TEACHING AT THE UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Teaching at the University of Virginia would not be the handbook it is without the insights and editorial help of many people: those faculty and teaching assistants who authored sections, shared ideas, and wrote the reflections on teaching that provided most of the quotations; the many administrators who gave much support and information; the friends, colleagues, and businesses who helped with design, photos, and final editing. We also note appreciatively the inspiration we found in handbooks from other institutions. We gratefully acknowledge all these contributions, direct and indirect, although any errors are our own.
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When Thomas Jefferson was a young man, an influential teacher entered his life.

From 1760 to 1762, William Small was Jefferson’s only instructor at the College of William & Mary. Born and educated in Scotland during the Enlightenment, Small had immersed himself in the writings of Isaac Newton, Francis Bacon, and John Locke. At William & Mary, he took the young Jefferson under his wing, and introduced him to science, mathematics, and the writings of the Enlightenment thinkers. Jefferson biographer Dumas Malone writes that William Small “was one of those rare personal influences that prove unforgettable and elicit immortal tribute.”

Thomas Jefferson himself understood and appreciated the significance of Small’s influence. In his autobiography, he wrote, “It was my great good fortune, and what probably fixed the destinies of my life, that Dr. William Small of Scotland was then professor of Mathematics, a man profound in most of the useful branches of science, with a happy talent of communication correct and gentlemanly manners and an enlarged and liberal mind.”

The relationship between Small and Jefferson underscores one of the truths of university life—that the student-teacher relationship is the foundation of effective learning. This third edition of Teaching at the University of Virginia is designed to help you strengthen your connections with students and properly analyze their work, even as you strive to improve your own work as a teacher. This handbook reflects the most recent research on teaching and learning, and it provides valuable information that will help you do your job to the greatest possible effect.

Many years after he left William & Mary, Thomas Jefferson designed the Academical Village that gives architectural shape and substance to our greatest aspirations for teaching and learning at UVa. The Academical Village creates proximity by design, with teachers and students working and living side by side. No other university in America, in its physical design, so perfectly embodies the principles on which it was founded and the values that permeate every facet of student and faculty life. No other university is built to foster the student-teacher relationship the way this University is built to do so.

For those of us who teach at UVa, we can look to Jefferson’s early life and his designs for this University whenever we need to be reminded of the significance and value of teaching. I am grateful to all of the teachers who continue to uphold the high standard of teaching at UVa.

Teresa A. Sullivan
President, University of Virginia
Introduction

In my early individual monthly meetings with the school deans, I would ask what they were most proud of when they thought of the University of Virginia. I share with you a particular response that captured the collective input I was receiving. I was told with great enthusiasm, "The University of Virginia combines the best features of a liberal arts college with the best features of a research university." We often find ourselves living the tensions associated with providing educational experiences for undergraduate, graduate, and professional students and sustaining a reputation as a leader in research. Research and teaching are mutually-reinforcing activities, and together form a powerful combination for the intellectual and social maturation of our students. One of the greatest attributes of the University of Virginia is that it continually aspires for excellence in teaching and scholarship, not bolstering one activity at the expense of another, and not forgetting that the primary mission of universities is education. The University of Virginia is a very special institution in this regard, and what I have learned since arriving at this great university only serves to reinforce this belief.

The Teaching Resource Center plays an important role in enabling us to excel in the classroom experiences we provide our students. Through its faculty programs—University Academy of Teaching, Excellence in Diversity Fellowship Program, Learning Assessment Grants, Professors as Writers—the Teaching Resource Center provides a comprehensive set of support activities to enable the best in classroom education. Of special note is the intensive Course Design Institute, where faculty and graduate student participants explore pedagogical approaches, learning how to design or redesign a course that is learner-centered and how to apply research-based teaching and learning principles to design courses. The Teaching Resource Center nurtures graduate students by offering such programs as Tomorrow's Professor Today and Teaching+Technology Support Partners, and by collaborating on international teaching assistants programs. Graduate students and faculty also benefit from numerous individual consultation opportunities at the Center.

Our core mission at the University of Virginia is education. For our undergraduates, I am convinced that a broad education is more important today than when I experienced it 35 years ago. Our students will change careers several times in their lives, and, for some, success will be measured more by team work than by individual accomplishments. Many of these teams will include members from all parts of the globe, and their advances will draw on the knowledge of many disciplines and cultures. And perhaps most important, our students will need to know how to continually learn – everyone will need to be a lifelong learner, and many will aspire to take on leadership roles to make the world better. This requires us to help our students develop the skills needed to succeed, and the programs and opportunities provided through the Teaching Resource Center play an important role in enabling
the University to rise to this challenge.

Thomas Jefferson wrote to Samuel Kercheval on June 12, 1816 on the topic of government, but his words also speak to education: "Laws and institutions must go hand in hand with the progress of the human mind. As that becomes more developed, more enlightened, as new discoveries are made, new truths disclosed, and manners and opinions change with the change of circumstances, institutions must advance also, and keep pace with the times." Sometime I think we underestimate the "pace of change" and how much the changes in the world around us impact how we carry out our work as educators and scholars. As I look at the generation in K-12 education today, and the amazing changes in the availability of information (not knowledge), I wonder what college will be like for them, both in terms of our expectations of them and—perhaps more important—their expectations of us. As teachers, we will need to continually innovate, integrating new pedagogical approaches into our curriculum as well as making sure the curriculum itself is preparing students for the world in which they will work. The University of Virginia excels at providing excellent education for its students, and I hope that many of you will take advantage of the programs offered by the Teaching Resource Center to continue our legacy of defining what is best in teaching within the context of a research university.

John D. Simon  
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Through Teaching at the University of Virginia: A Handbook for Faculty and Teaching Assistants, accomplished U.Va. professors and teaching assistants share what they have learned from others and from their own experiences. As editors of and contributors to the Handbook, we have kept our suggestions fairly general and have intermingled theory with hands-on advice so that you will benefit from the ideas contained in the following pages, whether you are a seasoned or first-time teacher, no matter what your discipline, and regardless of your differing needs, personalities, student populations, and goals. Although our primary focus is on teaching undergraduates, many Handbook recommendations apply to teaching graduate students as well. Please note that hyperlinks were accurate at the time of publication but may have changed in the meantime.

Why a Handbook?
Although scholarship, research, and teaching are all vital aspects of acquiring and sharing knowledge in academia, graduate study does not always equally prepare the professional academic for all three tasks. As Carl E. Wieman explained it to the Chronicle of Higher Education, “In large part, the problem is that graduate students pursuing their doctorates get little or no training in how students learn. When these graduate students become faculty members,” he said, “they might think about the content they want students to learn, but not the cognitive capabilities they want them to develop.”

Fortunately, current scholarship in teaching and learning suggests that research-based teaching is a very fruitful approach: it both helps students learn and builds on the strengths of professional academics. Research-based teaching and learning requires students to “grapple with the material and receive authentic and explicit practice in thinking like an expert.” Wieman continues, and requires faculty “to provide timely and specific feedback, and move beyond lectures in which students can sit passively receiving information” (Chronicle, “Harvard Conference Seeks to Jolt University Teaching, Feb 5, 2012).

Indeed, many teachers have already recognized the important connection between research and teaching that Weiman is highlighting. As Professor James Smith, a Civil and Environmental Engineer at U.Va, explains,

For me, my teaching and research are inextricably linked. My efforts to become a good teacher strengthen my research, and my research activities strengthen my teaching.

Certainly, no handbook can substitute for classroom teaching experience and continuing study of effective teaching and learning practices. What a handbook can do is to provide instructors with the multifaceted experiences of other teachers, offering even experienced instructors a fresh idea, a new technique, and another perspective.

With the hope of subduing butterflies, drying palms, and inspiring more students, we offer a few pointers and encourage you to try them, toss aside the ones that don’t work, and delight in your own teaching style as you cultivate it.

Why Care About Teaching Well?
Given the call to publish or perish, many academics wonder whether it’s really necessary to teach well at all. Why agonize over lecture notes or reread the poem to be discussed on Wednesday? Why attempt to cultivate your teaching style, instead of viewing teaching as a part of the job that you simply “get through” each week?

Although each academic must answer such
questions for herself, the fact that you are reading this handbook indicates, at the very least, that you care about teaching effectively. If teaching is a learned skill that can be improved, why not make your professional life easier by learning how to teach better? Beyond this purely self-interested motive, most scholars are committed not only to mastering and contributing to our disciplines but also to extending our disciplinary knowledge to others. Student course evaluations and Cavalier Daily editorials reveal that a teacher’s pedagogical style heavily influences students’ interest in learning the course material. A fine teacher can interest students in a subject they never cared about before, and/or change the course of a student’s life by inspiring her to greatness within the subject area. Whether we view teaching as a professional hoop through which we are required to jump, or whether we want to extend our academic legacies through our students or inspire them to greatness, teaching is a serious responsibility and a great privilege.

What Do You Teach Students?
Teaching students about your subject area is one of the primary goals of any teacher. In addition to this, however, teachers also have the opportunity to contribute to the development of students’ cognitive abilities, including their power to ask critical questions, analyze and solve problems, and think logically and creatively within the discipline. As a teacher, you help to equip your students with the skills required to grapple with a wide range of intellectual, personal, and moral issues they encounter during and after their college years—central questions of philosophy, politics, economics, science, art, and religion.

Along with imparting knowledge and developing critical thinking skills, you have the opportunity to motivate students to become lifelong learners. What many would call the “ideal student”—the one who would seek knowledge and engage with it deeply, regardless of your efforts in encouraging such behavior—is rare. Most college students, whether bright and energetic or discouraged and lethargic, benefit from, and perhaps require, some external motivation from their teachers.

One way to motivate your students is to share the process of scholarly thinking. Why offer only digested solutions to problems already solved? By sharing the genesis of your ideas, including some of your missteps, you promote creativity, insight, and informed evaluation. When teaching and research invigorate each other, each is enriched: students’ queries may provoke you to further investigation, and what you discover through research may enhance students’ learning. As Professor Carolyn Callahan of the Curry School of Education puts it:

*Teaching and learning are most effective when the classroom provides an opportunity for a joint journey by the teacher and learner. Teachers cannot be effective unless they, too, are learning—about the discipline and about their students in every learning encounter.*

Using This Handbook
We have designed this Handbook for a broad readership that includes you, whether you are an established faculty member or a new graduate teaching assistant or somewhere in between. Further, we have organized the Handbook so that it will be helpful whether you read individual sections as they become relevant to your teaching, or choose to read the document in its entirety. To help you navigate your way through the Handbook, we have provided a detailed table of contents at the beginning of the document, and offer frequent references to related sections along the way. Recognizing that our audience includes teachers from various disciplines, we have offered trans-departmental recommendations, and defer to departmental recommendations where they conflict with ours.
We have also deliberately kept our remarks brief, opting to give you basic concepts and recommendations; for more details, consult works listed in the “Further Reading” appendix.

This third edition of the Handbook reflects your comments and suggestions on earlier editions, which we have taken into account. We continue to appreciate your input for future editions. Please feel free to share your insights with us (trc-uva@virginia.edu).

We offer this Handbook as a brief summary of our suggestions and resources for teaching and learning. We hope you go far beyond this Handbook in your efforts to improve your teaching, by discussing your classes with your students and colleagues, observing other instructors, experimenting with new techniques, and continuing to develop your personal teaching style.

— The editorial team
PREPARING A COURSE

Long before walking into the classroom, you spend hours thinking, reading, and organizing your course, whether you teach as the sole instructor, as an assistant, or with colleagues. By carefully planning your course, you increase the likelihood that students will grasp what they are to learn, will see clearly individual course elements and their relationships, and will understand what you intend to communicate.

Planning for Instruction

Before considering the details of your course, such as ordering books, scheduling the class, designing the syllabus, or reserving equipment, it is helpful to consider the philosophy behind your course. You may want to begin with these questions:

What are your goals for the course? What do you expect students to learn, retain, and put into practice three to five years from now? What concepts and skills will they acquire or extend? How does this course build on or provide a foundation for other courses? By defining the course focus and the type of learning you hope will occur, you will be in a much better position to select and sequence the content, reading, assignments, and assessments for your course.

How will you align your expectations for student learning with assignments? If you want students to think critically, for instance, how will you model it in your lectures and class discussions—showing them the types of thinking necessary to read, comment, and write successfully in your course? Formal and informal course activities and assignments let your students practice and acquire those same critical thinking skills. Graded assignments should also reflect your goals; in this case, including some tests of their ability to demonstrate critical thinking.

Every class should be an occasion for discovery. It is not possible to achieve that experience for every student every day, but it is possible to provide the opportunity. – John Jeffries, Law

What knowledge and skills are prerequisites for success in your course? Students and instructors alike will benefit from an explicit delineation of the instructor’s expectations, preferably in writing. During the first week of the course, consider spending a few minutes evaluating students’ current knowledge (see also “The First Day of Class”). Here are a few classroom assessment activities you can use to gauge this (Angelo and Cross, 1993):

- Ask students to write a short paragraph, including their questions, about the course’s subject matter.

- Have students list relevant courses previously taken (be sure you know the content and objectives of prerequisite courses).

- Give a short, ungraded quiz on information you believe students should already know and facts they should learn in your course. The quiz may also include a test of students’ current reasoning skills, or other skills you hope they will develop.
through the course.

What you learn from these activities will suggest whether you need to schedule a few introductory lectures, include an extended introduction to assigned readings, and/or spend some time laying a solid foundation for the types of thinking, writing, and learning that you want will occur throughout the semester.

How will you know whether and what students are learning throughout the course? Plan to assess students’ progress regularly (see “Evaluating Students’ Work,” and “Assessing Students’ Learning”). In addition, listen closely to students’ comments during discussions, talk with students before and after class, and designate some office hours for individual conferences. Just a few minutes of conversation will tell you whether a student is on the right track.

How will you vary your instruction? Novelty is intrinsically motivating and novel methods aligned with your goals and course content can help engage students meaningfully in the material. By offering a variety of activities, students may be more interested in and attentive to the material. See “Typical Teaching Situations” for ideas you can implement.

How will your syllabus show students the goals of your course and how all assignments are connected to those central goals? When students have a clear map of where the course begins and ends, they are more likely to realize their potential. By sharing your hopes explicitly through your syllabus and course introduction, you allow students to “buy into” your goals and strive to achieve them as their own.

After determining the course focus, consider the following practical questions, with the help of an experienced instructor if you are teaching the course for the first time:

How many students should you expect? Class size will influence how much in-class time you may devote to lectures, demonstrations, or discussions. In addition, the larger the class, the fewer papers and other graded assignments you will be able to handle on your own; if you have an especially large class, ask your department to assign you one or more TAs and/or graders. (See below for guidelines on working with TAs and graders.)

What other situational factors might affect student learning or performance in the course? Is this course for students majoring or minoring in your discipline, or does it attract students from other departments? Understanding how students are oriented toward your discipline and your particular course can help you clarify your expectations about their work, the need to explain background material, topics or methods, and the tenor of class discussions. You may find discussions taking unexpected and stimulating directions as a student from the Architecture School, for example, approaches Shakespeare’s plays or U.S. history without the jargon undergraduates within the discipline have learned to employ.

How much work can you reasonably assign for each class? If you are a graduate student yourself or have been recently teaching graduate courses, you may need to review typical undergraduate requirements. Remember that each student carries about 14 to 17 hours of course credits, probably in diverse disciplines. The usual rule of thumb is two hours of study outside class for every credit hour carried. For a three-credit course, that means assigning readings and assignments that students can reasonably complete in six hours per week.

How many of your students will have previously written a college-level paper? Not all students take a first-year course in academic writing, and only half of those enrolled in such courses take the course during their first semester. In addition, such courses in academic writing generally focus on argumentation, and do not teach students how to write appropriately
for all disciplines. You may need to devote class
time or a series of individual or group confer-
ences to explaining the conventions of writing
within your discipline.

By reflecting on your goals, integrating your
assignments and assessments with those goals,
and considering the background of your
students and the context of your course, you will
set realistic expectations for both yourself and
your students, and be on the road to facilitating
effective teaching and learning in your course. In
the next section of this handbook, you will have
the opportunity to consider how to design your
syllabus – the document that will explicate your
course goals and how you intend to reach them
with the active involvement of your students.

Preparing a Syllabus

Many instructors believe that a course syllabus
primarily serves two basic functions: it organizes
the semester in advance and states requirements
clearly and fully, protecting the instructor from
student pleas and challenges and supporting the
instructor should a student complain to a
chairperson or dean. For those instructors, a
syllabus consists of two parts: a schedule of
assignments, and a list of rules or regulations.
Although there is a kernel of truth in that
common understanding of syllabi, we suggest a
different way of viewing your course syllabus –
as a document issuing promises to your
students, inviting them to work diligently as
they study the subject matter to accomplish
shared goals.

