Armstrong: *The Best Schools: Intro. & Chap. 1 & 2*  
*3rd*: Armstrong: *Chap 3 & 4 OR 5 & 6 & conclusion*  
*Cultural Autobiography due 9/3* |
| Sep. 10 & 14      | Types of Schools: charter, public vs. private; homeschooling; vouchers | Clark: *Charter Schools*  
Jost: *School Vouchers*  
Cox: *Home Schooling* |
History 380: Schedule: Prof. Adrea Lawrence, SETH

11 January 2010
Introduction to and Overview of the Course

14 January 2010
Comparative Epistemologies and Axiologies
Readings:
Turner, Ch. 1 “The Significance of the Frontier in American History”
Mann, Ch. 8 “Made in America” and Ch. 10 “The Artificial Wilderness” (on e-reserves)
Research and writing assignment(s):
Complete Spatial Census form
Information Literacy Tutorial and Plagiarism Test certificate due via email Reading Synthesis Wave post due by class time

You can also post the syllabus on line with a menu that enables students to clearly see where each component is written. Here is an example from Professor Adrea Lawrence in the School of Education, Teaching and Health, CAS: http://hist380680sp10.wordpress.com/about/

Yet another example includes assignments students are expected to complete before class:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Pre-Class Reading Assignment</th>
<th>Pre-Class Writing Assignment</th>
<th>In Class Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 14</td>
<td>Read the syllabus, the Kenneth Goodman article in Blackboard, and the article on the Reading Wars by Nicholas Lehman. All of the readings will be in the Reading folder. For ease of use, some of the articles also available through hot links in this syllabus.</td>
<td>See the introduction assignment in the Blackboard Discussion Board.</td>
<td>• Review questions about syllabus and provide a rationale for the readings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Review how the research of the past has influenced current language practices in schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Discuss the reading wars, phonics versus whole language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• In-class interview work on favorite books and opportunities to teach such books.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• How can interviews and surveys work in your writing classes?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Prof. Jim McCabe, SETH & CTRL
Grading System

Grades reflect the degree to which students demonstrate competency based on your course goals and student learning outcomes. Assignments reflect what you ask students to do to demonstrate competency. The two are intertwined. Students always want to know early in the semester how their work will be graded so it is critical to include this information in the syllabus.

What Type of Grading System Works Best for you? There are many different models to consider, based on your priorities and evaluation goals. E.g.

What are your evaluation criteria? What content areas and skills do you value most? Which of the following matter most?

- Higher level thinking
- Creativity
- Originality
- New perspectives
- Accuracy
- Correct grammar, organization & presentation
- Logical thought
- Application, analysis, synthesis
- Research skills
- Grammar and punctuation
- Presentation

What percentage of the course grade is based on the following?

- Class participation
- Exams & quizzes
- Papers
- Research
- Reflections
- Labs
- Performances
- Artwork
- In class presentations
- Group Projects
How you are defining “class participation” and what is included, e.g.

- Attendance;
- Participating in class discussions or activities;
- Posting on line resources for peers;
- Participating in on-line blogs, wikki’s or discussion threads;
- Completing lab assignments;
- Attending rehearsals;
- Logging hours in an art studio;
- Participating in group projects.

Student Voices: “I’m shy and reserved and it takes me a while to feel comfortable talking in class.”

Students who are more reflective often need time to process and think about what is discussed in class. Look for their engagement in other ways: paying attention; body language, participation during in-class small group activities. Take into account the quality of their responses as well as the number of times they participate in class discussions. Consider other ways these students can communicate with you via email and Blackboard.

Do you want to use a point system?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Point Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Article/presentation</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three tests</td>
<td>300 (100 pts. each)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online assignment</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data display</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion paper</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written homework</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td><strong>700 pts.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In this model, students accumulate points for each completed assignment. Point values are then converted to letter grades.

**What constitutes an “A”?** There is no university-wide directive on point values for letter grades; below is one example adapted from Professor Adrea Lawrence in the School of Education, Teaching & Health:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>94- 100%</td>
<td>A grades reflect consistent higher level thinking: analysis, synthesis &amp; evaluation; well organized &amp; presented work; creativity &amp; originality; intellectual engagement with ideas, theories &amp; interpretations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-93%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87-89%</td>
<td>B grades reflect a command of the material with some examples of higher level thinking, organization, creativity and intellectual engagement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>83-86%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>80-82%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>77-79%</td>
<td>C grades reflect a lack of higher level thinking, intellectual engagement or well organized work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>73-76%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>70-72%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>66-69%</td>
<td>Minimum course requirements not fully met</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>66% &amp; below</td>
<td>Minimum course requirements were not met</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**How can students compute their grade throughout the semester?**

There is a feature on Blackboard that you can use to post and compute student grades [http://www.american.edu/provost/ctrl/bb-transition.cfm](http://www.american.edu/provost/ctrl/bb-transition.cfm). If you provide students with the value of each assignment (see chart on the previous page), they can calculate their own averages based on grades when assignments are returned. If class participation is a grade that is only computed at the end of the semester, these can be posted on Blackboard or communicated to students in another, confidential way.
Course Policies

Professors have rules about what is and is not allowed in their classroom. It is helpful to list these in the syllabus very precisely so the students know what is expected of them each day: attendance, deadlines, turning work in late; using cell phones and computers in class, how to cite resources in papers; collaborate on projects; how online resources will be used etc.

It helps to anticipate/respond to typical student questions. Being proactive can eliminate problems or miscommunication later on:

*Can I turn it in late?*
*“How can I get extra credit?”*
*“Can I re-do the assignment?”*

“I hate group assignments; someone always slacks off. Can I work on my own?”
“You didn’t tell us we had to…”
“It wasn’t clear that…”
“Can I take notes on my computer in class?”

