



### *Lens on Learning Theory*

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As Barbara Davis points out, in her book Tools for Teaching, the first few classes of a course can set the tone for the rest of the semester. Everyone – the teacher as well as the students - experiences a combination of anxiety and excitement at the beginning of a course. The more instructors can do to reduce anxiety and capitalize on excitement, the more likely things are to get off on the right foot.



### *Reflection on Practice*

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1. What can you do in your first few classes to achieve the following?
  - Address student concerns and reduce anxiety.
  - Communicate and model expectations related to the course and class activities.
  - Create a positive learning environment.
2. How can you get students actively involved in learning as quickly as possible?

### *Expanding Your Teaching Toolkit*

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Below are some ideas we have gathered. **Add to our collective knowledge** by sharing your ideas or questions with other faculty in your program areas.

#### 1. Creating a Positive Learning Environment

- Welcome students individually as they come into your classroom
- Provide opportunities for students to get to know a bit about each other and about you. Some **ideas** for this include things such as the following:
  - (i) Students write answers to three questions about themselves on an index card. These are redistributed and students try to find out whose card they have.
  - (ii) Students complete a quiz with questions about you (the instructor). See which team of students can get the most correct answers.
  - (iii) Students interview each other and then present their partner in Blackboard
  - (iv) Students conduct a people search with search items that are relevant to the course (i.e. In a communications course, they could search for someone who has had some writing published, someone who writes poetry, some one who has read at least two books in the past month, someone who reads the newspaper daily, etc.)
- Conduct a survey that links course content and student lives.
- Involve students in doing something interactive as quickly as possible. Some **ideas** for this include things such as the following:
  - (i) Students match famous names in the field with their claim to fame.
  - (ii) Students complete a self-assessment quiz that provides insight into things such as their learning style, personality, information processing preferences, etc. The following **websites** have a variety of self-assessment quizzes.
    - <http://www.queendom.com/>
    - <http://www.2h.com/personality-tests.html>
  - (iii) Students work in teams to solve a problem, challenge, or critical thinking activity within a time limit.

- Explain to students how to be successful in your course, including how to study for tests, how to best learn your course material, how to use the textbook/Blackboard/etc. Create a fun and/or competitive activity that gets students to apply these strategies to a small task.

## 2. Communicating Goals and Expectations

- Explain course, outlining goals, what will be covered and what won't be covered. Communicate what your course offers of value to the students.
- Discuss your roles/responsibilities and the students' roles/responsibilities in the learning partnership (i.e. office hours, importance of asking for help before it's too late, what to do if students don't understand something, the value of attending class, etc.).
- Go over the syllabus, clearly explaining the learning goals, the weekly plan, and the evaluation structure for the course.
- Establish policies and procedures for all elements of course (i.e. class activities, tests and exams, assignments, plagiarism, group projects, etc.). Try to anticipate issues that will arise (i.e. missed tests, dysfunctional groups, late assignments, etc.), and communicate a policy and/or procedure to students in writing.
- Create a true false quiz based on course syllabus
- Have students work in groups to generate a list of questions they would like answered or explored about the subject as the course progresses.
- Bring in former students and have them answer questions about the course.

## 3. Getting Students Involved in the Subject Material

- Have students work in teams to see how many terms they can define, from a list of terms that come up in the course.
- Create a small, success-oriented and relevant assignment for students to complete in the first week
- Give students a pre-test to see how much they know and don't know about the subject already.
- Shows a series of images related to the course material, and have students answer questions related to the images.

### ***More Information and Ideas***

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#### **On the Web**

Business Balls. (n.d.) *Team building games and tips*. Retrieved June 2011 from <http://www.businessballs.com/teambuildinggames.htm>

Business Training Works (n.d.) *Creative icebreakers, introductions, and hellos for teachers, trainers, and facilitators*. Retrieved June 2011, from <http://www.businesstrainingworks.com/Free-Icebreakers-PDF.html>

Hawaii Community College (n.d.). *Teaching tips index: First day*. Retrieved June 2011 from <http://honolulu.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachtip/teachtip.htm#firstday>

#### **In the Centre for Teaching and Learning**

Davis, B. G. (2001). *Tools for teaching*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Provitera-McGlynn, A. (2001). *Successful beginnings for college teaching: Engaging your students from the first day*. Atwood Publishing.