The syllabus can motivate your students to
actively engage in the classroom, set the tone
and a direction for the semester, and serve as a
contract between instructor and students
regarding course assignments and classroom
behaviors. The parts of a syllabus and their
placement will vary depending on each
instructor’s goals. (Find more information
Teaching Resource Center workshops on
syllabus or course design here)
http://trc.virginia.edu/Workshops/

The following components are found in most
syllabi or on separate sheets distributed with
syllabi:

- The course title, its abbreviation, the semester,
  and the year.
- Your name, office location, office telephone
  number, e-mail address, and course website, if
  you have one. Some choose to include a personal
  phone number; if you choose to announce it, set
  clear limits on its usage (no calls after 10:00
  p.m., for instance).
- The names, office locations and office hours of
  TAs, graders, lab assistants, and so on. Your
  assistants may want to create their own sub-
  syllabi as well, to provide goals and details for
  the discussions and labs they will be leading.
- Your office hours. Generally instructors hold at
  least one hour per week for every hour you
  spend in class. Consider avoiding office hours
  scheduled during a regular course slot (e.g.,
  instead of MWF 10:00-11:00, choose MW 10:30-
  11:30 and Thursday 1:30-2:30). Many instructors
  also schedule extra hours before exams and due
dates of major assignments.
- Required and recommended texts and
  resources. Indicate where students may buy
  books and where to find texts on reserve. (See
  below for details.) List any online resources the
  students may find helpful.
- A brief summary of course goals and format. In
  addition to making your goals for the course
  explicit, students also benefit from explanations
  of the learning activities you have chosen. For
  example, students in your writing courses will
  benefit from hearing a brief rationale behind
  your choice to ask students to engage in peer-
  review paper workshops.
Procedures for assessments and grading. Explaining how a course assignment correlates with a core goal of the course allows students to understand the purpose of such assessments. In addition, that explanation sets the stage for clearly defining from the outset how students’ work will be assessed (for more helpful tips from the TRC website, click here). Many instructors also note what percentage of the student’s final grade comes from papers, exams, quizzes, oral presentations, other assigned work, and participation in class discussions.

Attendance policy. Discussion sections, labs, language courses, and studio courses often require consistent attendance and participation for students to practice and demonstrate mastery of necessary skills, such as supporting an argument or analyzing a compound. Insist on the level of attendance appropriate for your course and its goals. If you are a TA for a course, be sure you know the professor’s policy and whether you are expected to set your own.

Athletes are excused from classes on days when they have out-of-town athletic commitments. Any in-season athletes in your class should give you a letter from the coach listing away-games, including the time of departure. (For instance, students are not excused from a 9:00 a.m. class if their bus leaves at noon.) Remind students that they are responsible for all work completed in class or assigned during their absence.

Your policy on late assignments. How many days late, if any, will you accept an assignment without penalty? How will the grade be affected? Decide on your policy before the semester begins, and confirm it with your supervisor (if any). Some instructors choose to build in flexibility by allowing students to drop their lowest grade in one or more categories.

Statement about the Honor Pledge. Remind students that U.Va.’s honor pledge is presumed, even if students do not write it on their work. Note any changes to the Honor Pledge your course requires and suggest that students unfamiliar with the pledge or its specifics consult the Honor Committee Website at http://www.virginia.edu/honor/.

Useful resources. U.Va. has a plethora of useful resources for students, and some of these may be particularly relevant for your course. For instance, students in a writing requirement course may obtain writing assistance at the Writing Center (see Resources).

Schedule of assignments and assessments. A calendar of assignments and assessments provides the opportunity to clearly explain the arc of the course, from beginning to end. In addition, course schedules or calendars help students to develop time management skills. Some instructors choose to build a few catch-up days or times for review into the course schedule. Doing so provides the opportunity to offer, for instance, more background lectures if you find that your students would benefit from them, or time for a discussion that warranted more time.

Consider how to format it for your students. You can choose from a number of formats to distribute your syllabus – from a traditional

Syllabus Checklist: Does your syllabus contain . . . ?

- Course title, abbreviation, semester, year
- Instructor and TA names
- Office locations, phone numbers, hours
- Web site address, when appropriate
- Texts, materials, reserve readings
- Course objectives
- Criteria for the final grade
- Attendance policy
- Late assignment policy
- Your policy with respect to the Honor Pledge
- Resources for extra help
- Assignments, course calendar
paper copy or electronic file, to the Interactive Syllabus (iSyllabus) feature in Collab, U.Va.’s Course Management System, to displaying it on a course website, perhaps using the WordPress plug-in in Collab or other website design software.

Using Collab also allows instructors to create and manage class home pages and set up class e-mail discussion and distribution lists, among other technological teaching tools. At the very least, it is worth familiarizing yourself with it, since you will be required to submit your grades through it.

For more information about Collab, visit: https://collab.itc.virginia.edu/portal
To learn how to set up an iSyllabus: https://collab.itc.virginia.edu/docs/iSyllabus.pdf

Sharing Teaching

Working with TAs
Graduate student teaching assistants are normally responsible for the discussion sections, lab courses, and grading that often accompany large lecture courses (see also “Specific TA Concerns”). If you are a faculty member preparing a TA-assisted course, you will find it beneficial to clarify your assistants’ roles and responsibilities with them at the beginning of the semester. At the time of this Handbook’s most recent revision, TAs are usually responsible for discussion sections or labs, each of which contain between 15-40 students. For up-to-date information on policies, see the College and Graduate School of Arts and Sciences website: http://artsandsciences.virginia.edu/facultystaff/index.html

Typically, TAs evaluate student work and participation in those sections, and the final student grade includes a portion from the TA-led section that is proportionate to the amount of learning they do therein. If you have more than one assistant, ensuring consistent standards within the course helps both the TAs and undergraduates. Here are a few suggestions that may make your teaching team more enjoyable and effective:

Assemble the team early. If possible, make sure the department schedules the TAs for your course well in advance. Although TAs do not always need to know the precise details of their assignment (i.e., their precise section times), everyone benefits from knowing which course they will be teaching, and with whom. Many TAs find it helpful to review the syllabus, order books, and meet with the instructor ahead of time so that they are familiar with the material and the instructor by the first day of class.

Meet regularly. Many instructors hold regular meetings (once every two weeks is a good rule of thumb) with all TAs to preview upcoming lectures, key concepts covered, or assignments, and to discuss any concerns or difficulties the TAs are experiencing in the classroom. Many also integrate TAs’ work with their own by eliciting their ideas and keeping tabs on how well students seem to be learning in class.

Consider appointing a head TA. If you have more than two or three sections, find out from your department whether it is possible to appoint someone to oversee day-to-day administrative tasks such as monitoring changing enrollment figures early in the semester, establishing exam-writing committees, and organizing staff meetings. Head TAs normally receive compensation for this extra work, with release time from normal teaching loads or additional salary. See the College and Graduate School of Arts and Sciences policy website for updated information: https://policy.itc.virginia.edu/policy/policydisplay?id=PROV-001

Balance oversight with freedom. Aim for coherence throughout the course sections without stifling your TAs’ imagination and enthusiasm. Consciously decide how much leeway to give TAs in their discussion sections. On the one hand, students in separate sections are in the same course and should receive a
similar learning experience. On the other hand, graduate students specializing in the discipline appreciate some flexibility. Giving them some independence also affords these soon-to-be professors a chance to develop their own teaching goals and practices.

**Calibrate evaluation standards.** Discuss sample assignments with TAs, and establish grading and commenting policies. Standardizing the evaluation of student learning does much to reduce undergraduate student anxiety about being graded as well as concerns about being graded fairly. For complex assignments, consider creating a shared grading rubric. For more information on grading with rubrics, see the TRC publication [here](#): 

In addition to using grading rubrics, scheduling a grading session with your TAs to evaluate a few sample student responses to the first assignment can help clarify and calibrate expectations and standards. Photocopy half a dozen papers or essay exams, read and evaluate them simultaneously, and compare your notes. By discussing specific cases, you will be more likely to evaluate student learning in similar ways.

**Observe and offer feedback on their teaching.** Sit in on each TA’s section at least once and discuss the TA’s teaching individually. Keep in mind, however, that nearly everyone becomes nervous when supervised. To reduce that strain, consider taking notes about what happens during class without adding your own evaluative component. With those descriptive notes in hand, you can help the TA see what works best and improve where necessary. Most importantly, explain the exact observation procedure to your TAs and seek their suggestions. The Teaching Resource Center faculty and graduate consultants are available to videotape teaching for self-analysis, and for in-class observations (see “Analyzing and Improving Your Teaching”).

**Promote collegial observations.** Encourage TAs to observe each other’s classes, and give them guidelines for doing so. You will find some ideas in the consultations section of “Analyzing and Improving Your Teaching.”

**Maintain a united front.** Support your TAs in their teaching and grading whenever possible. If students have questions or grade complaints, require students to consult their TA and then the head TA, where applicable, before speaking to you. Speaking with the TA about such cases before meeting with a concerned student may give you important background information that will help you make well-informed decisions about each case. In cases where you believe reviewing the assignment is warranted, many instructors find it useful to let students know that they will re-evaluate the student’s assignment on the condition that the instructor cannot guarantee that the assignment will earn the same grade the TA believes it has earned—the assignment may be evaluated similarly, higher, or lower than the TA has evaluated it. This risk often dissuades undergraduates who earned an A- and would like an A, for example, from asking you to review their assignment.

**All in all, consider yourself a mentor to your TAs.** Thoughtfully decide what they can learn from you about scholarship and teaching within your field and profession. If possible, offer your TAs the opportunity to guest lecture, respond to their ideas about the course throughout the semester, and ask for their reactions to a draft of your syllabus or assignment before you finalize it. By involving TAs in creating and directing a course, you offer them opportunities for practical experience that will benefit their current and future careers.
Working with Graders
Graders are typically graduate students who do not have close interactions with the undergraduates whose work they are evaluating. This situation brings its own set of difficulties and can lead to an increased number of undergraduates protesting the grades assigned to their work. To help your graders evaluate your students' work responsibly and to reduce complaints by standardizing course grading, consider integrating graders into your course as much as possible:

Decide whether graders need to attend your lectures. In most cases, instructors request that graders attend at least some of the classes for the course.

Tell your students who their graders are and how to reach them. Students who can discuss how their work was evaluated are more likely to have a positive response to the course.

Participate in assessing each assignment by reviewing the assignments with graders before students submit their work. You may also consider reviewing the first submitted assignment with graders before they begin grading. Grade a few papers as a group and compare your reactions and grades. Recommend that graders comment and correct in pencil so that the differences between their changes and yours (perhaps inevitable at first) will not be obvious to students. In addition, be sure to clarify how the grading will be divided between you and your graders and who will assign the final grade.

Support your graders and their grading decisions as you would your TAs (see above).

Teaching as a Team
Teaching a course or parts of a course with a colleague can benefit both instructors and students. By watching each other in the classroom and analyzing course progress, instructors learn new teaching strategies, gain new insights on their disciplines, or student interactions, and experience a renewed sense of collegiality. Students have the benefit of two experts who may sometimes disagree, the opportunity to learn from different teaching styles, and, in many cases, the excitement of an interdisciplinary approach. To team-teach successfully, work in tandem as much as possible:

- Design the syllabus together.
- Decide how to distribute the teaching load—by topic, by alternating sessions, or some other method.
- If one colleague teaches only a few classes, decide how you will inform students that they are equally responsible for material presented by each instructor.
- Decide how you will settle differences of opinion. If you disagree about a student’s grade on the final exam, for instance, do you negotiate a resolution or does one of you have the final say?
- Consider evaluating student assignments independently, and consulting each other about final grades on common assignments.
- Consult with the department chair to ascertain how the course load will count for each of you. One solution has proved successful for two professors teaching one three-hour course on a regular basis: each year, in an alternating pattern, the course counts as a three-hour course for one instructor and an overload for the other. On the other hand, suppose a three-hour course is divided into two lectures and discussion sections each week. Then instructors who equally team-teach two lectures and two discussion sections per week can each be said to teach the equivalent of a three-hour course.
- Divide your responsibilities in advance (and
preferably in writing to avoid future confusion). The following questions may stimulate your thinking about your responsibilities:

- Who orders the books?
- Who coordinates with TAs, if any?
- Who guarantees that handouts or new web documents are prepared?
- Who should students see for a conference or complaint?
- Which class meetings will both instructors attend? To benefit from team teaching, most instructors participate in as many of the colleague’s classes as possible.
- Who submits the final grade sheet?

Administration

Scheduling a Course

Decide whether your course should meet three times a week for 50-minute sessions, twice a week for 75-minute sessions, or once a week for 2 ½ hours. Your department administrators will appreciate flexible requests, as classroom space is limited.

The Student Information System (SIS) is used by students and faculty advisors to plan each semester’s course schedule, and lists each course by department. These listings include course title and abbreviation, course schedule number, section number, credit hours, scheduled time, location, instructor’s name, maximum enrollment, and pre-registration enrollment. In addition to requesting information for SIS, the administrative staff in your department may ask you for information to update your departmental website each semester. To verify accuracy, always check your course listings as soon as the information appears in the SIS.

Locate the Student Information System (SIS) here: http://www.virginia.edu/integratedsystem/sis

For a more user-friendly version of the course offerings, see Professor Lou Bloomfield’s elegant work-around (“Lou’s List”) here: http://rabi.phys.virginia.edu/mySIS/CS2/index.php

Ordering Textbooks and Supplies

To have textbooks available for your students, you must order them ahead of time. Examine possible textbooks early. Consider visiting textbook exhibits at professional meetings, consulting with colleagues, and visiting websites at other institutions to discover the materials they have found most useful. Most publishers will send you free examination copies (see below). Even so, learn what potential textbooks will cost; you may elect to put books on reserve that are particularly expensive or that students will not be required to read in full. To help reduce student costs, U.Va. also offers a textbook rental program and began a limited e-book pilot in 2012. See the U.Va. Bookstore’s website for updated information: http://uvabookstores.com/site_textbook_faculty.asp?

Ordering deadlines. Bookstores’ ordering deadlines ensure sufficient time to acquire used books from U.Va. students and wholesalers, to determine availability of texts ordered, and to process and to receive orders. Standard deadlines apply to supplies such as engineering tools, electronic components, dissecting instruments, and art supplies: April 1 for summer school; May 1 for fall semester (allowing time to buy back students’ used books during exams); and November 1 for spring semester. Usually, the general merchandising department of the bookstore can assemble customized packages of supplies if you like. Call the Bookstore for updated deadline information: 1-800-759-4667.

If you must send in a last-minute request, expect delays: delivery can take two to three weeks from some publishers during the peak months of August and January and books can go out-of-stock when demand exceeds production estimates. Also, some companies (albeit minor ones) insist on pre-payment before shipping books, resulting in additional delays of one to
two weeks.

**Enrollment estimates.** When ordering texts, try to estimate enrollment as accurately as possible. Bookstore personnel determine likely enrollment by considering your estimate, course pre-enrollment figures for undergraduate courses, sales history for courses previously offered, and the availability of used texts on Grounds. If you know your course enrollment will be substantially greater than in the past (because, for example, more graduate students were admitted or major/minor requirements were changed), it is helpful to explain the situation on your requisition form.

**Availability of books.** A few days before classes begin, check bookstore shelves to be sure all of your ordered books have arrived. Because of over-enrollment, about ten to fifteen percent of orders request an insufficient quantity of books. Bookstore staff will reorder books only when you ask. Reorders are shipped at regular UPS rates unless you request delivery via airmail; if you do, these charges will be added to the cost of the book.

**Desk and examination copies.** Instructors can request desk or examination copies of books for a course. These two differ: You can request a desk copy for use during the course if you are the lead instructor or TA. To receive desk copies, you may need to write directly to the publisher on your department letterhead; such requests usually receive prompt attention. One other option is to request them on your textbook order to the U.Va. Bookstore. Desk copies can only be sent to your department. If you need one in a hurry, the U.Va. Bookstore will loan you or a TA a desk copy from the shelves. In this case, ask the publisher for a replacement copy immediately. All loaned books must be returned, replaced, or purchased.

Instructors can request a desk copy for use during the course if they are the lead instructor or TA. To receive desk copies, you may need to write directly to the publisher on your department letterhead; such requests usually receive prompt attention. One other option is to request them on your textbook order to the U.Va. Bookstore. Desk copies can only be sent to your department. If you need one in a hurry, the U.Va. Bookstore will loan you or a TA a desk copy from the shelves. In this case, ask the publisher for a replacement copy immediately. All loaned books must be returned, replaced, or purchased.

If you are considering a book for a future course, you can instead request an examination copy. Request an examination copy only of books you seriously think you might use in an upcoming course, as some companies ask for return of or payment for books not adopted.

**Creating Course Packets**

When no textbook is appropriate for your course, you may compile a course-specific packet. You may choose to work with U.Va. Printing and Copying Services (PCS) or an outside business, like The Copy Shop or Brillig Books, to make a hard-copy collection. Students can purchase course packets directly from the copy service. Course packets can benefit students by avoiding the expense of purchasing several books from which only a portion of reading will be assigned in the course. See the PCS website for updated information:

http://www.virginia.edu/uvaprint/

Alternatively, where appropriate, you may choose to place course materials, such as journal articles, book chapters, or homework solutions, on Collab (http://collab.virginia.edu). You may have course readings scanned electronically by the library as PDF files, which students can then access and print through Collab:

http://www2.lib.virginia.edu/faculty/course_materials.html

The library has instructions for getting your Collab site set up and ready to receive electronic course materials, as well as information about the University’s policy on copying copyrighted materials, and the web form for submitting requests to the library for materials to be placed on Collab. See:

http://www.lib.virginia.edu/reserve/instructfac.html/

The following tips may help you to make sure your packet is useful, affordable, and available when your students need it:

**Shop around.** The cost of paper packets can vary. Some local printing services do everything but select your readings, including gathering sources at libraries and obtaining copyright permissions; others do not, but offer more inexpensive packets. Find the route that best fits your and your students’ needs.
Provide a table of contents. Students are much more likely to keep packets that they find easy to navigate.

Be creative about your packet’s contents. In addition to readings, consider including study guides, graphs, computer-generated information, lecture notes, and practice exams. Try not to include more text than students need. Include only the necessary five pages from a twenty-page chapter, for example, thus saving money and expediting copyright matters. Less than one-tenth of a text can often be reproduced without royalty fees.