It is also helpful to include how you want assignments delivered (via email, Blackboard drop box, in your mailbox etc.) and when you will return assignments. If you want assignments typed a certain way, in a particular style or font, double spaced etc. this can also be specified.

Here are some examples of how faculty addresses their expectations in course syllabi:
**Prof. Don Fulsom, SPA**

**What to Expect:** There will be reading, take-home and classroom quizzes (some of the pop variety) and short essay assignments—but no formal mid-term test or final exam. Most of the regularly assigned papers will be five to six pages long, but there will be a 15-pager due at the end of the course. In addition, you will deliver a 10-minute oral presentation (use all the “special effects,” including PowerPoint, you want) at the same time your final paper is due. Both the paper and the presentation will cover the same topic (and you will have a major say in picking the topic, and the way you wish to approach it). The ability to write well and to express yourself clearly and persuasively in both print and speech will put you in line for a high grade. As much as your hard work and intelligence, it will give you a personal and professional advantage when you enter the “real world.”

**Prof. Simon Nicholson, SIS**

**In-Class Participation (10% of grade)**

This is a seminar course. Because of this, the quality of the classroom experience depends to a large extent on the active, informed participation of all members of the class. My hope is that you’ll attend all of our sessions, read all assigned material before each class, and participate in a committed manner to discussions. Note that you will not be assessed on the *quantity* of your interactions in the classroom, but rather their *quality*. This means that attentive listening and respectful engagement with views expressed by others are more important and valuable forms of classroom involvement than domination of classroom discussion.

**Providing Feedback on Assignments**

Students really appreciate information about when graded assignments will be returned. Feedback on one assignment provides valuable information about what you are looking for and whether or not they completed the assignment correctly. Your comments and questions inform the way they approach the next assignment.

If the syllabus includes a statement about when you will provide feedback, this is also helpful. What is a realistic turn-around time for each assignment? Can students submit a draft for comment? Can they continue to work on an assignment or request additional time?
Student Voices: Feedback on a given assignment helps students see what they can do to improve in the next assignment. Otherwise we are guessing what a given instructor is looking for on a paper or project.

Attendance:

The syllabus should clearly state your course attendance policy including but not limited to:

- Is class attendance mandatory?
- What is considered an excused absence? (e.g. illness, religious holiday)
- If a student is ill, do you require a doctor’s note?
- How many times can a student miss class?
- What are students expected to do when they miss class?
- Does coming late to class have consequences?
- Can students make up missed class work?
- Are points deducted from their grade for excessive absences?

If your course has an on-line component, it is helpful to list the time frame for student participation; e.g. for an on-line discussion forum, is it synchronous or asynchronous? What flexibility do students have re the time they choose to participate?

Course attendance also relates to how students view the class and their individual contributions as noted in the examples below:

Prof. Don Fulsom, SPA

Attendance: As we will only meet twelve times as a group, it is imperative that you attend each and every session of the course. By not attending class, you will not be able to view documentaries or listen to guest lecturers; this will, in turn, put you at a disadvantage in writing the short papers accompanying this material. Therefore, please make every effort to be in class this summer. If a family or other emergency arises, please see the instructor as soon as possible.
Prof. Chris Palmer, SOC

Students are expected to come each week prepared to contribute their knowledge and insights with their colleagues. We will learn from each other...More than your physical presence is required in class. I am looking for attentiveness, vitality and enthusiasm during class. Participation in class will raise your grades. The give and take of information, ideas, insights and feelings is essential to the success of this class.

Making Changes to the Syllabus

If you make any changes to the course schedule, be sure to let the students know in advance so that they can plan and arrange their schedules. However, changing assignments or course requirements or adding readings & new assignments can be problematic.

Links to other Campus Resources

Your syllabus can also help link students to valuable campus resources that provide support services such as:

- **Library**: for support in locating resources, conducting research, viewing films... [http://www.american.edu/library/](http://www.american.edu/library/)

- **Academic Support Center**: (x3360, MGC 243) offers study skills workshops, individual instruction, tutor referrals, and services for students with learning disabilities. Writing support is available in the ASC Writing Lab or in the Writing Center, Battelle 228.

- **Counseling Center**: (x3500, MGC 214) offers counseling and consultations regarding personal concerns, self-help information, and connections to off-campus mental health resources

- **Disability Support**: (x3315, MGC 206) offers technical and practical support and assistance with accommodations for students with physical, medical, or psychological disabilities.

- **Office of Information Technology** for computer support: [http://www.american.edu/oit/index.cfm](http://www.american.edu/oit/index.cfm)

- **CTRL for Blackboard Support** [http://www.american.edu/provost/ctrl/bb-transition.cfm](http://www.american.edu/provost/ctrl/bb-transition.cfm)

“If I write it, will they read it?”

Creating a clear and comprehensive syllabus is the goal; encouraging students to read it is equally important! Here are some suggestions:
During the first week of class, note how your syllabus is organized. Remember that each faculty member does this differently and students have to successfully navigate several;

As sections of the syllabus become more relevant in the first weeks of class, refer back to individual sections; e.g. when the first assignment is due, review your policies for completing and turning them in. Review your grading policy before and after the first assignment is due and then returned.

Review the procedures for on-line assignments before the first one is due.

Remind students when answers to their questions are in the syllabus; ask them to check back before asking questions.

If several students are confused about the same thing, think about adding information or specificity to the syllabus. Students always appreciate examples for complex assignments.
APPENDIX:

Syllabus Boilerplate Statements

American University offers several statements that can be inserted into your syllabus including the following:

**Students with Disabilities**

If you experience difficulty in this course for any reason, please don’t hesitate to consult with me. In addition to the resources of the department, a wide range of services is available to support you in your efforts to meet the course requirements.