Provide the copy center with originals whenever possible. Their printers can normally do any required reducing or enlarging.

Give your originals and secured copyright permission (if needed) to the printer at least two weeks before you need the packets. Printing services typically require approximately seven to ten days to reproduce materials with no copyright delays. When you ask the printing service to secure copyright permission, packet preparation may take more than a month. Keep in mind that permission fees are normally added to the students’ cost of the packet.

If you can’t submit all of your course materials early but would like the service to obtain permissions, first send the printers a complete table of contents. For each source include title, authors’ names, edition, volume, issue, and page numbers, and the copyright holder’s name and address.

Placing Materials on Reserve
Most University libraries can reserve books, articles, videotapes, and other materials for your course for use throughout the semester, and request forms can be found on the library webpages. You can place library materials and/or your own materials. Reserve items are kept in a central location for students to use in the library or outside of the library (as you designate), for a limited period of time (usually between two hours and two days).

By using the reserve service, you avoid unnecessary photocopying and make available to everyone optional books and popular books some students might otherwise check out for the entire semester. Individual libraries have different specific reserve policies.

Technology and Classroom Space
When planning your course, consider integrating multimedia such as films, slides, video recordings, video and audiotapes. Such diverse media can intrigue and motivate if used effectively (for ideas, see “Lecture Courses” and “Laboratory Teaching”). Of course, choosing a multimedia approach requires reserving appropriate equipment or classrooms. See the following websites for updated information:

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For success with equipment, consider these tips:
- Increasingly, many classrooms come
equipped with a range of technology; however, this is not standard in all rooms. If your course will require special equipment, such as a screen, LCD projector, or computer, or even such things as moveable desks, or a seminar table, be sure your departmental facilities coordinator includes your needs in the departmental request for classrooms (usually submitted the preceding semester). If you find yourself in a room that lacks a necessary piece of equipment, request that your facilities coordinator order it for you or request to move to a room more appropriately equipped.

- If a room change proves difficult or you need special equipment regularly, you can often reserve it for the entire semester.

- Be sure you know how to operate the equipment you reserve; ITS staff will be happy to teach you if you set up an appointment before your class begins.

- Pick up the equipment well before class to set it up and make sure it works. Preview and cue the media to its appropriate starting points in advance.

- Remember that once you have equipment, you are responsible for its safety; in many cases, you will need to sign an acceptance of liability. Never leave equipment unattended, and be especially careful when taking equipment on and off elevators.

### Plan the First Day

- Plan the first day, thinking about your discipline and why students should be interested in it.

- Visit the assigned room ahead of time to visualize you and your students in it; consider how you would like to arrange (if possible) the furniture.

- Decide what you want to learn about your students and how best to discover it—through small group discussions, individual conversations, information sheets, or games?

- For specific ideas, see Magnan, 1989, or Teaching Tips articles on the TRC website.

- Plan to arrive early to talk with students before class to put everyone at ease, and meet them person-to-person, not teacher-to-student. The better you know your students, and the more comfortable they feel with you, the more easily you can communicate with them.

- Prepare, as appropriate, a short lecture, discussion questions to raise students’ awareness, or a quick review of information from the previous course in a sequence. If possible, link your topic to students’ daily lives; how a recent news event relates to your history course or why the language

### Teaching the First Day of Class

It’s your first teaching position and you’ve got butterflies in your stomach. Or maybe you’ve been teaching for years, and you’ve still got butterflies. They come because you care about what you’re doing—not to mention the thrill of performing before a group. In fact, the first day of a course is exciting and anxiety-provoking for almost everyone. How do you take advantage of that excitement, inspire your students, and reduce anxiety? One sure way is to consider carefully how you will begin. Many instructors spend the first day discussing course requirements and then end class early. Such a beginning doesn’t convey to your students why they should become excited about your course, or why you spend most of your waking hours studying this discipline. Neither does it communicate how you teach or how you’ll approach the subject matter. Here are some techniques to get your course off to a productive and stimulating start:
you teach appears in American advertisements.

- Be ready to summarize and answer questions about the syllabus and course requirements (see “Preparing a Course”).

Teach the First Day
Consider the following plan for the first day:

Arrive early. Distribute or write on the board the course title and number and your name as you’d like to be called. If possible, arrange the chairs in an appropriate configuration (a semi-circle, for example).

Get to know your students and tell them something about yourself, your research interests, and your background. Learning everyone’s name can be a challenge for a large enrollment course, but learning as many as you can will help you build rapport with your class. The following strategies can help in a variety of contexts:

- Memorize names from the class list before the first day; in class, correlate faces with names.

- Solicit proper pronunciations and nicknames of your students’ names. Use and learn as many names as possible—go ahead and make mistakes!

- Encourage students to learn and use each other’s names.

- Have students complete an information card with name, email address, phone number, previous study in your discipline, reasons for taking your course, hobbies, and any other appropriate information.

- Request a one-page self-description due the next class; you’ll be surprised at what they write and will see how much students want teachers to know them.

- If you find it hard to learn names or have a large course, ask students to create name tents to put on their desks. Since people tend to sit in the same places, you might find it helpful to make a seating chart.

SIX WAYS TO HANDLE NERVOUSNESS

Practice
Although practice may not make perfect, rehearsing aloud several times before the real thing will make you feel more confident, especially if you practice under conditions as close to the actual situation as possible. Do at least one dry run in front of an audience, even if just a friend or spouse.

Concentrate on the Ideas
Concentrate on your ideas, not on your own nervousness. Even timid people speak up when it’s something they care about. Think about your audience’s needs, not your own.

Make a Strong Start
You’ll be the most nervous at the beginning of the talk; starting with an easy to remember introduction will relax you and the audience.

Visualize
Rehearse your presentation by visualizing how it will go. Imagine what you’d like to say, how you’d like to say it, and a positive response from the audience. Many athletes use a similar approach by imagining an entire dive or jump, in detail, before they actually do it.

Use Presentation Tools Effectively
Particularly if you have lots of technical information to cover, it can be reassuring to have some of it already prepared on power-point slides or in an outline on the board.

Assume a Confident Attitude
To a large extent, you can control your own reaction to sweaty palms or a beating heart. Tell yourself you’re “psyched,” not nervous. Remember that to an audience nervousness can seem like dynamism or energy. Your attitude can shape what the audience thinks.
- Take photos or ask permission to have a helper take photos during class.

- Study information sheets between meeting times, and use them to recall participants’ names as they arrive and contribute in class.

**Teach a real class the first day.** Start on time, and use the allotted time, sending a clear message that you take the course seriously. Show why your discipline is exciting; involve students with the course material from the moment you meet.

**Ask for students’ questions and concerns.**

**Encourage engagement in the course by involving students with the syllabus, rather than simply “going over” it.** Ask them to discuss their expectations of the course. Ask them to read the syllabus and write three questions they have. Or ask them to discuss with a peer what seems most interesting or challenging about the course.

**Show what kind of an instructor you are.** Research suggests students most appreciate a teacher’s enthusiasm, willingness to make the course worthwhile, objectivity (what students often call “fairness”), and a sympathetic attitude toward their problems (McKeachie, 2006). The first day is a good time to begin demonstrating these characteristics to your students.
INTERACTING WITH STUDENTS

Teaching the Whole Student

If you were to list the adults who have been most influential in your life, most likely several teachers would be near the top: teachers at all levels who taught you to think and motivated you to keep thinking, who helped you define and redefine yourself and the world, who taught you as a “whole student.” This handbook section aims to help you become not just a teacher of a subject or a disseminator of information, but also a teacher of people—whole, complex people.

First, recognize that you influence your students, not just in terms of grades and future endeavors, but also with respect to their attitudes towards learning, and perceptions of themselves, their families, and the world. The college years are particularly salient in developing one’s adult attitudes and perceptions (see, for example, Perry, 1985; Pascarella et al., 2005). Consider what perspectives you bring to the classroom, and how your convictions are communicated to students, directly or indirectly.

Second, respect students’ differing formulations and positions, which may contrast with yours or those of their classmates. Even though encouraging students to adopt a specific theoretical perspective is a legitimate course objective, it is also important to help students understand critical debates, alternative interpretations and perspectives, and to present supporting evidence accordingly. Help students understand why you hold a given position, and feel free to challenge their positions. In addition, encourage students to ask questions and respectfully challenge your perspective. Students are more likely to embrace a position they formulate than one they feel has been imposed on them.

Third, motivate students to enjoy learning beyond what they need to know for the course. Motivation is a complex phenomenon that has received much empirical attention (For a review of the details, see chapter 3 of Ambrose, 2010). Psychological studies classifying motivation as intrinsic (internal, self-defined, rewarding in and of itself) or extrinsic (contingent on external reinforcement) have shown that superior performance and deep learning are more closely associated with intrinsic motivation. The grading required by our current educational system means many students focus on such extrinsic motivators to the exclusion of internal motivators. (Hence, the frequently heard question, “Will this be on the test?”) We can help balance extrinsic and intrinsic motivations by avoiding an over-emphasis on grades and test performance. One way to avoid an over-emphasis on grades is to ask students to take a more active role in learning (for example, having them lead a specific discussion or give a presentation). Doing so has been shown to increase students’ motivation to learn, regardless of the way in which the students have been evaluated, if at all, during such activities. In addition, being excited about what we teach and helping students find ways to make connections between our discipline, their lives, and the real world also tends to increase their motivation to learn.

Finally, recognize that even when you don’t know your students well (in large lectures, for instance), students feel as though they know you. As they attend your presentations each week, they see how you think and feel about

The essence of teaching lies in the living relationship between the teacher and the student. By teaching history, I strive to enable students to see that the people they study were, in fact, real, thoughtful, emotional people who were attempting to build a life. By teaching people, I hope to help them envision alternative futures for themselves individually and for us collectively.

--Jenny Morsman, History

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yourself and your discipline, and even how you feel about them in a corporate sense. When students perceive you as approachable, many take steps to help you know them better. Fostering this interaction can help you become a better teacher, because it allows you to become more familiar with your audience’s assumptions and interests, and to invest in their learning more deeply.

**Learning Styles**
The theory that different students have different styles of learning – for example, that one student might learn material best by seeing it, while another student would better learn the same material by hearing it – is one of the most powerful and widespread ideas to come out of brain research in the twentieth-century (see Byrd et al., 1989). Unfortunately, researchers have not found consistent evidence to support this theory (Willingham 2009, Coffield et al. 2004).

Although this does mean that such theories should not inform our teaching choices, it does not mean that you shouldn’t vary the ways in which you present material: some information is best learned visually, while some is best learned kinesthetically, depending on the type of information being conveyed. Two obvious examples: If you are teaching about rhythm and rhyme, listening to a song or recited poem will enhance student learning, whereas if you are teaching about texture and form, presenting students with a painting to consider would be more useful. In addition, changing the timing, topic, or pitch of your lectures will help keep students interested and attentive (see McAllister 1997, 2009). In each cases, the mode most relevant to learning the material, rather than individual students’ learning “styles,” should guide your decisions. When it comes to how they think and learn, students are more alike than different.

**Unprepared or Distracted Students**
You may find that students sometimes exhibit a lack of preparation, habitual tardiness, talking or texting during class, inattention, and so on. Whatever the trouble, confront it immediately.

- Privately, tell the student involved that you find the behavior problematic or distracting. Sometimes students do not realize that you are aware of their behavior; if that is the case, merely mentioning it to them can curb subsequent occurrences.

- Describe the behavior from your point of view, being sure to describe it objectively. Avoid labeling the student or stating a rule without explaining your rationale: for instance, say, “I’ve noticed that you’ve arrived every day five to ten minutes late for the past week,” rather than, “It is irresponsible to come to class late.” Or, “I’ve noticed that your laptop use seems to distract students around you,” rather than “Laptops are not allowed in my classroom.”

- Ask for the student’s perspective and listen to the response; students may be truly surprised that certain conduct bothers you, or they may have an understandable reason for that conduct. Try to avoid jumping to conclusions.

Usually when you address problems directly and clearly articulate your concerns, students change their behavior accordingly. Merely hoping a problem will go away is the surest way to prolong it—and raise your blood pressure. If you find yourself in a quandary or if you feel that students are purposely trying to offend you, consult with your supervisor, a colleague, or a TRC staff member. What you deem offensive (for instance, feet on a chair, eating during class, or texting) may not be consciously insolent behavior. Today, American eighteen-year-old students have a generally informal attitude about class attendance, sometimes confusing teachers from different regions of the US, different countries of origin, generations, or social backgrounds.

**Communicating with Students**
Sometimes you and your students will misunderstand each other. Try to recognize
puzzling comments and questions, and respond immediately:

- If you realize that you don’t understand a student’s comment or question, be honest and say, “I’m sorry, I don’t understand. Could you please repeat (or rephrase) your remark / question?” Or ask whether another student can rephrase; sometimes you’re not the only one who doesn’t understand. Take the time to find out what the student is trying to say.

- If you don’t know the answer to a question, be honest (and earn students’ respect). If the answer is factual, find it before the next class meeting. If it requires further thought, you might ask students to prepare proposed solutions for the next meeting.

- If a question or comment is tangential, irrelevant or inappropriate, offer to discuss it after class. If the question is loosely related to the topic, you might offer to address it at the end of class, time permitting. Irrelevant or inappropriate questions are best addressed after class, when you can try to discover what provoked the question or comment.

- If students do not understand what you are saying, whether because of your accent, or vocabulary unfamiliar to them, try clarifying your point with one of these techniques:
  - Rephrase the information.
  - Use examples or analogies that might relate to students’ experiences.
  - Write on the board or screen, or act something out.
  - Ask specific questions to discover the source of the misunderstanding.
  - If misunderstanding happens more than a few times, ask a friend, colleague, or TRC staff member to watch you teach or videotape your class so you can analyze classroom interactions together (see “Analyzing and Improving Your Teaching”).

- Finally, at times you may not know whether your students comprehend what you are saying. Students don’t often admit a lack of understanding nor do they respond when you ask if everything is clear. But bewilderment often manifests itself in body language. Look for puzzled expressions, lack of responses, and students talking with each other.

- Make sure you allot plenty of time and opportunities for students’ questions, and invite them to speak in a way that suggests confusion may be reasonable, saying, for example, “This is an important but difficult concept. I want to be sure everyone understands its complexity. What questions do you have for me about it?”

- At the conclusion of important class segments, pause and look around the room to allow students enough time to formulate questions. You may also consider using an appropriate classroom assessment technique to gauge students’ understanding, such as a one-minute paper (see “Evaluating Students’ Learning”).

**Hostile or Harassing Students**

Occasionally you may encounter a hostile or aggressive student whose behavior affects the entire class dynamic. This can be particularly problematic for those new to teaching. While you may feel tempted to tolerate distressing behavior in order to create an open environment for discussion, do not ignore the situation. Allowing hostile behavior to continue can create an uncomfortable classroom environment that inhibits others from speaking openly. Such behavior includes vulgar or abusive language, sexist and racist remarks, persistent and
conscious lack of respect, or questioning of your authority.

Inform the Office of the Dean of Students (924-7133) when a student behaves in any way inappropriately. In addition, you can take suitable steps to control the situation, either at that moment during class or in private. In class, you can help students rephrase remarks to express their ideas without hindering discussion or invite the class to examine a controversial topic from different theoretical perspectives, including what’s at stake, and for whom, in each (“Let’s list the different claims and evidence people with differing perspectives on this issue might voice and how our readings help us understand them.”) Encourage other students to respond while continuing to direct the discussion; never allow a debate to escalate beyond control. In the classroom, you might diffuse a particularly tense moment by inviting students to reflect on the topic in a brief writing exercise. In private, you can often be more direct, telling the student that his or her behavior has made some students uncomfortable in class. Finally, particularly if your course involves sensitive topics, you can emphasize at the beginning of a course that it is important to be aware of others’ experiences and to frame their comments accordingly.

Besides the first degree of eminence in science, a professor with us must be of sober and correct morals and habits, having the talent of communicating and peaceable temper. The latter is all important for the harmony of the institution.

--- Thomas Jefferson, letter to Dugald Stewart, April 26, 1824

Professionalism

Professional conduct involves many qualities that we assume you already practice: honesty, fairness, respect for students, dependability, maturity, and so on. But it also requires certain actions specific to the academic setting.

Discretion

Discretion and good judgment must come into play in your relationship with your department, colleagues, and supervisor or chairperson. Be circumspect in your public comments about your department and colleagues. Students frequently ask which TA is the best in the next course in the sequence or which faculty member is the most interesting or sympathetic. Fight the urge to confide in your students, but do tell them the facts: for instance, the instructor’s area of specialization or amount of experience. Of course, honest and positive comments are always welcome.

You may not always agree with departmental or course policies or the textbook chosen in a multi-section course; when you have strong feelings, work to change matters rather than complaining to your students. If, as a TA, you believe you should have more input in decisions that affect you, work through your departmental graduate student representatives to make improvements. If, as a faculty member, you believe a departmental committee has set an inappropriate requirement, talk with the chair of the committee rather than complaining to students or colleagues.

Confidentiality

In a similar manner, information about your students’ work and your evaluation of it should be kept between you, the student, and, when appropriate, the student’s academic dean or advisor. Since students can now gain access to their grades electronically, do not post them publicly. And, although it can be immensely helpful to discuss individual students’ situations with colleagues, keep the student’s name in confidence and discuss only the events, your reactions to them, or questions about them. This also applies to information that may come to you regarding a student who is experiencing personal difficulties. In all cases, maintain confidentiality while steering students toward finding the help they need. The following
sections offer advice on negotiating this delicate balance.

Defining Your Role as a Teacher

Along with confidentiality and discretion, professionalism means the ability to juggle several roles: instructor, scholar/student, administrator, advisor, colleague, supervisor, mentor, protégé. Combining roles can be especially difficult for TAs who add the responsibilities of instructor or grader to their graduate student status, and for beginning assistant professors who teach graduate students shortly after having been one themselves.

If you find yourself in either position (or if you have the benefit of looking younger than you are), avoid inadvertently setting yourself up for difficulties by dressing like, behaving like, or socializing with your students. Sometimes such behavior stems from an effort to be friendly or from a certain insecurity about this new role (“What, me teach? What do I know?”). In any case, acting like your students or trying to be too familiar with them may undermine your authority for the entire semester. The closer in age to your students you are or appear to be, the more you should avoid students’ habits and dress. Dressing even more professionally than older faculty will go a long way toward making you feel professional, and students will accept the University’s inherent endorsement of you as an authority figure.

The question of teacher-student relationships becomes even more troublesome when it involves the possibilities of friendship or dating. Sometimes TAs or faculty members wish to develop personal relationships that can create a conflict of interest. If an instructor were to develop a friendship or romantic involvement with a student outside of class, not only would the roles of teacher and evaluator be jeopardized, but the other students might feel that the instructor could no longer be impartial. Depending on the specific circumstances, the student could assume sexual harassment despite the instructor’s best intentions. Such relationships fall under the University’s Conflict of Interest policy and are to be avoided. (See Appendix II for policy web sites.) If you find yourself desiring to know one of your students more personally, wait until the semester ends and grades have been submitted.

Similarly, you may find that you have potentially problematic ties with a student in your class: for instance, someone from your hometown or a student who contested a grade in a former course. Most likely you are the best person to judge whether a problem may arise in the future. If it seems likely, and if the course has multiple sections, arrange for the student to transfer. If that proves impossible, be sure your students know that you grade work with identities masked, hiding names, as suggested in the section on evaluating students’ work. You might also ask a colleague to confirm your assessment of the work of that student and of several others.

Teaching a Diverse Student Body

Our student body is made up of a diverse group of graduate and undergraduate students from a wide variety of ethnic, racial, educational, familial, experiential, gendered, and cultural backgrounds. These include significant numbers of African American, Asian and Asian American, Latina and Latino, international, and LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender, and queer) students and community scholars. In addition, although students within a particular group, either a majority or minority, may have a
common racial, ethnic, or cultural identity, their experiences and backgrounds differ in many ways. U.Va. students exhibit a diversity of attitudes, perceptions, and opinions about themselves and the world.

For those students who are identified, either by themselves or by others, as being part of a minority group, that identification may have a strong impact on the classroom dynamic and the identified students’ education. Students identified as minorities frequently speak of feeling isolated or in the spotlight. When they feel this way in a class in which they are underrepresented, their perceptions may affect their ability to learn. The TRC’s Teaching a Diverse Student Body offers many practical ideas about how you can work toward creating a classroom climate conducive to learning for all of your students. Here are a few brief tips:

- Treat all students as individuals regardless of what you might identify as the “group” to which they belong. Resist making assumptions and generalizations about an individual’s experience or point of view, even if you would be doing so out of good intentions to be aware and sensitive to your students’ situations. Be sure to avoid drawing conclusions about students based on your perception of their physical appearance.

- Make efforts to ensure that you treat students, inside and outside of class, equitably and fairly. Pay attention to your body language and the types of interactions you have with your students. For example, if you chat informally with some students after class, be sure you provide the same opportunity for informal contact with other student(s) who do not approach you at that time. In addition, encourage students to visit you during office hours to foster good student/teacher relationships.

- Create a climate that encourages dialogue by allowing a wide range of opinions to emerge in a non-intimidating environment. Encourage students to express themselves freely, and appropriately.

- Vary the kinds of people or relationships you use in examples, whether anecdotal or visual. Avoid stereotypes.

- During discussions, do not spotlight underrepresented students by expecting them to articulate “the minority perspective” or by calling on them particularly when topics involve underrepresented populations. Establish a fair way to involve all students in discussions.

- In large lecture classes, notice where your students sit, and be sure not to overlook underrepresented students when establishing eye contact and asking students to participate.

- Assign class projects and design study groups to involve underrepresented students in groups, so that students do not self-select in consistent ways. Although it may be helpful to allow students to select their own groups in the beginning of the semester so that they become comfortable in the classroom, by the middle or end of the semester you can assign students to groups in ways that expand their intellectual communities.

- If you are a member of an underrepresented population, be aware that students’ perceptions and/or expectations of you may be stereotyped or unreasonable. Model the behavior that you wish them to emulate: expect them to respect you as an individual, as you in turn respect their individuality.

**Students with Difficulties**

Students may come to you with personal as well as academic difficulties. In these situations, know your limits; you are (most likely) not a trained psychologist, and you should not assume
a counselor’s role and responsibilities. You can, however, be a concerned teacher and provide a referral when professional assistance is warranted. You may even consider walking with them to the Counseling and Psychological Services Center (CAPS). If you are unsure about how to help, contact CAPS for ideas (http://www.virginia.edu/studenthealth/caps.html). No matter what type of difficulty the student is experiencing—academic, personal, substance abuse-related, or otherwise—you may reaffirm your concern for the student by following up to see whether the problem has been addressed.

Academic Difficulties
One of our most challenging yet satisfying jobs as teachers involves helping students succeed in learning a subject even when they have substantial academic difficulties. When students approach you (or when you approach them) with concerns about their learning in the course, first identify the scope of the problem. Is the student having difficulty in your course alone or in other courses as well? Does the student have problems with your course in general or only with specific aspects of your course? For example, does the student do well on tests, but write unsatisfactory papers? Once you identify the boundaries of the problem, take appropriate steps such as those outlined below.

If the student is having difficulty in several classes, make sure the student is in contact with the appropriate academic advisor and association dean (for College students). If you are equipped to help directly, consider these ideas:

- Has the student taken on too much? For example, too many credit hours, too many extracurricular activities, too demanding a job? If so, help the student identify something to put on hold or eliminate. Suggest effective time management or stress reduction strategies (see “Time Management”).

If the student is having trouble in your course in particular:

- Work with the student individually for at least half an hour, asking specific questions about material covered recently and not so recently. Ask probing questions about how and when the student studies and what parts of the course are most difficult. Look for signs of emotional distress or a specific learning disability (see “Teaching Students with Disabilities”), and if appropriate refer the student to CAPS or the Learning Needs and Evaluation Center (LNEC; http://www.virginia.edu/studenthealth/lnec.html).

- Ascertain whether the student has adequate background in the subject or should be enrolled in a prerequisite or lower-level course.

- If the student has trouble solving problems, try to discover the source(s) of the difficulty, even though simply having the solution may seem to be the student’s goal. Students have trouble solving problems for a variety of reasons; if your course involves much problem solving, familiarize yourself with the sources and types of problem-solving errors listed in the table.

- If the student’s difficulties emerge primarily

I ask my students to open their minds, believe that they are capable of not just solving physics problems, but of developing the skills to face any challenge presented to them in life. I encourage them to set high standards for themselves, to reach goals beyond their furthest expectations. I advocate that it isn’t super-intelligence that one requires, but the willingness to train one’s mind to think effectively.
on tests, look for a pattern in the incorrect items. Are they mostly from the reading, the lecture, or discussion or lab section? Do errors appear in multiple-choice items or essays? Does the student repeatedly run out of time? Use test results and students’ past activities in class to redirect your methodology, your directions, or your explanations when necessary.

- If responses to course reading are problematic, ask to see the student’s textbook; if in-class information has been misunderstood, check class notes. Do the student’s highlighting and/or note-taking indicate awareness of what information is essential and what is peripheral?

- If multiple-choice questions are troublesome, make sure the student is reading all of the items and can distinguish among distractors.

- If essays are the problem, can the student identify major themes and relate them to each other and to broader issues? If not, you can help the student develop these skills by soliciting a two- or three-sentence description of themes following each lecture, discussion, or reading assignment.

- If a student always runs out of time, he or she may not have sufficient command of the material to summarize facts quickly, may previously have been rewarded for verbosity rather than conciseness, or may have a learning disability that slows processing time. If, during your conversation, you find that the student grasps the subject matter, contemplate the possibility of a specific processing problem (see “Teaching Students with Disabilities”). If the student’s test accurately displays what the student knows about the subject, show how they can improve their understanding or provide sample answers that present necessary information concisely.

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Sources and Types of Errors in Problem Solving

Inaccurate reading. The student:
- reads without concentrating on meaning.
- skips unfamiliar words.
- loses some facts or ideas.
- doesn’t reread a difficult section.
- starts to work the problem before reading all the material.

Inaccurate thinking. The student:
- doesn’t value accuracy above speed or ease of completing the work.
- doesn’t take enough care in performing some operations.
- interprets words or performs operations inconsistently.
- doesn’t check or review unfamiliar or unclear procedures.
- works too rapidly.
- draws conclusions without sufficient thought.

Analyzes problems poorly. The student:
- doesn’t divide a complex problem into parts; doesn’t use the simpler parts to understand the harder ones.
- doesn’t use prior knowledge and experience to make sense of unclear ideas.
- doesn’t use the dictionary when necessary.
- doesn’t construct a useful representation of ideas on paper when necessary.

Lacks perseverance. The student:
- lacks confidence and gives up easily.
- chooses an answer after only superficially considering the problem.
- solves the problem mechanically, without much thought.
- reasons through part of the problem and jumps to a conclusion about the rest.
- tries one way to solve the problem and gives up if that one doesn’t work.
If the student’s difficulties emerge primarily on writing assignments, investigate whether the student has misunderstood the assignment or needs more help with writing and research. Ask for a description of the assignment in the student’s own words. If the student can write well but doesn’t understand your expectations, evaluate your instructions. If, for example, you expect a logical argument rather than a just descriptive claim, explicitly state, “This assignment requires a logical argument,” and explain what a logical argument involves (a clarification that is often necessary in lower-level courses). Many students do not automatically transfer skills learned in writing classes to other disciplines, and may need help understanding that writing lessons about argumentation or supporting evidence that are learned in one course general apply in others, with slight variations.

If the student has not misunderstood the assignment, try to determine whether the difficulties pertain to research, organization, or grammatical skills. A student with poor research skills may not know where to find material, how to cite sources appropriately, or how much material is sufficient. A student who has problems with organization may not know how to develop an idea, what types of questions to ask, or what constitutes adequate support or refutation. To help, require outlines of papers before final drafts, and recommend the Writing Center or a writing course.

If you are dissatisfied with students’ class participation, explore possible reasons for it with them privately. Most often they will tell you: they are shy, they don’t like to discuss, or perhaps their cultural heritage discourages such activity. For instance, in some cultures, it would be considered rude to meet the eyes of an authority figure or to offer contradictory perspectives in class. Your teaching style may also inadvertently put off some students. For example, a non-confrontational style of interaction can offend those who interpret a blanket acceptance of their comments as an insult, believing that a quality comment warrants a counter-comment. Similarly, others may hesitate to risk potential humiliation from a teacher who employs a more confrontational approach. You may find it useful to examine your teaching persona and style; the TRC offers videotape analysis and in-class observations, which may be particularly helpful for this purpose. You may request a consultation through the TRC’s website: http://trc.virginia.edu/Consultations/Consultation_Request.htm

When students routinely do not participate, ask them individually how you can help. Some students speak comfortably in class when called upon, when giving a scheduled presentation, or when reading something they’ve written, but hesitate to speak more spontaneously. If developing students’ skills related to oral communication are part of your goals for the course or if such skills may be useful for individual students’ future careers (for business/marketing majors, for instance), help your students practice them.

If oral communication skills are not essential, encourage students to be active in class in other ways: for example, by submitting potential discussion topics a few days prior to class or by preparing for classmates a written summary of the pros and cons of a controversial topic. Students who approach you about this problem are generally eager to find solutions.

In any of these cases, referring the student to the Learning Needs and Evaluation Center for help may be appropriate. If in doubt, call LNEC (243-5180) for assistance.

Personal Difficulties
Students who solicit your help with personal
difficulties do so because they trust you and believe that you care enough to listen. Often, good listening is sufficient to help students work toward their own solutions. Here are some tips to help you be an effective listener while still maintaining an appropriate teacher-student relationship:

Clarify your role as instructor, not counselor. Whenever students or teachers disclose personal information, role conflicts may occur. If the student sees you as an authority figure, you may feel obliged to give advice, advice that may be unwanted or not in the student’s best interest. If the student sees you as a peer, you might find it difficult to act objectively as a teacher/evaluator.

Don’t pry. Let the student decide how much to reveal about any given problem.

Clarify the concerns. After the student has described the problem, rephrase the main aspects of the situation, helping the student define her or his own primary concerns.

Offer support. Often rephrasing the emotions the student has expressed (explicitly or implicitly) is enough to let the student feel heard, understood, and supported: for example, “So you are feeling betrayed by your roommate?” Other situations merit more explicit expressions of your regard for the student and your perceptions of the student’s competence.

Help the student generate potential courses of action and select possible solutions. When a student seems unable to generate plausible solutions, suggest some as a model, but do not assume responsibility for choosing a solution. Remember that the student must arrive at his or her own solution to truly resolve the problem.

Be sensitive about referrals. To some people, the suggestion that they see a professional counselor is stigmatizing. Demystify the process by emphasizing that recognizing one’s need for help is a sign of strength, not weakness, and by explaining that many people seek counseling. If a student seems ambivalent about making an appointment, simplify the procedure by writing down the phone number of the Office of the Dean of Students, Counseling and Psychological Services, or the Learning Needs and Evaluation Center, or by telephoning yourself for basic information.

Sexual Harassment or Assault

Many male, female, and intersex students are victims of sexual abuse and harassment. Although you will not always foresee when a topic will touch on a sensitive subject, it is important to be aware that a student’s unduly emotional reaction to seemingly innocuous classroom discussions can be a sign of past traumatic experiences.

A student who has experienced significant trauma, whether more or less recently, may seek you out for advice and/or support. Although, as noted above, you are probably not qualified as a counselor in such situations, you can have a significant impact as a listener or referral source. The following are a few suggestions for handling such delicate situations:

- In the cases of sexual harassment and/or assault, reassure the student that the University has a policy prohibiting sexual assault and/or harassment and that the victim’s wishes about how to handle the situation will be taken into account. The Equal Opportunity Programs Office or the Sexual and Domestic Violence Services (http://womenscenter.virginia.edu/sdvs.php) can provide detailed information about how to file a complaint either on or off Grounds. Filing a formal complaint will allow the University to take action against the perpetrator, if appropriate, and can protect others from experiencing the same behavior.

- Express your willingness to listen non-judgmentally and assist in any way you can.

- Determine whether immediate action needs to be taken; does the student feel in danger?
Is medical attention necessary? This is a priority if the assault was recent.

- Listen without suggesting explanations or providing excuses. Instead, validate feelings. You may consider saying: “It must be hard to talk about. . .”
- Avoid making decisions even if the student seems confused. Ask questions about what he or she would like to have done. In the case of harassment, suggest steps the student can take to make it clear that the behavior is unwelcome and that it should stop. Be flexible and supportive if work or class performance has been affected.

- Follow up to see if the situation persists or has been repeated.

Substance Abuse Problems
Alcohol or drug abuse can seriously affect students’ academic progress as well as their personal well-being. As an instructor interested in educating the entire person, you have an important role to play if you suspect that a student has a substance abuse problem. You can help that student receive crucial assistance and support.

How do you know that one of your students needs help with a substance abuse problem? Although a student’s roommate or friend might approach you, most likely the student’s classroom behavior will alert you to abuse if you know the signals and pay attention to them. “Red flags” include tardiness, multiple absences, inconsistent performance, talk of substance use or abuse in class, overreaction in ambiguous situations, and behavior that is grandiose, aggressive, belligerent, or passive and withdrawn. If you suspect that a student is abusing a controlled substance, you should do the following:

- Become knowledgeable by contacting the Gordie Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (http://www.virginia.edu/case/) and help the student’s roommates and friends who have approached you become knowledgeable too.

- Don’t assume that someone else will act. Others may be thinking the same thing. Moreover, the student may need to be confronted several times before recognizing or admitting a problem.

- If you confront a student, be nonjudgmental but persistent. Stick to observable facts and show you care. Use “I” statements rather than “you” statements: say, “I am concerned about you,” not “you are ruining your life.”

- Never “enable” by giving extensions, allowing make-up tests, or sparing the student the consequences of the abuse.

- In the unlikely event that a student approaches you to discuss a substance abuse problem, make a referral. Encourage a visit to either Student Health or the Counseling and Psychological Service Center (CAPS).

Discussing Alcohol with Students
In recent years the University has taken steps to reduce the prevalence of abusive drinking on Grounds, including initiating the Gordie Center for Substance Abuse Prevention. However, the problem is in part perpetuated by a nation-wide college tradition and culture that condones
excessive drinking habits. As a faculty member or teaching assistant, you can foster responsible attitudes toward alcohol use and avoid inadvertently enabling the “drinking culture” through your own behavior and language. Here are some suggestions:

- Whenever possible, encourage student participation in activities in the Charlottesville/Albemarle area that are not alcohol-related.

- Suggest meetings at coffeehouses on the Corner (University Avenue) rather than in bars.