**Academic Support Center** (x3360, MGC 243) offers study skills workshops, individual instruction, tutor referrals, and services for students with learning disabilities. Writing support is available in the ASC Writing Lab or in the Writing Center, Battelle 228.

**Counseling Center** (x3500, MGC 214) offers counseling and consultations regarding personal concerns, self-help information, and connections to off-campus mental health resources.

**Disability Support Services** (x3315, MGC 206) offers technical and practical support and assistance with accommodations for students with physical, medical, or psychological disabilities.

If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please notify me in a timely manner with a letter from the Academic Support Center or Disability Support Services so that we can make arrangements to address your needs.

**A.U.’s Academic Integrity Code:** [http://www.american.edu/academics/integrity/index.htm](http://www.american.edu/academics/integrity/index.htm)

Standards of academic conduct are set forth in the University’s Academic Integrity Code. By registering for this course, students have acknowledged their awareness of the Academic Integrity Code, and are obligated to become familiar with their rights and responsibilities as defined by the Code. Violations of the Code’s standards will not be treated lightly, and disciplinary actions will be taken should violations occur.
Who Are Your Students?

Class Introductions

How can you learn about your students’ interests? Where can they introduce themselves to you and to each other? How can you answer common questions they have without having to respond to each e-mail? What are some ways to do this online? Which format is best?

One way to engage students is to find out who they are and what they hope to gain from your course. There are several strategies that faculty has used; these can be part of the first week of classes or be in place prior to the start of the semester:

Enable course Blackboard site: this creates a communication forum prior to the start of classes. Students can email questions about the texts, e.g. which edition is required or communicate a special need. For examples, some students may want the list of texts in advance to get a head start on the reading. Others may want more detailed information about course content.

Ask for information about students: there are several ways professors have done this:

- Create an information sheet to distribute the first day of class (see example on the following page).
- Create an on-line site for students and request that they introduce themselves to each other and to you prior to the start of class; provide one or more prompts, e.g. “what is one question you have about the topics we will cover this semester?”
- Post a discussion thread on Blackboard with a question that immediately engages students in one of the course topics. This will also provide you with information about their prior knowledge and areas of interest.
- Post a short article that addresses a main topic or issue in your course and ask students to respond prior to the first class; ask them to post their own reaction and then respond to one of their peers.
- Create a class blog or wiki site where students are asked to post introductory statements or information prior to the first class or during the first week of classes.

NOTE: any confidential information you request would, of course, need to be done individually rather than online.

Here are some examples:

**From the Department of Justice, Law & Society, SPA:**

Please introduce yourselves, now through the opening week of the class. We are about to establish a learning community that meets both face to face and online. To begin the process, please use the thread I have established in this forum to let your classmates know a little about you. Your introduction should be posted as soon as possible during the first week of the course. I look forward to hearing from you! (In the first thread, the professor introduced herself.)

**From the History Department, CAS**

Please tell us a little about yourself. This can include anything: where you're from, your year at AU, your major, your outside interests, how you like living in Washington, etc. Then tell us your impressions of the period of history we're studying together this semester -- that is, Europe from the Italian Renaissance to the French Revolution. These impressions might come from anywhere: your reading, from movies or television programs, courses you've already taken in high school or college. It doesn't matter how vague or specific your impressions are -- and there's definitely no "right" or "wrong" answer to his question. (Note: we will not be grading your contributions to this Discussion Board, though your final grade for the course will drop 1/3 of a letter grade if you do not participate!)

**From the School of Communication: SOC**

Meet one-on-one with students during the first two weeks of class. In these meetings, learn more about each student, including their backgrounds, interests and life goals. For large classes, meet with students in small groups or assign students to meet with your TA. Keep the focus on the course rather than on personal issues which might be perceived as prying.

**From the Department of Performing Arts: CAS**

Have the class create a contract e.g. brainstorm response to this question: “What do each of us need to do as individuals to ensure that everyone participates, gets heard and gets respected in this class? Type their responses as a class contract, handout it out and hang it in the room.
From the School of Education, CAS  Form that students complete during the first class:

Name: ________________________________

___ Freshman  ___ Sophomore  ___ Junior  ___ Senior

E-mail address: ________________________ Phone: ______________________

Do you live: on campus ___  off campus ___ (helpful information if you form study groups)

Major: ______________________________ Minor: __________________________

Current Job: (if applicable) ______________________________

Teaching Experience, if applicable: ______________________________

Reason for taking this course:

___ Education Major  ___ Education Minor  ___ Elective
___ Psych Major  ___ Other: please explain

What specific questions do you have about human development, learning theory, motivation or the learning environment?

Is there any information you want to share with me about your participation in this class?

(This last question provides students with an opportunity to share information about special learning needs or situations that might impact their participation in class.)

What’s in a Name?

Students will tell you that learning their names means a great deal. It helps to create a connection between instructor and student and sends a clear message that you view your students as individuals with opinions and ideas to share in your course. It also helps to build community in the classroom which impacts participation and engagement. Not everyone finds it easy to learn names, so here are some practical suggestions:

- For smaller classes (under 25), use name tags until you learn students’ names or continue to use them all semester, if needed. Students can make their own;
- Assign seating and use a chart for larger classes so you can call on students by name;
For seminar classes or labs, have students create “tent cards” similar to those used at business meetings.
During the first few classes, ask students to state their name before they speak;

Encourage students to learn each others’ names as well. Students often find themselves in a course where they do not know anyone. Small group activities in class and/or on line discussion groups can facilitate this process. This is also a good way to build community within the course.