- Bear in mind that even casual remarks, such as that all students are “party animals,” can serve to normalize alcohol use by reinforcing the misperception that “everyone drinks anyhow.” Not every student engages in excessive or risky drinking behavior, and a significant minority of students do not drink at all. Blanket statements dismissing students as irresponsible drinkers support those who are irresponsible and alienate those who use alcohol in moderation or not at all.

- In the classroom, use serious situations as teachable moments, incorporating alcohol-related issues into the class discussion when appropriate. Active debate allows students to explore and evaluate their own attitudes toward alcohol use. At the same time, stress that alcohol is a drug and the consequences of misusing it are often harmful.

### Teaching Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities at the University constitute a population as diverse as the total student body. Even though students with disabilities are as intelligent and academically prepared as other students at U.Va., they also have special needs that may require your knowledge and understanding as well as the support of the Learning Needs and Evaluation Center (LNEC; [http://www.virginia.edu/studenthealth/lnec.html](http://www.virginia.edu/studenthealth/lnec.html)). Disabilities include those related to chronic health conditions (for example, diabetes, HIV positive, or sickle cell anemia), neurological conditions (such as seizure disorders and head injuries), and specific learning disabilities (for instance, dysgraphia, dyslexia, or dyslogia). Some students have psychiatric disorders or emotional problems resulting from childhood sexual abuse, arrested addictions, and biochemical imbalances. And some students may have vision or hearing deficits or mobility impairments, including temporary impairments due to injuries.

### Constraints

Simply managing any disability drains students of time and energy, and their health routines are critically important. Disabilities also interfere with daily living skills. Some students with disabilities cannot take notes while trying to listen; others cannot read at a rate commensurate with their general intelligence. Still others have great difficulty simply getting work on paper (trouble with hand-eye coordination, apraxia, arthritis, or prostheses). The same problems you see in class sometimes mean that students repeatedly get lost or cannot drive because they cannot coordinate information from several senses quickly enough. Students with disabilities may have low self-concepts or feel socially isolated. And, of course, students with disabilities also encounter other student difficulties: perfectionism, pressures associated with family expectations, family responsibilities, and so on.

Reading what sounds like a litany of problems may provoke in you one of the common reactions to disabilities. These reactions are important to recognize if only to spot them among your non-disabled students. Some people feel awkward or flustered when they are near a person with a physical disability: “Should I open the door, or would that be condescending?” Others feel an overwhelming sense of pity and a need to take care of the person. Fear is another...
common reaction, including the irrational fear of the same disability affecting you. Still others suspect that people with disabilities are receiving “special breaks” and aren’t pulling their own weight. Dealing with such negative feelings and attitudes can be a significant added difficulty for people with disabilities.

Feelings of discomfort and prejudice toward people with disabilities may be diminished, however, when people get to know others as individuals. The section below explains how you can offer students with disabilities reasonable accommodations designed not to give them an unfair advantage, but to level the playing field as much as possible. For more details, see the TRC handbook entitled *Teaching a Diverse Student Body*; [http://trc.virginia.edu/Publications/Diversity/Diversity.htm](http://trc.virginia.edu/Publications/Diversity/Diversity.htm).

**Accommodations**

Given a documented diagnosed disability (with information from the student’s academic dean and/or the LNEC), you may need to provide accommodations by individualizing your instruction or by changing course requirements. Normally, the LNEC will suggest accommodations that are appropriate for the student’s disability. Although not all accommodations or techniques will work for every individual, here are some time-tested recommendations:

- Encourage your students to let you know of any disability right away. You are not responsible for making accommodations for a student when the student does not make you aware of her disability or claims to have a disability that you cannot verify.

- If a student with a physical disability takes your course, be sure that your classroom is accessible and comfortable for a person using a wheelchair or other transportation device. If a classroom change is necessary, the student’s dean should let you know.

- Hearing-impaired people who read lips lose out if you turn away from them. Make an effort to face students and speak distinctly. Men with beards are especially difficult to understand. If an interpreter accompanies the student, speak directly to the student, not to the interpreter.

- Make written information available in another format for a blind student. For example, read aloud what you’re writing on the board or narrate demonstrations. Be sure to repeat important information.

- Some disabilities cause erratic class attendance, which may be offset if the student can obtain class notes or tape recordings of classes. If irregular participation precludes a student’s completion of the course, consult with the student’s dean.

- Sometimes students cannot meet due dates because of a disability. Negotiate reasonable schedules for completing work and record the schedules for all parties involved. When timed quizzes and exams present problems, consider sensible alternatives. In courses like accounting, however, where time is a defensible standard because of professional or licensure expectations, any student must meet the time standard in order to succeed in the course. Extending a course into a second semester has been allowed and may be an option.

- Interpersonal problems can result from neurological impairments. A student with short-term memory deficits may report never having received a particular instruction. When you know of short-term auditory deficits, make sure the student receives all expectations in writing.

- A student with perceptual deficits may not process an event as others do, may miss the main point in reading, may write an excellent response to a question quite unlike
the one asked, or may make an irrelevant discussion contribution. The LNEC can help you with discovering whether such behavior is due to a disability and can provide reader services and/or social training for such students.

- A learning disability often means that a student learns better in some ways than in others. Some students think very well but have trouble with rote tasks. Others do poorly in lecture classes until they complete enough hands-on labs to understand concepts thoroughly. Some cannot visualize well and need someone else to draw for them until they learn compensatory skills. Others cannot easily interpret visual material and must either go through a lengthy language translation to interpret graphs and charts or depend on someone else to interpret it for her. Consider it a challenge to find new ways to help such students master your course material, and refer to LNEC staff for assistance.

- Students with disabilities sometimes need individualized test formats. Some students cannot perceive the author’s intent in multiple-choice items but may be able to argue for and against each possible yet incorrect answer. Others have difficulty finding words to fill in blanks but can give the necessary answers in an open-ended format. Others have extensive problems organizing written language.

Experience has shown that students with disabilities are among the most industrious and motivated U.Va. students and that they complete degrees more dependably than do students in general, although some take longer than average to finish. With reasonable understanding and accommodation on your part, these students meet degree standards, enter professions, and succeed in graduate and professional programs.

**Academic / Social Calendars**

Plan and conduct your course with the expectation that students will be present and attentive at all classes. Still, be prepared for the impact of some social events and other academic deadlines on students’ lives (schedules are available from the office of your dean).

**Academic Schedule**

*Orientation.* Students accepted into the University of Virginia attend a Summer Orientation for two days and one night prior to their arrival in late August, and then attend a multi-day Fall Orientation. During the Summer Program, students and their parents learn about the academic and social life at the University. Students are able to receive academic advising, enroll in fall courses, familiarize themselves with Grounds, and learn what it means to be a member of the University community while also taking care of many details like getting a student ID card and email account. There is an optional Parents’ Orientation program that includes information about intellectual life at the University, student life issues, and parenting a University student. After completing Summer Orientation, students return in the fall with a greater sense of confidence and familiarity with life at the University of Virginia.

During the Fall Orientation program, students are able to meet with faculty members and attend academic sessions that will prepare them for life in the classroom. They can attend a University-wide lecture presented by a distinguished faculty member and interact with their faculty advisers and other faculty members from their respective schools during a number of formal and informal sessions. There are also numerous opportunities for students to meet fellow classmates. The entire first year is filled with events that help students become acclimated to life at the University, and the Summer and Fall Orientation programs help to begin that process.
Add / Drop. In most departments, students may change courses or sections through the University Student Information System (SIS) either online or by telephone during the first two weeks of the semester. You can also get enrollment information through Collab (https://collab.itc.virginia.edu). In any case, the registrar’s “official” class list becomes available about four weeks into the semester.

Expect your class to be in a state of flux for as long as two weeks. Combat this confusion by distributing the syllabus and course requirements to all students who enter your class during this two-week period, and consider asking new students to stay a few minutes late one day at the close of the add/drop period so you can review requirements. Even if this material is on your syllabus and/or course website, students will understand and remember it better if you discuss it with them. After the add/drop period has ended, compare your new class rosters with the names of students attending, and alert students to any discrepancies.

Deadlines. Know semester deadlines for administrative procedures, such as students’ changing the grading option from graded to credit/no credit or vice versa, and dropping or withdrawing from a course. Remember that students follow the rules of their home College or School, not yours. For example, your Engineering (SEAS) students may have deadlines that are different from those of your College of Arts and Sciences (CLAS) students. (For policy web sites, see Appendix II.) Although students are expected to know these rules, they don’t always remember the details; if you do, you will be able to avoid endorsing a student’s inappropriate petition. (For details about some CLAS rules, see Appendix IV.)

Advising and pre-registration. The advising and pre-registration period occurs within the last three weeks of each semester. Advising is an essential part of teaching; know how to answer questions about the next course in a sequence, the “best” teachers, or their optimal course choices (see “Professionalism”). Because even unofficial advising can be time-consuming, you may want to avoid assigning lengthy papers or tests that you will need to grade at this time.

Final exams and grades. The scheduled day and time for your course exams can be found through the registrar’s website:
http://www.virginia.edu/registrar/exams.html

Do not change the official exam period; include the exam day, time, and place on your syllabus, announcing that students must plan to depart after the exams. In most schools, exam times for individual students cannot be changed without good reason and the academic dean’s approval. Final grades are due to the registrar’s office within 48 hours after your exam ends. For details about giving grades of incomplete (IN) or withdrawal (W), consult the Undergraduate Record (see Appendix II for policy web sites).

Slumps. While certainly not official academic periods, seemingly cyclical and predictable slumps deplete some students’ energy levels: for example, we tend to see more lively and industrious students in September than in January. Thus a successful first-semester activity may need extra sprucing up to elicit the same excitement in the second semester. Similarly, long rainy spells or wintry weather in the spring can dampen students’ enthusiasm, and some fourth-year students seem to slump with “senioritis” during the entire school year. While you cannot always prevent such declines in energy and may feel them yourself, consider these slump seasons when you design your courses.

Social Events
The social aspects of an undergraduate’s person-
al development during college are important. As an instructor, however, you must uphold the rigor of your course and maintain your announced policies. Know about major U.Va. social events such as rush, pledging, and Foxfield (explained below), but remember that social development is no excuse for inadequate academic performance. Students who choose to place their social lives above academic progress must live with the consequences of that choice.

**Fraternities and sororities.** During the first month of the spring semester, fraternities and sororities hold parties almost every night for a period of three weeks. During this “rush” period, individual students decide whether to join a specific fraternity or sorority, and the Greek organizations select new members. A highly stressful, time-consuming period for many students, rush seems to some more important than academic pursuits.

Following rush, students who have received and accepted bids (invitations) to join a Greek organization become “pledges.” Pledging activities serve as initiation rites, in which these students often perform a variety of activities at all hours of the day and night. Like rush parties, pledging can leave students too exhausted to concentrate and sometimes renders them physically unable to attend class. Although it may be tempting to take pity on students who have missed class “through no fault of their own,” let such students know that they face the same consequences as any student who misses a test, deadline, or a class meeting when attendance counts towards the grade.

If you have problems with students because of rush events, you can discover the name of the appropriate faculty advisor by contacting:

**The Inter-Sorority Council**
http://www.student.virginia.edu/~isc-uva/

**The Inter-Fraternity Council**
http://www.student.virginia.edu/~ifcouncl/

**Foxfield.** The Foxfield horse races, held once each fall and spring, form an important part of many undergraduates’ social calendars, as they generally require extensive planning and shopping for formal attire and tail-gate party provisions. Foxfield frequently occurs during the rush period and may easily overlap with a football weekend in the fall. Some instructors find that not scheduling a major due date on the following Monday reduces conflict and stress for students.

Throughout the year, planned and unplanned public events may affect students in unprecedented ways—local, national and international current events may prompt political activism, personal distress, or other passionate responses. Being aware of public events that may provoke strong reactions and sensitive to students’ feelings about them can be helpful. Prominent current issues related to your course material can also make effective case studies, lecture examples or discussion lead-ins. To keep abreast of what’s happening on Grounds, consult the student paper, *The Cavalier Daily*: http://www.cavalierdaily.com

**Writing Letters of Recommendation**

Early in your career, you may be surprised the first time a student asks you to write a letter of recommendation. Be assured that your academic career has prepared you for this task. A letter of recommendation functions like a short argumentative essay, complete with a central claim about the student and supporting evidence; you can prepare and write it much as you would construct any paper in which you persuade your reader of a stated position. Here are some tips:

- First, before agreeing to write a letter, approach the situation with the same standard of honesty that you would insist on for a published paper. This means that for some students you don’t feel you can say much or say much that is superlative. So don’t. Politely and honestly refuse as soon as you have decided, suggesting that the
student make the request of someone else. Say, “I’m sorry, I don’t feel as though I can write a letter that would facilitate your acceptance.” It is unfair and unethical to agree to write a positive letter and then write a lukewarm or negative one instead.

- Clarify the assignment. Ask the student for detailed information about the desired position or academic program, as well as for a stamped, addressed envelope. If possible, read the application guidelines to learn exactly how the request for recommendations is worded and when it is due. Some program guidelines request information about the applicant’s character; others emphasize the applicant’s academic performance. If you are unfamiliar with the letter format, ask colleagues for anonymous copies of their letters or stop by the TRC for a sample and additional “how-to” guides. Follow the recommended length; if none is specified, limit yourself to no more than one to one-and-a-half single-spaced pages.

- Research thoroughly by asking the student for all relevant academic records, copies of successful papers, and lists of honors, internships, volunteer work, extra-curricular activities, and career goals. You want to hear anything that will help you know the student or remind you about your previous relationship. Meet with or interview any student you don’t know very well, paying special attention to social skills and personality. Be sure to ask for suggestions about what to include in the letter; the answer will give you more insights and may focus the letter for you. If necessary, ask colleagues about their experiences with the student.

- Outline significant, main claims about the student to organize the body paragraphs, and support each with specific examples: for example, “Latasha’s thirst for knowledge will make her a coveted prospective graduate student for your department. I once found her working in the lab after midnight; she said that she’d been about to fall asleep when she’d come up with a hypothesis she just had to test.”

- Interpret objective data. Not all 3.8 GPAs are equivalent. Some students make these grades in honors’ courses, others by stacking their schedules with easier courses. Comment on the student’s overall academic career to contextualize their achievement.

- Be precise in your interpretation: “Mohammed was fifth in a class of 103” tells the recipient much more than, “Phil is an excellent student.”

- Go beyond the objective data. Letter recipients probably already have objective measures of the student’s capabilities and look to you for the subjective, anecdotal information not reflected in a transcript. In particular, they seek an evaluation of the student’s personal virtues: Is the student organized, trustworthy, persistent, and/or thorough? Particularly gifted in social skills, written or oral communication, or analytical thinking? Mature, with the sense of humor necessary for the job? Some positions require particular personal qualities and letter recipients will be scanning letters for these. Make your student memorable to the reader.

- If you have a particular respect or even fondness for the student, express this: for example, “I think back to the day Maria begged me to let her into my overcrowded class—I’d do it in an instant now,” or “Jung tries to learn something from everyone, even from those with whom he disagrees. In this way I would like to be more like him.”

- Note reasons for discrepancies in the student’s performance if they arise from extenuating circumstances (e.g., a prolonged illness or a death in the family).
• Save a copy of your letter. This way, you can rapidly update it should the student need a new letter.

• Meet the deadline and let the student know when the letter has been sent. If you cannot or find that you have forgotten to do so, notify both the student and the recipient of the letter. Normally, admission committees and future employers are sympathetic when contacted by the recommender.

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**Checklist for Recommendation Letters**

**Preparing to write:** Do I have...?

- the request for recommendations (including a stamped, addressed envelope, and due date)?
- the student’s academic records (including transcripts and SAT scores, with percentile ranking)?
- a sample of the student’s writing?
- a list of the student’s extracurricular activities, honors, internships and past employment, and long-term goals, including interest in the specified position?
- if necessary, opinions from colleagues who also know this student?

**Writing the letter:** Have I...?

- interpreted the student’s objective records?
- provided a precise quantitative description of the student’s capabilities relative to those of other students?
- described the student’s personal virtues, particularly as they relate to the position sought?
- provided anecdotal information that will make the student memorable?
- conveyed my genuine respect or liking for the student?
- addressed discrepancies in the student’s record?
TYPICAL TEACHING SITUATIONS

The type of teaching that will work best for you and your students depends on a complex combination of factors: the requirements of your discipline, your personality, your goals, the class size, the instructional materials you choose, and the responses of your students, including their diverse levels of intellectual development and work ethic. In this chapter, we begin with brief summaries of research on students’ cognitive development, which will help you consider the later sections focused on various teaching methods, including lecturing, discussion-leading, teaching with case studies, and teaching in a laboratory or a foreign language.

For the sake of clarity, we have written most of these sections as though you would be teaching the entire course using the described method, but you can effectively mix methodologies. We encourage you to experiment: Add mini-lectures to a discussion of historical documents to offer new perspectives or useful background information; ask students to solve problems in teams or on your website during class; or have students analyze a case study in a discussion session rather than analyzing primary texts. You might invite students to share ideas or work on a shared task in groups during a lecture, even one with a hundred students. Varying your techniques will motivate and interest students, promote development of their critical thinking skills, and help you remain excited about teaching and learning in the classroom.

For whatever combination of methods you choose, considering the following will help you make deliberate choices about the course in ways that will make your teaching and student learning easier and more robust: When first designing a course, consider your goals for the course, how you will assess whether those goals have been achieved, and how you will offer students opportunities to practice their skills in order to achieve the goals. Then, when you begin considering course material in more detail, you may want to consult with experienced colleagues about which and how many readings and other media will help students engage with the material. Though it may be difficult, be prepared to condense topics that warrant years of research in order to clearly and simply illuminate the whole subject for students. As the semester goes on, note any problems and necessary modifications to your course design, so that you can improve for next time. If you need to make alterations to the syllabus in response to students’ learning needs, be sure to explain to students why you are doing so.

Promoting Students’ Intellectual Growth
How often have you heard these kinds of student comments? (adapted from Perry, 1985):

- “We’ve talked about three theories of the economic cycle, but we haven’t focused in on the right one? Why doesn’t she just tell us which one to know and forget these games? How can we study for the exam?”
- “You said three to five pages. Does that mean four? Double-spaced or single?”
- “Everyone has a right to her own opinion.”

These perspectives are common to many young adults who may believe knowledge is an
absolute quantity or that learning means memorizing and restating the exact “facts” given to them by an authority. Because these attitudes are normal stages of cognitive development, faculty members, instructors, and TAs need to know how to help students move to higher levels of understanding and to graduate as people who reflect thoughtfully and think critically about the world around them.

Understanding Students’ Perspectives

“Critical thinking” has become a buzzword during recent decades, but it is also an incredibly useful concept for teachers. Critical thinking refers to those advanced cognitive processes through which people unearth and question their assumptions, as well as rationally respond to questions that cannot be answered definitively or exhaustively – responses that integrate all relevant, available information to justify conclusions (Kurfiss, 1988, p. 2; see also Paul and Elder, 2006 and 2010 and Brookfield, 2011). People who think critically recognize that little in the world is fully known, and that we need to continually learn as we make reasoned judgments. You can encourage your students to progress to this level of cognitive and ethical development by taking into consideration their different understandings of knowledge. Through hundreds of interviews over many years in several different contexts, cognitive psychologists have documented young people’s development through different stages, or levels, of understanding what constitutes knowledge (see especially Perry, 1970, 1981; Belenky et al., 1986; Ambrose et al., 2010). Kurfiss summarizes some of that research this way (1988, pp. 52-56):

Stage 1: Knowledge as facts. Many students believe that knowledge is a collection of discrete facts that one simply has to acquire from the professor or text and restate on papers and exams. They see the professor as an authority who should give them the right answers. For such students, the concept of interpretation is puzzling, and they have limited awareness of the complexity of the world. Factual knowledge is, of course, essential for understanding, and background knowledge is a building block of critical thinking (see Ambrose et al., 2010, chapter 1; Willingham, 2006, chapter 2). But as instructors, we usually want to help our students move beyond this first phase.

Stage 2: Knowledge as opinion. Students progress to this level when they have been convinced by the presence of conflicting theories, perspectives, and interpretations that one cannot always know what is correct. But since they have not yet moved to a position from which they can truly understand the reasons behind the different points of view, they attribute them solely to personal opinions, all of which they see as equal. These students believe that giving one’s opinion is enough and that teachers have no right to call the student “incorrect” on these matters of “opinion” (Perry, 1970, p. 97).

Stage 3: Knowledge as reason. At this stage, students realize that there are reasons why some opinions are better than others in certain contexts, and that people use logic within and evidence to support their arguments. Here, the student realizes that “you’ve got to have some facts under the opinion, I guess” (Perry, 1981, p. 86).

Regardless of the course level, I expect students to have opinions, to think and learn independently, and to take an active role in defining their work.

—Cassandra Fraser, Chemistry

Stage 4: Knowledge as commitment. At this final stage, individuals recognize the complexity and uncertainty of knowledge while nevertheless realizing their need to commit to reasoned positions. Perry’s imaginary student sums up this stage this way: “I must be wholehearted while tentative, fight for my values yet respect others, believe my deepest values right yet be ready to learn” (1981, p. 79). As Belenky and her colleagues explain: “Once
knowers assume the general relativity of knowledge, that their frame of reference matters and that they can construct and reconstruct frames of reference, they feel responsible for examining, questioning, and developing the systems that they will use for constructing knowledge” (Belenky et al., 1986, pp. 138-39). In the end, critical thinkers continually question received knowledge and their own assumptions, approaching life with a spirit of inquiry.

Cognitive development research can provide useful background for understanding critical thinking. Even though we may have different understandings of what critical thinking entails in our own individual disciplines, we can generally agree on several aspects of that skill. Critical thinking:

- requires open-mindedness
- proceeds from a sense of curiosity or inquiry
- is self-reflective, recognizing the need to continually examine one’s own assumptions
- takes evidence into account
- is logical, or ordered
- is purposeful
- is tenacious, persevering in asking questions and seeking answers
- is not averse to taking risks
- allows one to develop a clear argument meant to persuade
- requires effort

Giving students insight into how you and your colleagues think critically about your discipline can help broaden their outlook on knowledge and develop their own critical thinking skills.

**Teaching Students to Think Critically**

So, how can you help your students develop such habits of mind as to make them reflective, engaged, critical citizens? First, recognize that you do not bear this responsibility alone; advisors, academic deans, and students’ peers (many of whom are at different stages of cognitive development) engage your students in situations that provoke growth. When students resist such growth, remember that intellectual development is usually unsettling to some degree. Since some students resist and/or are angered by activities that invite them to question their assumptions and previous understandings, explicitly describing the purpose of such exercises is helpful. It may also be helpful to share some of your own experiences and frustrations with learning to think critically. Consider how to incorporate some of the recommended activities below, or create your own (for more ideas, see “Further Reading”).

- Encourage students’ interest and their awareness of complexity by highlighting problems, issues, and topics that experts wonder about themselves. By showing them that all is not known, and that even experts disagree, you invite students to engage their minds; their own questions usually open up new avenues of thought that are most compelling to them (Meyers 1986).

- Design assignments that require students to argue for positions that are not their own. Students who have difficulty understanding others’ positions will gain new understanding. Students who are cautiously considering embracing a position can “try it on” without assuming the responsibility inherent in actual commitment.

- Create activities that enable students to juxtapose their current model of understanding with a more sophisticated one. For instance, students who have
learned an Aristotelian view of the universe will not replace it with a more accurate model until they see their own theory fail. For an example, see the Harvard video documentary, *A Private Universe*, 1987, here: http://www.learner.org/resources/series28.html?pop=yes&pid=9#

- Emphasize that although critical thinking sometimes results in dramatic change, such change is not inherent to the process. This is often the most unnerving and intimidating misconception students have about critical thinking. It is true that sometimes, when we think critically about an assumption we hold, we may realize it is inaccurate or flawed and that we need to alter our understanding. But it also happens quite frequently that, after thinking critically about an idea, we come to an even stronger commitment to that same idea than we had before. In both cases, critical thinking is occurring.

- Model the critical thinking process. Brookfield (2011) reports that students find modeling to be one of the most helpful ways of learning how to think critically. It is also the most ethically responsible approach: we shouldn’t expect our students to unearth and challenge their assumptions, which is often frightening, if we aren’t also willing to do it too. For example, you might describe how you modified your position on an issue, emphasizing changes attributable to students’ comments and ideas. Or, you can show students how two scholars interpreted the same subject differently and explain how you reconciled those differences or held them in productive tension. You might also pause in class and ask students to point out the assumptions that you are making in your thinking.

- Remind students that embracing a position does not have to be a lifelong commitment. As they acquire more information, students will inevitably reevaluate and change their positions accordingly. Consider showing students an example of a scholar’s work from early in her career and then an example from later on, after she has revised or even changed her position totally.

- Respect and encourage each student. Recognize that critical thinking may involve more than just cognitive processes. For some students, critical thinking may mean confronting, even abandoning, deeply embedded cultural or familial world views, which can be difficult, even painful. Some students may consider you a role model and seek your support. Students who do not yet trust their own thinking process (and would prefer indisputable external evidence about “truth”) are heartened by the knowledge that someone they respect trusts them to embrace a critically informed position. In contrast, attacking students’ positions may make them cling to biases even more tightly, impeding their learning and intellectual development.

- Identify the general principle behind students’ comments and “mirror” it back to them, giving them a chance to ask, “Is that what I really believe?” and to reconsider: for example, “So you think moral principles differ during war time and peacetime?”

- Create a classroom environment in which students can participate in social learning processes. Brookfield (2011) demonstrates that the best way to learn critical thinking, according to student reports, is through group work. It makes sense: it’s often difficult to see our own assumptions — they seem so natural and obvious to us, after all — but when others reflect them back to us and share their own, often different, perspectives, our assumptions may become more obvious, and more open to questioning. Ask students to list and then compare with each other the pros and cons of an issue. By juxtaposing their ideas with
those of peers, they will better be able to perceive their assumptions and might even begin questioning them (Angelo and Cross, 1993; Brookfield, 2011).

- Show students that writing is, in effect, thinking: that in writing they can clarify and refine their thoughts, describing, justifying, and even qualifying their assumptions for their readers, so as to communicate more effectively with others. For practical tips, see “Conceptualizing and Assigning Papers and Projects” in “Evaluating Students’ Work.”

Whether you define the central issue as one of intellectual growth, reflective habits of the mind, critical thinking, or thinking “like a mathematician, historian, etc.,” you and your courses are essential to helping students achieve an advanced level of understanding and thought. Consciously teaching them how to think about your discipline along with what to know about it will help them develop into more reflective, engaged members of society.

Lecturing

When planning and delivering a lecture-based course, it is important to consider your goals for student learning, to know your discipline both widely and deeply, most particularly to be aware of key concepts and common misconceptions about it, and to determine efficient and effective ways to find out whether students are learning the material. The success of a lecture course depends on the instructor’s ability to identify, organize, and deliver content appropriate to answer a question, help students grapple with that question, and remain sensitive to the students’ particular needs and interests (see Bligh, 2000, pp. 291-296).

Organizing Your Course

Before you begin to write individual lectures, spend some time analyzing your course, both practically and theoretically. The questions below will help you determine your course level goals, which will then help you decide what combination of lecture styles will best achieve those goals: factual, polemical, provocative, integrative, or — most likely — a mixture.

- What learning goals will your lectures help your students to achieve? That is, why lecture?
- What is the goal for each lecture? What do you want students to learn?
- What is the logical sequence of topics for novice learners new to the material? (Keep in mind that often the best sequence may run counter to textbook table of contents or a strict chronology.)
- What common themes, trends, or theoretical frameworks will you emphasize to create coherence?
- How will the lectures relate to the assignments? Will students consult primary sources or learn from specialists who have already interpreted the primary material?
- How should students prepare for, record, and follow up on the lectures?
- How will you help them understand when you are making key points and when you are providing contextual information to help further their understanding?
- What kinds of interactive exercises or group activities will best complement each lecture? Why?
- Will multi-media help you make particular points during the lecture(s). If so, what kinds?
- Will you have discussion sections? How will they complement or supplement the lecture? What kinds of activities will students do in them — closely analyze readings, clarify confusing concepts from the lecture or readings, develop and answer more complex questions about the material, or…? How much direction will you provide TAs leading the sections? If you are a professor working with teaching assistants, see sections “Working with TAs” and “Specific TA Concerns.”
Your syllabus, course schedule, and communication with students about your goals for the course influence your students’ (and TAs’) perceptions of your organization, and may impact how smoothly you progress through the semester.

Clarifying Expectations
It is worthwhile to spend about 15-30 minutes at the start of the semester clarifying your goals and expectations for the course and to reiterate these goals throughout the semester. This will help address any misconceptions about the course early on, so that students know precisely what the course is about and why you have designed it in this way. Discussing with your students what they hope to learn from your class, and how those goals can be reasonably achieved, also encourages students to take responsibility for learning and engage with the course. Because people are more receptive to ideas they generate themselves (see Ambrose et al., 2010, pp. 66-90, on “motivation”), you can create a teachable moment when students are ready to listen by asking a few probing questions about the upcoming course on the first day.

Here are a few examples:
- What do you expect to learn in this course?
- How do you expect this course to expand on the one you just finished?
- Why did you enroll in this course?
- How do you expect this course to prepare you to go on in this or another discipline?

During the ensuing discussion, focus on students’ ideas: you provoke the ideas, hear and acknowledge them, develop them when necessary, write the ideas for all to see, help analyze ways to fulfill them, and respond to them. Compare students’ expectations with yours, and take the time to explain the rationale behind your own objectives. You might even want to modify your planned expectations in light of some thoughtful ideas from your students. If students later complain that there is too much work, you can refer back to this discussion and remind them of what is necessary to achieve the learning goals that they have set out for themselves. (For more details, see Barnett, “On the Same Wave Length?” 1999.)

Knowing Your Audience
Discovering students’ backgrounds. Consider your audience as you organize individual lectures.

- How should students prepare for the lecture? That is, what do you expect them to be familiar with, know or do before each lecture?
- Where might they have questions, misconceptions, or confusions? How can you find this out quickly and efficiently?
- How can you best resolve their misunderstandings and difficulties?

Anticipate what prior knowledge and experiences students will bring to the course and find ways to test your predictions (e.g., an ungraded quiz or classroom activity that reveals what students do and don’t know or think about a topic), so you can compare them to the reality that emerges throughout the semester. At times, this will require flexibility; addressing misconceptions or learning challenges when they arise make it more likely students will learn and, this will help you rapidly learn some reasonable expectations. See “Preparing a Course” and “The First Day of Class” for ideas about learning your students’ backgrounds.

Contrary to stereotype, I think the most entertaining lectures are the most, not the least, disciplined ones... A lecture should be as transparent as possible: clean, not encumbered by a host of qualifications and reservations.

--Edward Ayers, former Professor of History

Responding to students. The best lecturers
interact with their audience, helping students understand that they care about them and their learning.

- Come to class early and leave late; students who might never come to your office hours may feel comfortable talking with you before or after class if you make yourself available. Initiate conversations with students who arrive early.

- To help make your lectures engaging for students, determine whether and how well they are attending to you as you speak. Watch for negative body language (e.g., eyes glazed over, intense laptop focus, whispering, slouching) and for positive reactions (e.g., eye contact, nods of agreement, perplexed eyebrows). Routinely stop to check for comprehension or ask to see student’s notes when they stop by during office hours.

- Ask questions that require students to restate main points and draw conclusions; use rhetorical questions to provoke interest and thinking.

- Use an exercise like the one-minute paper to see exactly what students comprehend (see “Analyzing and Improving your Teaching”).

Preparing students. Your classes will be more effective if students prepare beforehand. Good lecturers motivate students to study by making clear the need for basic understanding and knowledge before the lecture; they don’t simply rehash fundamentals. You can motivate study before class in several ways.

- In your lectures, allude to assigned material to show that you aren’t repeating information and that you expect students to be prepared. These allusions help students make explicit connections between their preparatory work and the focus of the lecture, which typically builds on the reading without duplicating it. Students generally appreciate such clear integration.

- Quizzes demonstrate that you expect preparedness and usually encourage students to prioritize your course; you might choose to drop the scores on one or two to reduce test anxiety.

- A five- or ten-minute essay in which students summarize the day’s reading and, perhaps, give their personal opinion on a particular issue or question helps to check their comprehension (see “Evaluating Students’ Work”).

Preparing and Structuring Each Lecture

Structuring each lecture. Once you have a sense of your students, structure your ideas and main points for each lecture. Have a goal: What two-three new ideas, concepts, or skills should your students leave class with today? It helps many experienced lecturers to think of preparing a lecture as similar to writing a paper: a thesis statement followed by supporting or “branching” ideas, and concluding with a look ahead to the next lecture or assignment. Know, too, that if you make a point only once, many of your students might not hear it, so be sure to build in time for periodic repetition into your lecture. To plan individual lectures, consider questions like these:

Can I briefly summarize my main points and the goal of my lecture? If you can’t, then your students will probably not be able to either. Always try to have a clear sense of the direction of your lecture. A short, annotated outline can
How does this lecture fit into the course overall? Referring to previous lectures and readings and telling students where you’re going helps them to situate a lecture amidst your overall learning goals.

Which details best illustrate my main points, and how can I use them most effectively? At the beginning, you will want to grab the students’ attention in a manner you are comfortable with, perhaps by starting with a key question or paradox, or offering a new idea or a new twist (Lowman, 1984; Bligh, 2000; Race, 2006). You might even try to present a mystery to intrigue your students at the beginning of your lectures (see Cialdini, 2005). To draw students in, try to present your ideas in a way that will seem sensible and relevant to most listeners, but that also require some reflection or reorganization of old ideas. Listeners can often understand deeply if you present material in the context of previous lectures, readings, real-world examples, and, most importantly, their lives.

Is my lecture clear? To make your lecture cohesive, reinforce main points often. In addition, handouts provided in class or on Collab can help students tremendously. By providing basic information, handouts can save students from rapid writing and give them more time to process and think during the lecture: use them to offer skeletal outlines to fill in, thoughtful questions to consider, definitions of key terms, or significant people, dates, and events.

Can my students assimilate what I’m telling them? Because short term memory is limited, be sure to make your key points count, and reiterate them in various ways throughout the lecture: show graphics, use examples and analogies, define terms, tell an anecdote, and/or summarize. Encountering the information in multiple forms or media will help your students remember and eventually learn it.