**Students at American University**

Undergraduates and graduate students bring with them differing skills, perceptions and perspectives. Some can readily identify who they are and what they need in an academic setting, others are less articulate. They vary greatly in their abilities to write, problem solve, engage in higher level thinking and manage the non-academic aspects of life on a college campus. They bring their experiences, strengths and areas of concern into your classroom each semester.

AU is home to many international students. Some are here for a semester abroad while others are enrolled in full time degree undergraduate and graduate programs. For some, English is a second language and they have culturally-based understandings and expectations. As with all students, it is valuable to get to know them as individuals and discover their needs and the contribution they can make to your course. Campus life includes an office that focuses on the needs of international students.

There are students on campus with special learning needs: some that have been identified and documented and others that are just as real but not formally recorded. Some students with learning challenges are extremely articulate about what they need in the way of accommodations; others are still figuring it out. All students come with a common goal, however: to be viewed as individuals with potential and value, both within the classroom and in the university community.

There are several resources on campus to help students adjust not only to academic life but also to the demands of communal living on a college campus. These resources are equally valuable to faculty who may have questions about how to work with and support students:

- **Academic Support Center:** (x3360, MGC 243) offers study skills workshops, individual instruction, tutor referrals, and services for students with learning disabilities. Writing support is available in the ASC Writing Lab or in the Writing Center, Battelle 228.

- **Counseling Center:** (x3500, MGC 214) offers counseling and consultations regarding personal concerns, self-help information, and connections to off-campus mental health resources
- **Disability Support**: (x3315, MGC 206) offers technical and practical support and assistance with accommodations for students with physical, medical, or psychological disabilities.

- **Campus Life**: check their website for a listing of information that may be helpful to you throughout the semester: [http://www.american.edu/life](http://www.american.edu/life).

**Documentation for Academic Accommodations**

Students who have documented learning challenges will bring you forms that note accommodations that they need to perform their best in your class. These may include:

- Extended time to complete assignments and/or quizzes and exams;
- A quiet, less distracted place in which to take exams (this can be arranged through the Disability Support office);
- A note taker (directions on how to request this are on the form)
- Use of adaptive equipment or technology (e.g. a computer to take notes in class).

What is often not included are the specific ways in which learning disabilities impact the way a student understands and approaches course assignments and exams. For example, a student who has challenges organizing his time may need extensions on assignments as well as on exams. Those who have language processing difficulties may need more visual cues during class lectures or ask to have an assignment explained in a different way. Those who have difficulty synthesizing information may need to meet more often with a professor to better understand how course material relates.

The Academic Support Center and Disability Support offices also have brochures and handouts with more specific information about students’ special needs. They also offer workshops during the semester and encourage you to contact them with questions and/or concerns.
Teaching to Diverse Learners

Student Voices: “I just can’t wrap my mind around that.”

Much has been written and debated about whether learning styles and multiple intelligences are real and many theories exist. But when you give an assignment, explain a principle or demonstrate a procedure and some students tell you, “I just don’t get it”, there is often more at play than straightforward comprehension.

What are Learning Styles?

Faculty and students are often familiar with the three basic types of learning styles or preferences:

- Visual learners
- Auditory Learners
- Kinesthetic, hands-on Learners

Auditory learners have the easiest time in a lecture environment because they learn best through hearing information. Visual learners need concrete cues, something to look at while they listen. Kinesthetic learners do best when they can actually perform a task that allows them to interact with the material in a concrete way. How does this fit with your own teaching style?

- Most faculty teach in the way they themselves learn best; varying your style can help to engage students with learning styles that differ from your own;
- Students may not be aware of their preferred styles but can tell you when something “just doesn’t make sense” to them;

You can observe this when reading assignments or course exams; we ask the same question, yet students present us with very different ways of organizing their answers. Some are very
linear, others start in what seems to be the center and work their way out, still others need to scaffold the question to be sure they do not omit key sections of the exam. All of these relate to the different ways in which students take in and organize information.

How do you find out?

Helping students to become self reflective about how they learn best can be viewed as part of the college curriculum. Meta-cognition, thinking about how you think, is a skill that will benefit them in any future career and enhance their engagement in individual courses. There are several ways to do this:

- Ask students to take a brief learning styles survey
- Conduct a brief exercise in class to help determine the overall learning style of your students.

Here are two examples:

**From Caleen Jennings in Performing Arts:**

Ask students to respond to the following questions; as they respond, they move to the corner of the room that has the appropriate label:

“*If I were giving you directions to a location, do you want me to:*

- Write them down and hand them to you? **visual**
- Tell you verbally? **auditory**
- Take you by the hand and go there together? **kinesthetic**
- Write them down and talk to you about how to get there?” **visual & auditory**

**From Marilyn Goldhammer in the School of Education:**

“If I had the best chocolate chip cookie recipe, how would you want me to share it with you?”

- Write down the recipe? **visual**
- Verbally give you the ingredients & directions? **auditory**
- Make the cookies together? **kinesthetic**
Think about your own learning style, e.g.

In the past few months, how did you learn a new skill, e.g. on the computer. Did you:

- Read the manual? visual
- Call for tech support over the phone? auditory
- Request a one-on-one tutorial? Kinesthetic

Which of these approaches or combination, work best for you? Thinking about this will help you focus on your students learning styles and the way they approach your course.

Student Voices: “If the professor doesn’t understand that people learn and take in information differently then they don’t end up teaching to most of the class... a good teacher provides many different ways to understand the material to get me engaged.”