Will I keep my students’ attention, and how can I help them attend to the most important material? Because attentions wane, you will want to vary your presentation and, when possible, incorporate moments of discussion (Bligh 2000). Remember that the first ten and last five minutes of a lecture are key; emphasize the major concerns at those times. You’re most likely to lose students’ attention in the middle of class; if you have an appropriate anecdote or shocking idea, use it then. One caveat: make sure that the anecdote or idea reinforces the main concept of your lecture. Consider using “change-ups” to hold your students’ attention over the course of an entire class period. The term comes from baseball: by throwing the ball at different speeds, the pitcher keeps batters off-balance but alert. Inserting a change of pace every 15-20 minutes works equally well in the classroom. Design your activity to directly relate to that day’s course material and seek out tasks that will help reinforce the main points that you want students to learn. Most importantly, have a clear idea of what you want your students to do and give explicit instructions about what they should accomplish. After the change-up is completed, talk over the exercise with students in order to confirm what they have discovered and tie it into the day’s main points. For more information and examples of change-up exercises, see McAllister, 1997, and Barnett, “Engaging Students,” 1999; for more information on general ways to engage students, see Barkley, 2009.

During lectures I bring my personal experiences to convey the notion that concepts explored in class are not merely abstract thoughts but can be widely employed to derive basic understanding of natural phenomena.

--José Fuentes, former Professor, Environmental Sciences

Where will I go from here? At the end of the lecture, tie up loose ends and pique students’
interest in the next assignment or lecture.

Writing your lecture. The initial writing process will depend on you: some people feel more comfortable outlining, some brainstorm, and others start at the beginning and write through to the end. As long as your students are learning from your lectures, your system for organizing your thoughts is working.

Whether you begin with phrases or paragraphs, your lecture will be more engaging if you are speaking from notes or an annotated outline rather than reading a manuscript. Listening to anyone read a paper for 50 or 75 minutes is difficult unless the speaker has a fine rhetorical style, powerful eye contact, and brilliantly conceived and clearly stated points. Even then, it can be difficult for an audience to remain engaged. Using notes competently, you can interact with your students, make effective eye contact, and demonstrate your knowledge of and enthusiasm for the subject in a way that connects with your audience.

As for length, you may find it helpful to know that an average rate for reading aloud is 140-160 words per minute. So, even if you were tempted to recite your notes verbatim during a fifty-minute class (again, not recommended), you could cover ten pages of singled-spaced notes at maximum. If, however, you are more effectively speaking from your notes or outline, you will want to allow room for flexibility, to answer student questions or repeat difficult concepts to ensure comprehension. If you run out of time, you probably won’t be able to tie all of the pieces together, and students are likely to lose focus as they gather their belongings and worry about being late to their next class. If you routinely finish too early or too late, consider videotaping yourself to analyze how your actual lecture compares to your plans (see “Analyzing and Improving Your Teaching”).

Delivering Your Lectures
It is just as important to think about delivery of your lectures as it is to gather and organize the content of those lectures. Paradoxically, a wonderfully organized lecture can fall flat from weak delivery, and a fine delivery strengthens a hastily written lecture. Consider how and when to use visual aids (see “Using Visual Aids). Scrutinize your lecturing style by analyzing a videotape of your class or by discussing it with a colleague or TRC staff member who attends and takes notes. In analyzing your lecture technique and in preparing to speak, consider these points:

Eye contact. The best eye contact lasts about five seconds and focuses on specific individuals throughout the audience. Do you seem to be speaking directly to individual students?

Pace. You will want to speak at a speed and rhythm that keeps students’ attention but still allows ample time for students to take notes. Do your students appear interested and comfortable or bored or harried? Do they seem rushed? Is your pace varied or droning?

Tenor of voice. Does your voice convey your enthusiasm for your subject? Is your voice clear? Do you project your voice all the way to students in the back? If you have difficulty analyzing your own voice or changing your vocal patterns, consider a voice workshop sometimes offered through the Teaching Resource Center. (Check the TRC website for announcements: trc.virginia.edu.)

Movement. Often moving around the classroom helps students to stay awake and aware. Do you stand behind a podium during the entire class period or do you shift your location within the room? During your lecture, consider moving around the room and incorporating some physical movement for your students into the lecture, as well.

Visual Images
Visual images can vary your presentation, help clarify your talk, provide analogies to help students connect and remember discrete pieces of information, and, if used well, can also help students begin to understand how we make
sense of visual information in our disciplines. Consider using the board, a document camera, handouts, or a computer to project images in a variety of formats: Power Point slides, hand-drawn figures, graphs, maps, video clips, and other relevant images. By following a few simple tips, you can use visual images to engage students effectively:

Consider carefully what purpose each image will serve:
- Will it simply serve as an illustration or visual interest as a backdrop to your talk?
- Is it a means of interpretation to get students involved analyzing how the images relevant to meaning-making in your field? In this case, you’ll want to be sure to walk students through how to read a graph, map, photograph, or astronomical chart, for example.
- Or, can the image help illuminate a concept or deepen their engagement? Can it, that is, serve as a metaphor for a difficult concept or as a mnemonic device to aid memory? Will it offer some new, surprising insight into the subject?

Plan and prepare your use of visuals ahead of time, and consider using color to highlight important areas or ideas. Before class, make sure your presentation is large and legible by checking from the back of the room; remove any furniture or equipment that could distract students or impede their field of vision.

If you use Power Point (or another presentation program), begin by writing the outline or key information on the board at the beginning of class, so you can refer or add to it as you speak. You can also include an outline in the first slide, but this format is more difficult to refer back to along the way. However you deliver the key points, be sure to pace your presentation so that students can absorb the material and take adequate notes.

As with any presentation, the slides or images should not stand alone. Be sure that any text on a slide is not comprehensive, loaded with dense bullet points, or overwhelming; students should have to listen to you to get the full story.

Actively using slides, movies, and/or video clips can be a great way to engage student learning. When using videos, decide when you will pause and what questions or comments you will use. Tell students why you’re showing the video and preview important points with them. Ask students to perform pertinent tasks during and after the presentation. For instance, can they find the main points or the bias of the documentary? Or, how are various geological formations shown in the film similar?

You can request clips of a video from U.Va.’s Clemons library to use in the classroom. Using their service will save you the time and stress of having to worry about stopping and starting a video. See their website for further detail: http://www2.lib.virginia.edu/clemons/rmc/videoclipservice.html

Be sure to talk to the students, not at your presentation, and to monitor their engagement. Be sure to stay in the students’ view, and consider using a pointer, if necessary, to direct students’ attention.

At the end of the presentation, review quickly, emphasizing important points.

Discussions and Discussion Sections

Even experienced discussion leaders often feel nervous about guiding classroom discussion; every class has a different group dynamic. Leading a discussion can be somewhat like directing actors who step out of character when the dialogue is sensitive, try to steal the show, experience stage fright, arrive late for productions, and sometimes neglect to read the script. The following ideas will help make your discussion-oriented classes or discussion sections a hit.
Setting the Stage for Interaction

The most important aspect of stage setting is relationships, which is crucial because genuine dialogue requires that all participants feel comfortable with one another. While all instructors need to relate to their students, discussion leaders have a unique opportunity and a greater responsibility to foster positive teacher-student relationships and encourage student-student relationships. When participants value, respect, and communicate well with one another, they will feel free to express partially formulated ideas, jointly creating their own learning experiences.

Names are of the utmost importance. Tell students immediately what you prefer to be called and something about yourself (see “The First Day of Class”). Encourage students to learn each others’ names by devoting part of the first class to students’ introducing each other, making name placards (use these for as long as you or the class needs them), or playing a name game in which students identify each other when you’re stumped. Such procedures may seem laborious initially, but they pay off and students appreciate your effort to know them.

Consider students’ individual personalities. When students seem interested but rarely contribute, ask them privately how you can work together to enable increased participation. Some students would rather be called on than try to force their way into a conversation; others need a few moments to think about a question before responding. At the opposite extreme, you can ask students who contribute too much to hold their comments back to give others a chance. If some students are prone to jump to hasty, poorly conceived conclusions, give them a chance to correct themselves before class ends. If students speak with problematic biases, respectfully point out their implicit assumptions or, better yet, make it a course goal that all students begin to learn to recognize their own biases. To make this endeavor non-threatening, identify biases that you bring to the material yourself and invite students to “call you out” on these, should they appear in discussion. To really get to know your students, spend a few minutes after class recording observed dynamics and interesting interchanges. These notes will also prove helpful if students later ask you to write a letter of recommendation for them (see “Writing Letters of Recommendation”).

Interesting props help facilitate discussion. When appropriate, bring current events, historical documents, photos, ethnic food or costumes, models of parts of the body, poll results, and so on. Your students may become more involved in the discussion and will probably remember the significance better.

Before the semester begins, be sure the physical stage is set for dialogue. When possible, request a room suited to the anticipated enrollment, with tables or chairs that can be arranged in a semi-circle. Try to arrange the room so that everyone can make eye contact with all other discussants, not just you. When possible, vary the seating arrangement to fit classroom activities or to change the established order.

Knowing Where You Are Going

Like good directors, skilled discussion leaders know what they want to accomplish. When designing your discussion-based course (or, if you are a TA, in conjunction with the course instructor), consider the following:

- First, determine your goals. How will discussion help students meet the learning goals, whether over the course of the semester or in individual classes? Purposes will vary, sometimes even day to day: discussion can clarify and open up material; students can learn and practice new skills; the group can propose and critically evaluate positions; students can gain confidence in their analytical skills; the class can draw connections between course material and the outside world.
Next consider how best to accomplish them. If you are a TA leading a section, you will probably share requirement decisions with the lecturing professor. Distribute a syllabus for your section on the first day, even if the professor has included discussion assignments on the course syllabus (see "Preparing a Course"). You might even ask the professor if you can create your own “sub-syllabus” for specific sections; this can be a great way of practicing course design and working collaboratively with a teaching mentor.

Consider your teaching style and your level of comfort with different discussion-leading techniques. Whether you are teaching your own course or leading a section, it is important to consider your teaching style carefully, as this will help you decide what role(s) to play when facilitating discussion. No one teaching style characterizes effective discussion leaders, but style does communicate implicit expectations about the amount and type of student participation. If you are very directive, students may spend more time guessing your next point rather than contributing their own ideas. Conversely, if you are completely non-directive, there may be days when important matters are never covered. We recommend developing a style somewhere between these two extremes, closer to the one more congruent with your course goals and personality. Choose a style you are comfortable with before the first meeting, and spend time defining it for yourself and your students during the first few weeks. Changing implicit expectations mid-semester is as frustrating for students as changing explicit requirements: for example, if you intend to call on students (sometimes called “cold calling”) rather than wait for volunteers, do so from the first days of class.

Last, determine how you will help students make sense of the discussion. Whatever your teaching style, students need to leave discussion having learned (and being aware that they have learned) a few main points. At the end of class, with students’ help, generate a list of the main issues and their resolutions. A class without a synopsis is like a play without the last scene. Similarly, running out of time and summarizing during the next class would be like a director stepping on stage before the last scene and saying, “Sorry, folks, we’ll pick up tomorrow night where we left off.”

Asking Questions and Listening
Generally, you will need to direct or frame the discussion to reach your predetermined goal for the session. The type of orchestration you choose depends on your questioning skills and students’ preparation, motivation, and participation (see also “Case Method”).

If you opt for traditional questions, first ask about concrete facts and theories previously encountered in lectures or readings and then progress to questions requiring more analytical or abstract thought. This helps to build students’ confidence and reveals their level of understanding, so that they feel prepared to tackle the more difficult questions later (and you can gauge when/whether they are ready for them). Abstract questions may involve comparisons between sources, critical analyses of logic or methodology, alternative explanations, real-world applications, or the separation of primary and secondary arguments. For example, when discussing Skinner’s typology of behavior, you could develop a progression of questions like the following:

**Fact**
What is Skinner’s main argument?

**Evidence**
How does he support his
Comparison
In what ways are Skinner’s ideas similar to Locke’s?

Application
How would the adoption of such a theory affect social policy?

Evaluation
What is your recommendation and why?

For the most part, avoid yes/no questions or questions with obvious, programmed answers; they often bore students, and the responses to them don’t often contribute to a robust dialogue.

Just as important as asking the right questions is the way you ask them—and the way you listen and respond to students’ answers. Here are some tips:

- Treat all students with respect by considering each of their contributions thoughtfully.

- Expect valuable remarks from all students. Rather than reserving the more abstract questions for the more “insightful” students, give all students an equal chance to respond. Students will soon realize your confidence in their abilities and fulfill your expectations.

- Positively reinforce genuine attempts with verbal or facial expressions. When comments are slightly off the mark, rephrase elements that come close and give students a chance to agree or disagree. Of course, when comments are factually incorrect, you must acknowledge this in a polite and non-patronizing manner. Always direct your corrections toward the comment, not the student. When comments are particularly brilliant, give the other students time to recognize them as such. Then, as you summarize and draw the class to a close, recall noteworthy remarks and weave them into your synopsis, acknowledging the students who made them.

- Because college classrooms are increasingly diverse in visible and invisible ways, it is your responsibility to be sensitive to the various backgrounds students bring with them to the learning process. Factors such as country of origin, ethnicity, native language, cultural background, age, gender, sexual orientation, disability, and religion—just to name a few!—can affect how students process information and contribute to discussion. Try to gauge “the breadth and intensity of the diversity you encounter,” so that you can respond accordingly (see Brookfield, 2006, for ways to do so). Become aware of your own tendencies and comfort zones and try to vary your approach to accommodate all different kinds of students. The point is: using one approach all the time is likely to be effective with only some of your students. See Brookfield and Preskill (2005) and Ginsberg and Wlodkowski (2009). See also the TRC handbook, Teaching a Diverse Student Body.

- Learn to be comfortable with silence. When students don’t have a ready answer, wait patiently (5-30 seconds, depending on the complexity of the question) before embellishing, rephrasing, changing, or even answering your question. By doing so, you show that you value students’ learning more than their rapid guessing of your thoughts, and students may need and appreciate extra time to think. At home, practice posing a question and waiting to see how long half a minute of silence feels. Try it during casual conversations with friends and colleagues. At first, it may seem unbearably long, but you will soon become accustomed to it. If you find that your students always have a ready answer, you may need to reevaluate the quality of your questions.

- Encourage students to talk to each other.
directly, not through you. If necessary, say, “Katie, would you please respond to Tyrone’s comment,” or “What do you think about Tyrone’s argument?” If Katie still seems to be talking to you, orient her toward Tyrone with head and eye gestures. Such a directive may feel artificial at first, but students catch on quickly and conversation flows more realistically and fluidly.

- Promote mutual respect among students by using and encouraging them to use inclusive language, which recognizes people from various racial, religious, gender, and cultural groups.

- If you have a good sense of humor, use it to enhance the learning environment (see Skinner and Fowler, 2010, for the benefits of using humor in the classroom); be careful, however, of offending students with funny remarks that you think are benign.

- Answer students’ questions appropriately, and acknowledge when you don’t know the answer. For details, see “Resolving Conflicts.”

**Increasing Participation**

Innovative discussion techniques motivate students in different ways. We describe a few briefly here; for greater detail, see Bligh (2000). See also Brookfield and Preskill (2005) on how discussion techniques can create more democratic classrooms:

**Thinking time.** Ask students to spend several minutes thinking about their answer and, perhaps, writing it down. When you allow students to think, it emphasizes the importance of the question and gives the students a chance to gather their thoughts. As a result, students who otherwise are slow to participate may jump early into the discussion. One variation on this activity, think-pair-share, encourages students to share and compare answers in pairs or small groups, which often gives them confidence, before discussing them as a whole class (for more information, see “Further Reading” on cooperative learning).

**Group work.** Divide students into groups, asking them to develop answers to specific questions consensually. In smaller groups, more students can speak, shy students can address less formidable audiences, all students can build relationships, and a communal spirit assures lively discussion when the class reassembles. Vary the way you create groups: ask students to number off, select partners whom they do not know, pair students wearing the same color clothing, and so on. As long as you give very clear instructions, you can assign many types of tasks to groups. Some favorites are:

- Generating truth statements. Each group produces three statements thought to be true about a particular issue; for example, “It is true about slavery that...” You can then ask the class to reflect on the statements and unearth the assumptions that may have led to such conclusions.

- Determining the main point of the day’s text. Students report on their consensus and invite responses from other groups.

- Finding quotations in the text that best illustrate the major argument. Students read these aloud and defend their selection.

**Concrete images.** As each student briefly states a salient image, scene, event, or moment from the text, list them on the board and ask for the connection between them, the missing link, and the emerging theme. With this approach, students participate in a sort of collective memory-making, which helps them to learn and retain material better.

**Generating questions.** Students formulate the primary questions raised by the text or lecture.
Students might hand them in before class so that you can select some for discussion or you can ask students to lead the discussion using their own questions. Because this latter approach requires more class time, appoint only a few students to lead each discussion and start early in the semester so everyone has a chance. You will likely also need to teach students how to lead discussions and call attention to the ways that you lead discussion, so that they can learn from your example.

**Thought papers.** Students prepare short reactions to the week’s readings or lectures. These can provide the springboard for lively discussions.

**Role-playing.** Students reenact a scene from a novel, plead their case before a “jury,” or discuss “in character.” Assign characters to volunteers during class or by placing placards at students’ seats before they arrive. Students may need from several minutes to a week to study a character before performing.

**Forced debate or position taking.** Pose an “either/or” question (“Were the British or the Americans responsible for Revolutionary War?”) and force students to identify their position by sitting on the side of the room corresponding to that position. Ask students to change seats if they change their position. Alternatively, use the seating as a continuum. Another possibility is to stage a debate, having students argue to support the side they agree with. Alternatively, once students identify their initial position, make them switch sides and argue for the opposing view in the debate. This will help them to see the reasoning behind and even partial truth of both positions.

**Visual scientific models.** With a scientific phenomenon or conclusion on the board, ask students to work backwards, generating several plausible causal chains.