Recognizing that your students have these different, basic styles does not mean you have to completely change the way you teach. By adding and varying strategies, however, you will increase the likelihood that students are more engaged and focused in your class. For example:

- **Power points**: make copies available on line for students who want to download and print them out prior to the lecture; include both pictures and words in power point slides;
- **Provide notes on the board**: as you discuss topics, theories, formulae etc. This provides visual cues to students;
- **Consider diagrams** as a way to illustrate principles and concepts in addition to words;
- **Create graphic organizers** that students can use as a tool to follow a lecture or discussion, take notes, organize their thinking etc.
- **Offer opportunities for students to actively engage** with course material in hands-on ways; e.g. creative projects, visual representations, models etc.
• **Provide options in the way students respond to questions on exams:** can they use diagrams, charts or bullet points? Can they add pictures or audio components to demonstrate mastery?

Being responsive to varied learning styles is as much a mindset as a methodology. Recognizing that students learn differently will impact the way you view their work, their questions and the ways in which they respond. This can also be accomplished by providing options within assignments. For example, consider requiring one or two core assignments that all students must do and then allow them to select other assignments (Weiner 2002).

**Learning Styles: Beyond the Basic Three**

**Are Learning Styles Innate or Acquired?**

Are learning styles just preferences or do they relate to the way we best process information? One way to evaluate this is by looking at how consistent the students’ patterns are between academia and their social interactions. When students approach social situations, friendships and extra-curricular activities in a similar way, chances are this is part of their innate temperament rather than a learned behavior. For example, a student who is very linear in their thinking may exhibit this same trait in their social relationships.

Dr. Robert J. Sternberg’s Triarchic Theory of (Successful) Intelligence views learning styles as “Consistent preference over time and subject matter for perceiving, thinking about, and organizing information in a particular way.” (as cited in Snowman, McCown & Biehler2009). For example:

**Reflectivity vs. Impulsivity:** how do students approach a task?

• **Reflective:** collect information and analyze relevance to solution before offering response; these students are often meta-cognitive and carefully consider a question or task before responding.

• **Impulsive:** characterized by an “act first, think later” pattern, these students respond more quickly even when they are uncertain of the question or of the required response.

**Field dependence vs. Field independence:** To what extent is our perception and thinking influenced by the surrounding context?

• **Field dependent:** these students are strongly influenced by the prevailing field or context. They like to have a structure before starting a task. A challenge for them is to create structure when none exists. For example, an open-ended, creative assignment may be more challenging for them than one that is scripted and predictable. These are
students who also like to see the “big picture” first so they can better understand the task or problem in relation to the whole.

- **Field Independent**: these students can isolate target information even when it is embedded within a larger and more complex context. They are better able to create meaningful structures for themselves and welcome creative, open-ended assignments and exam questions.

**Sternberg’s Mental Self-Government**

These have been validated as useful approaches to understanding learning styles in a variety of settings, both in the classroom and in the workplace. These styles provide useful information about how students approach tasks and manage their time. It also speaks to why some students find group projects stimulating while others prefer to work alone.

- **Legislative**: Prefers to formulate rules & plans, imagine possibilities, and create ideas & products
- **Executive**: Prefers to follow rules and guidelines
- **Judicial**: Prefers to compare things and make evaluations about quality, worth, and effectiveness
- **Monarchic**: Prefers to work on one task at a time or to use a particular approach to tasks
- **Hierarchic**: Prefers to have several tasks to work on, deciding which one to do first and follow in sequential order, and for how long
- **Oligarchic**: Prefers to have several tasks to work on, all of which are treated equally
- **Anarchic**: Prefers an unstructured, random approach to learning that is devoid of rules, procedures, or guidelines
- **Global**: Prefers to have an overall view of a task before beginning work
- **Local**: Prefers to identify and work on the details of a particular part of a task before moving to another part
- **Internal**: Prefers to work alone
- **External**: Prefers to work with others
- **Liberal**: Prefers to work out own solutions to problems
- **Conservative**: Prefers to do things according to established procedures

These styles impact the way in which students: approach tasks; prioritize assignments; succeed in group projects and manage their time.

**Temperament: Introverts and Extroverts**

Temperament is the innate part of our personality; often described as the way one is “wired”. One component of temperament is the degree to which one is an “introvert” or “extrovert”. It is a myth that introverts “keep to themselves” or “have few friends” and that extroverts are “always outgoing” and “make friends easily”. In reality, temperament is on a continuum with
different students exhibiting different degrees of each characteristic. An interesting and
different way to view this is the way in which one processes information:

Introverts tend to be more reflective: they often think it through carefully before responding. They don’t always want to talk through
their thinking process but may prefer to work on it alone. They often need down time or time
off from social situations to regroup and process what they have learned, observed and
experienced.

Extroverts tend to be more impulsive: they are more comfortable taking academic risks in the
classroom, responding immediately to a question or theoretical proposal. They thrive on
talking through their ideas and opinions. They can comfortably move from one social setting to
the next without the need to “rest their brains”.

Another aspect of temperament that shows up in the classroom is a students’ level of anxiety.
Students with high anxiety levels may ask more questions about due dates for assignments,
exam questions or course procedures. They want to be sure they “get it right” and don’t leave
something out. Other students may ask if you will read a draft and provide feedback before
they complete a paper or an assignment.

Faculty Response to Diverse Learners

One way to be responsive to diverse learners in your class is to note on your syllabus that you
are available to talk about challenges when they arise. For example, statements like the
following can be helpful:

- “If at any time you feel that it would be more beneficial to your education to
do something differently in the course, please speak to me.” This might
translate into flexibility with assignments and selected readings for the course.

- “Is there anything you want to share with me about your participation in this
course?” A student with learning disabilities will know that this is an invitation
to talk about accommodations they need in your class.

Another idea is to follow up class discussions with a discussion thread on Blackboard. This
allows more introverted students an opportunity to think about what they want to contribute
rather than having to respond during class.
Works Cited


Engaging Students in the Learning Process

**Student Voices:** “The professor cared that we met course goals... it gave me practice in setting goals and following through on them. This has proven invaluable to me and is a core part of what I treasure most about my university experience.”

Engaged students are those who actively participate in the learning process; those who take ownership of their learning, are intrinsically motivated and pro-active in their approach. How do we encourage this type of engagement and improve our teaching methodology? This section will share ideas from across campus as well as from nationally recognized experts in teaching pedagogy.

**A Holistic View of Learning:** reprinted with permission from Mark A. Serva, Ph.D. Assoc. Director, Institute for Transforming Undergraduate Education, University of Delaware.

A holistic view of learning examines the interaction among the following key elements:

- **Class Environment:** How do we create an effective learning environment?
- **Learning Objectives:** Are we setting appropriate learning objectives?
- **Course Materials:** Are we presenting interesting problems for students to solve?
- **Assessment:** Are we assessing our students’ performance effectively?

As illustrated in the diagram below, this view encourages faculty to focus more on innovation and process and less on simply addressing course objectives or covering course content. The result is a more dynamic structure that focuses on ways to better engage students in the learning process. The focus is on both the student and the instructor and requires faculty to shift their perspective toward a more interactive classroom model. Students become more
active participants in the process of learning and the role of the environment promotes a community of learners.

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<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Increase Focus on</th>
<th>Decrease Focus on</th>
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<tr>
<td>Class Environment</td>
<td>Innovative Learning Spaces</td>
<td>Coverage; Student Attention</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning Objectives</td>
<td>Process Objectives</td>
<td>Content Objectives</td>
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<tr>
<td>Course Materials</td>
<td>Innovative Content</td>
<td>Textbooks</td>
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<td>Assessment</td>
<td>Formative Assessment (Feedback)</td>
<td>Summative Assessment (Grades)</td>
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<td>Scholarship of Teaching &amp; Learning</td>
<td>Innovation, Publishing Findings</td>
<td>“Being a Good Teacher”</td>
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Models like this one make use of seating arrangements that encourage students to interact with each other as well as with the professor. For example, horseshoe seating creates opportunities for better eye contact and facilitates small group discussions and hands-on activities.

**Collaborative Note Taking:**

As described in this article from Inside Higher Ed, one innovative way to meet student’s needs in a large class is to create a note taking collaborative: students work in groups, each with an assigned role, to take notes during lectures, formulate multiple choice questions based on the material, post the questions to an on-line discussion thread and check each other’s work.

**Learner-Centered Teaching:** Maryellen Weiner, editor of The Teaching Professor newsletter since 1987 and Penn State Professor Emeritus of Teaching and Learning.

Learner-centered teaching considers the question, “how much and how well do your students learn?” It encourages students to become reflective learners and promotes “deep learning”
that encourages students to evaluate information and track shifts in their perspective. Students are challenged to connect research to practice and develop life-long academic skills.

**Large Lecture Classes**

Large classes pose challenges to faculty who want to engage students in the learning process. Here are some suggestions of ways this can be accomplished:

- **Divide students into working groups**: this is effective both in class and for on-line assignments. It helps build community and gives students more time to discuss course material with each other and with faculty.
- **Use technology to track student participation in class**: during lectures, faculty can check in to see what students understand or identify areas that are confusing.
- **Create collaborative projects** that students can complete in smaller study groups;
- **Include class discussion**: pose a question and ask students to talk with those next to or around them;
- **Include hands-on activities**: present problems for students to solve, hypothetical situations to consider or writings to create.
- **Include audio visual prompts and cues**: especially in large classes, students who rely on visual cues will appreciate seeing notes and diagrams on the board, on power points or in handouts that they can refer to during lectures.

Here are some examples:

**Chris Edelson. Assistant Professor, Department of Government**

I have used group exercises; I send the students a hypothetical fact pattern, often based on current events, that raises questions related to constitutional issues we are studying. It’s essentially a fact pattern one might see on a law school exam. I then break the students up into groups of 4-6 or so. The groups discuss the fact pattern and questions related to it as I walk around the room from group to group. Then, we reconvene as a class to see what people think.

**Susan Glover, Associate Professor, Department of Government**

To achieve better class participation I structure most of my courses around readings (journal articles, book chapters) that have corresponding homework questions due the day we are discussing each reading. Therefore the students come to class with that information and their own thinking about it already developed, at least partially, and we have really good discussions.

**Chris Palmer, School of Communication**

Chat informally with students before and after class. Set a box by the door for feedback – questions, thoughts, ideas, opinions, commentaries, critiques etc. Begin or end your lecture with items from the box. (Magnum 27). Announce at the start of the lecture that you will ask students to summarize key points at the end or have students complete an exit card where they note key points. Make eye contact as you lecture and try to do this with each student equally.
Vikki Connaughton, Department of Biology, CAS
Vary delivery of material whenever possible; auditory (lecture) and visual (power point); have a
demo where they build something/act something out; 60 second essays that promote active
learning and application. Use more than one method of assessment.

Facilitating Discussions

A key component of any course is the quality of course discussions. Whether face to face or
online, they provide students with opportunities to analyze and synthesize course material, ask
questions, formulate theories and brainstorm creative responses. It is also an excellent way to
create smaller groups within a large lecture class.

On Line Discussion Threads

Within Blackboard, faculty can create discussion threads where students can post responses to
specific questions. Directions for setting up discussion threads can be found at:

On-line discussion threads can have multiple goals depending on the way your course is
structured and what you want to accomplish. For example, creating an on-line discussion
thread can:

- **Supplement and extend in-class discussions**: they encourage students to reflect on
what is covered in class and are particularly helpful to students who need time to think
before responding to a professor’s question;
- **Help build community**: in classes of any size, taking the discussion on-line in smaller
groups of anywhere from 4-10 can help students develop relationships with their peers;
- **Broaden students’ perspective on a given topic**: the number of students who can
actively participate in a class discussion is often limited by time and numbers. On line,
everyone has a voice and multiple perspectives can be explored;
- **Encourage problem solving, critical thinking and creativity**: with added time to think
and explore a given topic, students are encouraged to go beyond the response they
might give in class when the material is still new to them.

To maximize the use of on-line discussion threads, here are recommendations from AU faculty
on how to best structure this experience.

1. Clearly state the procedure and mechanics for participating in discussion threads;
2. Explain how you will evaluate and grade these assignments;
3. Be specific about the time frame: i.e. when to post;
4. Be specific about the number of posts you expect and provide examples;
5. Outline your expectations for content: are you looking for research, opinions, creativity,
   and originality?
6. Be specific about the type of language you expect students to use in posts; i.e. grammar, tone etc.
7. Let students know what to do if they have questions.

When crafting the questions that prompt a discussion thread, consider the following:

1. Are you asking for student feedback or opinions?
2. Do you want students to research a particular topic?
3. Are you encouraging debate?
4. Will you encourage students to submit questions they would like to discuss?
5. Do you questions require students to consider and reflect what was covered in class that day or are the discussion threads focusing on additional material?
6. How do you want students to respond to each others’ posts?
7. Do you want students to post as individuals, in teams or small groups?

Many faculty require students to post their own response and then respond to two or three of their peer’s posts as well. Again, this depends on your goals for the assignment.

Prof. April Shelford, Dept. of History, CAS recommends that faculty “provide multiple questions in a Discussion Board so that students will have a choice of topics and won’t be forced into all responding to the same question.” Her assignment is below:

**DBS: Religion and social roles and functions in Reformation Nuremberg**

**How did religion and social roles and functions relate to each other in Reformation Nuremberg?**

**Deadline for lead-off responses: 8:00 pm (EDT), Monday, July 20**  
**Deadline for first post of follow-up responders: 8:00 pm (EDT), Wednesday, July 22**  
**Discussion Board closes: 8:00 pm (EDT), Saturday, July 25**

How are Martin Luther’s *Treatise on Good Works* and Hans Sachs’ poetry and play different from and / or alike as primary sources? (If necessary, refresh your memory by taking another look at "How to Read a Primary Source" from our first week.) Then write about about the relationship between religion and social roles and functions in Reformation Nuremberg. You might consider the following questions: Do the two authors express similar or different views on what it means to be a human being in the world? Do they reinforce each other’s views of how people should function in relation to society? Do they reinforce social and / or gender hierarchy? Do you see any disagreements between the two about the appropriate relationship between serving God and serving society through activities such as work? Would you characterize either or both as revolutionary that is, challenging the social norms of a German city? Do they encourage people to strike out on their own and develop their own values and social roles? **Remember:** You can’t answer all of these questions! And you can’t discuss all of Sachs' works!
The following advice is offered from faculty across campus who has had a great deal of experience with on-line discussion threads:

From a syllabus from the College Writing Program, College of Arts and Sciences (Professor Kelly Joyner) How discussion thread posts will be graded:

To reward hard work I’ll grade your Bb entries on a four-point scale (4= exceeds expectations, 1= poor). Late entries and entries that are half-hearted, confusing, or mechanically messy will receive no credit. All the entries together will account for 15% of your final grade. Here’s what the point system means:

1. **Poor**
   - an entry almost devoid of original thought, perhaps full of mechanical errors and/or opaque language

2. **You can do better:**
   - the entry has some merit, but little original thought and/or much unclear or unpolished writing

3. **Meets requirements:**
   - your entry reads well and contributes usefully to the class Discussion.

4. **Exceeds Expectations**
   - in the quality of analysis and/or quality of writing

Directions for Students (Prof. Joyner)

1. When you’re ready to post your response, **enter the forum** by clicking on the title above. Click on "Thread" to start a new thread and give your posting an interesting and relevant title. If you have a response to a classmate's posting, simply click "reply" beneath his or her posting.

2. **To avoid losing text** if the Network should kick you out or hiccup, you should compose your response in MS Word or another word processor and then paste it into the text box. You may not attach a file.

3. Aim for the **word requirement (usually around 250-300 words)** going over is allowed as long as you're writing productively and not repeating yourself.

4. Before posting your response, it's a good idea to **read what your classmates have responded** already—I encourage cross-response conversations. If you're responding to another posting, refer to your classmate(s) by name. If you're the first or one of the first to post a response, by all means go back later and post a 2nd response to classmates.

5. **These Blackboard responses take the place of quizzes and traditional response papers.** I'm evaluating: your ability to read and understand a text, and the amount of effort you put into computing and assimilating what you've read. If you dislike the reading, try to figure out why you think as you do (instead of simply writing "I don’t like it but I’m not sure why" or “I don’t
like it – it’s boring”). If a text doesn’t match your tastes, that’s perfectly understandable. You can still analyze and push the on-line discussion forward. I’m looking for analysis, not summary. Assume your readers have read the assignment. You'll want to give some context clues to let us know which passage you’re referring to, but don’t re-tell the reading.

6. **Proofread and polish** your response before posting it. Your prose need not be as polished as in the formal papers, and ideas count more than style in these responses, but elegant and dynamic prose is always welcome.

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**Professor Meg Weekes, Associate Dean, SPA**

Taken from the course syllabus, this describes the weighting of the discussion board posting on the final grade:

Informed, analytical postings **on class online discussion board, 3-5 times per week, including at least one 250-word** (500 for graduate credit) posting that is an edited essay which contains at least 2 informed references to assigned texts (4 for graduate credit)

(The postings equal 40% of final grade)

Students are expected to participate consistently and regularly in the online class discussions, responding to at least three of the posted discussions questions each week, building on both what their colleagues say in the course and on what they are reading. All personal opinions should be supported by references to texts and the online class discussions. Contributions that are routinely bunched at the end of a week will receive a lower grade then regular, continuous comments. One posting each week must be a 250 to 500-word response to one of my discussion questions or to a comment or question posed by a classmate. This response must be supported by at least two informed references to readings assigned for the class for that week.

The core requirement of responding to at least three questions from the instructor and one from a fellow student are repeated in the introduction to each week’s work.

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**When should students post their response?**

If you are asking students to respond to each other, it is critical to provide some guidelines about when postings are due. Otherwise you may create a situation where all students wait until the last day which does not provide them with time to respond to each other. For example:

- Professor posts discussion question prompts on Monday.
- Students are asked to respond with their original post by Tuesday evening.
- Students are then asked to respond to 2-3 of their peer’s posts by Thursday.
- Professor reads posts on Friday and provides summary feedback before Monday when the cycle begins again.

Timing is also an issue if you are asking students to participate in a discussion thread in lieu of class on a given day. For long term projects, time guidelines are also useful to help students plan their time and stay focused.

**Mid-semester evaluations**

Checking in with students mid-semester can provide valuable feedback about how well the course is progressing. This can be done on line or in class. Brief surveys can be created through on-line services like *Survey Monkey* and *Google Forms* or students can be asked to complete a brief, anonymous survey in class.

Deciding which questions to ask relates to your course goals and objectives; what kind of feedback do you want from your students? For example:

- **Feedback on the text and readings:** is the amount reasonable? Do readings supplement class discussions? Can students readily access written materials?
- **Student Engagement:** what could students do differently to become more engaged in the class?
- **Faculty Engagement:** what do students believe that faculty could do to enhance learning and student engagement?
- **Course content:** Are there concepts students are struggling with? Are there some they would like to explore in more depth? Are there questions that need to be answered?
- **Changes in perspective:** has the course content and discussion changed the way students view a particular concept or theory?
- **Clarity of Assignments:** do students know what is expected in the course and how their work will be evaluated?

A mid-semester evaluation can also provide an opportunity for feedback in both directions. Prof. Caleen Jennings in the Dept. of Performing Arts, CAS asks her students: “What can *I* do to improve this course?” “What can *you* do to improve the course?” You can be as specific or as general as you like, based on the information you want to gather. Questions that cause students to reflect on the material will provide more information that simple yes or no responses. You may also want to ask them how their perspective has changed during the semester. This differs from information learned and focuses on how course material impacts their view of the topic, theories discussed or how they might apply the information they are learning in your course.
Using Technology to Enhance Teaching

**Student Voices:** “Using technology won’t make a bad assignment any better.”

We live in a media rich environment and are constantly surrounded, if not bombarded, by images, television shows, streaming web content, movies and commercials on a daily basis. Using the latest technology is one way to reach and engage students. Asking students to create a video clip or iMovie, develop an interactive power point or create a podcast or commercial can add new and creative dimensions to a course. However, technology is simply another teaching methodology. When selecting new strategies, it helps to keep the following in mind:

- What are your objectives for the assignment?
- Which technology is a good fit?
- How will using technology enhance or broaden the experience?
- What skills do students need to have in order to use the technology?
- Who is available to help students learn the new technology?
- How long will it take students to complete the assignment?
- Are additional costs involved? E.g. to produce an iMovie, students may need to purchase their own external hard drive, DVD's, SDHC cards and or miniDV tapes to complete the assignment.
- How can you clearly describe the assignment not only to students but also to the tech support staff who will assist them?

The goal is to choose technology not only because it will make the assignment more fun or creative but also because there is a clear link to the goals you have for a given assignment and how it connects to course material and objectives. We often feel pressured to use new technologies because students talk about their experiences in other courses. If you are converting an assignment like a research paper into an iMovie, it is important to rethink and re-craft the assignment based on the technology you are using.

There are many ways that technology can enhance the learning experience. For example:

- Creating an iMovie or video clip can help students synthesize all aspects of course content;
- Using technology can promote critical thinking skills;
- Technology can provide an alternative for students who learn best through hands-on kinesthetic experiences.

Students need very clear instructions when you assign a project that involves technology. While the goal may be creativity, students still need direction. They also need to know how the project will be evaluated. They need to know:

- Length and format of the assignment;
- How long it will take them to create the assignment using technology;
- What the final product should look like? Do you have examples to share?
- How the assignment will be evaluated? Which criteria will you use, for example: creativity; storytelling; concept; execution; cinematography; editing?)
- Whether the focus is on creativity or on technique?

Using a grading rubric can be very useful here and provides students with a clear understanding of how technology projects will be evaluated.

**Student Voices:** “Making an iMovie took way more time than I ever imagined.”

**Advice from the New Media Center**

Both students and faculty tend to underestimate the amount of time, skill and resources it takes to create a media assignment. A key variable is the student’s familiarity with the technology. Media assignments take a great deal of time, planning, organization and communication among the faculty member, student, teaching assistant and tech support staff. Students should be encouraged to allow extra time for technical problems that inevitably occur or due to errors based on their inexperience with media production.

Teaching assistants also need to be well versed in the rigors of media, the requirements of the assignment, learning objectives and assignment goals.
A good rule of thumb is to provide a minimum of 4-6 weeks for project from assignment to delivery date. Try to have media assignments towards the beginning of the semester versus at finals when finding time on a computer is at a premium.

### Technical Resources

When considering a media assignment, please consider the following:

1. Develop a strategy for the class
2. Consider the size of your class and available campus resources
3. Be realistic about student skills and prior experience.
4. Contact tech support staff early in the process
5. Be clear with students about expectations, cost and timing.