**When Nothing Seems to Work**

Sometimes—even though you are prepared, have sought help from colleagues and/or the TRC, have tried traditional approaches, nontraditional approaches, and everything short of a literal song and dance—students don’t participate. The best teachers have classes like this now and then, so there’s no reason to despair. You can’t force participation. But, if participation is key to your course goals, stick to your stated requirements. (Note: We encourage you to make discussions a graded requirement for your course; see “Working with TAs.”)

Talk about the class with a friend or colleague to see if you can spot problems. For the next classes, prepare students for the assignment in a different way, or repeat a discussion-leading technique that has worked for you in the past, even if in another course. Spend ten minutes eliciting students’ feedback: How effective do they find the discussions, and what improvements do they suggest? How well do they understand the readings? What do they think the goals of discussion sections are? These responses might give you some good ideas of how to proceed. (See “Analyzing and Improving Your Teaching.”)

**Laboratory Teaching**

As a laboratory instructor, you teach students how to learn by doing and you motivate and encourage them individually. Because only a relatively small number of students can work in a lab setting at one time, you have the chance to interact closely with your students. You may also be responsible for grading their work.

Although your role as a lab instructor will vary somewhat according to your discipline, and although your approach may need to be modified depending on the students within each particular lab, you will find many proven techniques for successful laboratory teaching in this section; for basic information, see “Preparing a Course,” “The First Day of Class,” and “Specific TA Concerns”; for details about preparing lectures, see “Lecture Courses.”
Preparing Labs

At the beginning of the semester:

- If your lab is part of a lecture course, attend the lecture so you can plan the corresponding lab work.

- Preview texts and lab manuals used in the lab and lecture. The course instructor should schedule meetings to discuss the course and lab. If she doesn’t, approach her and ask when you can meet.

- Find out where supplies are stored and who orders course materials.

- Give students the laboratory and safety rules in writing and verbally, and enforce them. If no departmental rules have been established, create them.

For each class meeting:

- Know the material thoroughly, including the theoretical basis and historical background for experiments or exercises so that you can help show their relevance to students.

- Compare the content of your lab to the lecture, deciding what information to reinforce and what to omit. Students tire quickly of material repeated too frequently.

- Practice with and test all equipment to make certain it functions properly before class. Know how to seek help with equipment breakdown.

- Complete all experiments and demonstrations at least once before class.

- Make certain all necessary materials are available in the right amount.

- Prepare lab notes, outlines, diagrams, and other necessary handouts.

- Write outlines, diagrams, illustrations, etc. on the board or overhead transparencies before class.

In the Lab

It is important to start on time from the very first meeting, showing your students that you take lab seriously. Be sure to meet for the first lab, even if there is no experiment scheduled on the syllabus (see “The First Day of Class”). You may want to give a short (five- to ten-minute) quiz at the beginning of labs, both to inspire punctuality and to focus students’ attention immediately on the lab. With the right questions, you can also discover how well your students are prepared for lab.

Lecturing. Introduce each lab by stating what you will be doing, how it fits into past and future work, and what the students have the opportunity to learn that day. In your short lab lecture, consider doing the following:

- Announce the day’s project, orally and/or on the board.

- Explain the task, perhaps by demonstrating samples you or former students have prepared. To heighten students’ interest and help them remember important points, tell them about especially memorable pertinent

Meaningful change doesn’t happen by chance. It is brought about through intentional design of an immersive learning environment, one which invites students to actively engage in their own learning. For me, this intentionality begins with a hook, a question that begs for answers. In chemistry, questions we might explore include why is hippopotamus skin pink; is drinking from BPA-containing bottles unsafe; is an SPF-100 sunscreen worth the cost?

-- Michael Palmer, Chemistry
facts or pose particularly provocative questions. One instructor asks his students questions such as “Are numbers discovered or invented?” or “Is an SPF-100 sunscreen worth the cost?”

- Give students all of the information they need to complete the lab activity. Distribute any handouts you have prepared, especially if you use drawings or diagrams, allowing room for students to add necessary details. Handouts especially help first- and second-year students learn to take notes and reduce the amount of time spent lecturing.

- Distribute materials to be used.

Throughout your lecture, it will help you remember to invite students’ questions if you write “Questions” in colored ink at appropriate transition spots in your notes. To promote students’ thinking and to verify understanding, compose appropriate questions before the session. If your students are not accustomed to questions during a lecture, they may not answer until they become more familiar with this “new” method. Begin with who, what, when, where questions and progress to more difficult how and why questions. By the end of the semester, you will have more lively classes where actual learning—not just memorization—is taking place.

**Supervising students’ work.** As students do their lab work, be sure to make yourself available. While building rapport and encouraging students, you can easily ask probing questions and correct faulty procedures. Call students by their names, using a seating chart at first if necessary. Move throughout the lab, watching for signs of students having difficulty: frustrated noises, confused expressions, flipping of text or lab manual pages. When individuals or groups have problems, inquire: “What did you do first?” “When did you first have trouble?” “How else could you solve this dilemma?” Resist deciphering and solving the problem for students; help them figure it out instead (see “Academic Difficulties”).

Interrupt the entire class to make general remarks only when you find many students in the same predicament. When you do work with the class as a whole, get all students’ attention before giving additional instructions. To explain experiment procedures, use the materials to show students directly rather than only giving verbal instructions. Rephrase a student’s question before answering to make sure that everyone hears and understands it. Not only does this technique involve the whole class, it gives you a few moments to consider your response.

**Summarizing.** Finish the lab by reviewing what students should have learned and, if appropriate, previewing the work for the next class. Discuss any problematic parts of the lab, so that the lesson plan can be adjusted for next year, if necessary.

**Case Method**

Primarily developed in business and law contexts, case method teaching can be used in a variety of different disciplines to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills, as well as to present students with real-life situations to consider. This section offers ideas from a business orientation, specifically, but you can easily adapt these details to fit your course’s goals.

Most studies of case method teaching describe the experience for both teacher and learner as exhilarating. In theory, the case brings into the classroom a real-world example that students spend hours rigorously analyzing. In class the instructor asks questions, moderates, and guides the case discussion, which is rational, civil, and at times, passionate. The end of class comes too soon, with many hands still waving in the air but without having arrived at “the right answer.” Students continue the debate outside the classroom, and so the learning continues:
learning how to think, how to plan, and how to act in specific contexts.

In practice, things are sometimes different. Students may challenge the case: it has too little or too much information, it is poorly written and confusing, no real business could possibly have all these problems. Some students may not devote time to analyzing the case because they don’t know how, or don’t think they need to. In class, other students are silent or passive, and their comments may even be unrelated to the case at hand. The instructor may resort to lecturing about the case. At long last class ends, and students leave thinking they know “the right answer” — “what the teacher just said.”

The possible gaps between the ideal and the real raise several questions for the practice of case method teaching. Here are a few tips, based on classroom experience.

**How Do You Select Cases?**

If you were taught with the case method, your best source is your own experience: teach the cases you learned and loved. Your interest in the case and your enthusiasm for exploring its possibilities will inspire both your discussion leadership and your students. Search for and select cases that are exciting, controversial, challenging, complex, and well written. The ideal case would be short, five to ten pages, but still require a full class period to explore fully. It would clearly describe a complicated situation in which people must act on difficult problems that cannot be perfectly resolved, but can be addressed in at least two reasonable ways. When possible, use more recent cases that occur in settings your students may eventually enter, preferably with an international or multicultural backdrop. Above all, each case study should consist of a good story that could have different endings. You may well be able to find documented cases in your discipline; otherwise, you might choose to write one yourself.

**Prepare students for the case-based course.** As with any course, use your syllabus to clearly identify your methodology. In this case, you will want to identify the course as a case-method course or a course that includes several case studies. Briefly define and explain what the case method is, since not all students will know, and outline your expectations, especially for in-class participation.

- In the first class session, describe the course as case-based. You may want to emphasize, “This will not be like your other courses” and tell students about some of the benefits and opportunities this sort of course provides. Convey to students the importance of “the four Ps”: preparation of each case before class, presence at every class, promptness in arriving, and participation in discussions (Shapiro, qtd. in Christensen, 1987). Explain how you grade participation, promise a written mid-term assessment of that grade, and invite students to discuss their participation with you. For suggestions about grading students’ participation, see “Evaluating Students’ Work.”

- Describe in general terms how a case discussion runs. One way to proceed is to begin class by designating one student as “the opener” to summarize the key issues of the case and another as “the action plan person” who will be called on about halfway through class to describe what should be done about the problems in the case. Your role as discussion leader will not be to point to “the truth,” but instead to question and to challenge their remarks with a little drama, a little humor, and a big focus on their thinking. The students’ role is to think, to listen, to express and give reasons for their thoughts, and to embrace or question the statements of others.

- State your ground rules for class discussions, and be sure to include these two: 1) Discussants should critique ideas, not
people; a sound critique and defense of ideas is appropriate, but public humiliation is not. Note that this means you will not permitting anyone to berate or personally attack any student, but that you will hold students accountable for their remarks. Part of holding students accountable includes allowing students to feel mildly embarrassed when they realize the implications of thoughtless comments or careless suggestions. In other words, you won’t rush in to assure students that their careless suggestion was legitimate. With this rule you simultaneously establish high standards for discussions, deter banal or foolish remarks, and demonstrate your respect for students’ minds. 2) Rude or offensive comments or class behavior, including bigotry of any kind, will not be tolerated. Your discussions are to be civil, with every student showing proper respect for the beliefs and the personhood of every other student.

- Explain why you use the case method in your course. In an introductory management course, for instance, cases will help students learn to think like managers.

- In business courses, you may want to distribute short notes, which offer guidance on preparing for class and useful checklists for students. Check with your colleagues to discover the current method for distributing such notes. Christensen (1987) and Bruner (2002) also help students and instructors prepare cases and think about how to use the case method effectively.

Prepare students for individual cases. Students usually analyze every case with two central questions in mind: What is your analysis of the situation? What should Actor X do about it? The class discussions will help students understand these general questions as they relate to specific cases.

Very occasionally, at the end of class, you may wish to offer some brief descriptive comments or specific questions to guide students in preparing for the next assigned case, especially when the case is lengthy or extremely complex. For example, for a case that recounts several events over the life of a task force, you can ask students to divide the case into six different time periods and assess the actions of the task force leader in each period, the choices made, and what might have been done better, before recommending future actions.

You can also use study questions to establish “interest groups” and thereby determine in advance the class controversy or debate. For example, you might ask students on the left to take the position of the headquarters staff and those on the right to argue as general managers of subsidiaries.

In general, however, we suggest that you rarely offer this type of direction. Because undergraduates often do only what they are told, they may read the case solely to answer the study questions, excluding all other issues that may interest them. Worse, too much direction does little to develop students’ confidence and ability to see what is and is not important in a situation. It is better that they struggle to make sense of conflicting and ambiguous data than learn to depend on “the boss” to direct them to “the problem.”

How Can You Get Them To Talk?
The short answer is that you invite students, one by one, to speak in class. To promote active discussion, first, learn your students’ names and something about them as individuals (see “The First Day of Class” and “Discussions and Discussion Sections”). Announce that for the next class, you will prepare and distribute a permanent seating chart to help you learn who they are. Or have them make large name cards everyone can see.

Second, start slowly and show them that discussion can be safe, rewarding, and enjoyable. Try to choose accessible early cases, and allow as many initial participants as possible to speak without interruption. Give verbal and non-
verbal encouragement—nodding, saying “Go on”—and be patient if a student stumbles or falls silent in the middle of a comment. Ask many open-ended questions: “What do you think?” “Do you buy that?” “Any other ideas?” “I saw your hand earlier; what were you going to say?” In early discussions, no student trying to participate responsibly should be pressed to the point of being uncomfortable. In later classes, you can become increasingly more challenging; at the start, tread softly.

What Should You Be Doing?
Instructors most familiar with a lecture method may have trouble imagining spending an entire class period without speaking from notes or writing key phrases on the board. If class time is filled with students talking and arguing, you might think, what am I supposed to do? Plan the discussion. Your work begins when you prepare each class. First, master the material in the case itself. Even when you’ve taught the case before, read it again, write a brief situation summary, and develop what Christensen (1987) calls “blocks of analysis,” that is, groups of ideas that represent a logical flow in the case. Consider how much time you wish to spend discussing each case, and work within that time frame to plan out the discussion process.

When you plan the discussion process, you are essentially developing a list of questions. What question will you ask the student you call on to open the discussion? How will you introduce a given topic if no student raises it first? What question will you ask to move the discussion into consideration of action alternatives? You must come to class with a mental list of such questions, including follow-up questions based on probable student responses. The only certain way to avoid unproductive dead silence in discussion is to have another question to ask. Prepare many questions.

Plan the board. In a case-method class, the board is used, not for documenting “the truth” or “the right answer,” but for recording logically the flow of the discussion. By making sections of the board correspond to blocks of case-analysis, many experienced case method teachers know before class begins how the board will look at the end.

You might work from left to right, arranging the board into sections for the organization and its environment, the critical decisions to be made, the different perspectives of key individuals involved, options, and then an action plan. Given the many mental activities required to teach case methods, using the board effectively can be exceedingly difficult; you will certainly improve with practice.

Develop your questioning, listening, and responding skills. These key skills are critical not only in case method teaching, but also in facilitating meetings and leading discussion sections, among other settings. As you develop these skills, you may even find your conversational style improving. Here are a few suggestions to guide you:

- Answer your own questions before asking them in class. Questions can be broad and open-ended or narrow and pointed. Which type of question do you want to ask? When? Why? Remember that even a little word, an “and” or a “so,” can color a question in unintended ways. Monitor your tone as well; the same question can be inviting or intimidating, depending on how it is asked. Consider asking the TRC to videotape a class, so that you can analyze your style more objectively.

- When listening to students, pay attention to them mentally and physically. Look them in the eyes. Stand near them, move toward them as you call on them or slightly away (while maintaining eye contact) to get them to speak up or address the rest of the class; use body language to signal your interest in what they have to say. While you listen to a student speak, also try to listen for a bridge
to the next comment, the next block of analysis. Try to remember who made what critical comments in the course of a discussion; few things invite more participation than the remark, “I’d like to return to Joy’s earlier suggestion that we . . .” (see also “Discussion Sections”).

- Perhaps the most challenging thing about case method teaching is that each class is unpredictable: you never know what a student will say, so how can you know how you will or should respond? Remember that you have a wide range of possible responses to any statement or classroom event, including verbal and nonverbal responses. Let students respond to classroom incidents before you do. When in doubt, ask a question. Finally, be aware that students will interpret everything you do—movements and facial expressions as well as statements—as a response to what they have said. Choose your responses with care.

What Should Happen At the End of Class?
The closing moments of class are important, so use them to summarize the discussion and end with some important questions the case has raised, asking: “What does this say about . . .?” “Under what circumstances can we . . .?” “What if . . .?” or even, “Who can help summarize the key concepts we’ve discussed today?”

You may also use the last ten minutes of class to lecture briefly on key concepts or theories that relate to the situation just discussed. If useful, draw a chart or write terms on the board, but avoid making comments such as, “And so this explains why X occurred in the case.” Such summations encourage students to shift their attention from understanding problems to memorizing. For the same reason, try never to end class with the comment, “Here’s what this case was about.”

In your final remarks, you may want to tell students why you selected that particular case, pointing out how you believe it relates to previous cases. Remind them of assignments due in the next class period. If appropriate, offer praise for the quality of the discussion, not for “the answer,” and for the class as a whole, not for individuals in it.

Some Final Advice
- For most students, the case method represents a big change from how they are used to learning, and change can often bring about fear. You may be fighting against years of experience where “good” students are quiet in class and listen attentively to the teacher and “bad” ones can get away with no preparation, poor attendance, sleeping, not taking notes, or doing other homework during class. Be clear, consistent, and firm in your expectations of students, and always model the behavior you expect of them.

- Respect your students. If the assigned material is too easy or too difficult, let them tell you. But even when students are floundering, still hold them accountable for what they say. It is not inappropriate to ask a student to explain a silly comment or an ill-advised suggestion (without, of course, calling it “silly” or “ill-advised” in class). Having to try to give reasons for their suggestion will help students learn.

- Accept the limitations of the case method, which is not the only, the universal, or “the best” teaching method. Be prepared for detractors, for students who say they don’t know if they’ve learned anything, and for colleagues who may agree with them. Understand your own reasons for using the
case method and explain it to others.

- Be clear about your objectives. With the case method, students can learn how to approach and solve problems.

- Consider giving case exams, especially if case studies have been one of the primary ways students have been learning in your class. Ask for essays discussing the same situation: “What should Ms. Chen do?” This type of exam gives you the opportunity to provide individualized feedback on your students’ thinking and learning.

- One aspect of case-method learning that students routinely describe as valuable is that from a well-orchestrated process of discussion, students improve their listening skills and their ability to express and defend their thoughts to others.

Modern Foreign Language Courses

Modern foreign language instructors teach grammatical structures, vocabulary, principles of literary analysis, and knowledge of the people who speak the language. In addition, students learn various mental operations used to acquire communication skills. Moreover, to better understand and respect another culture, students learn to integrate intellectual and emotional responses as they communicate.

In some courses, students learn mostly from reading and active participation in class; language students, like students in any other class, must practice in order to learn. Language learning is also a cumulative, step-by-step process: complex grammatical points build on basic ones, and skills grow as students practice different aspects of them. Understanding what one hears, for instance, depends on knowing pronunciation rules, hearing sounds correctly, recognizing words from sounds, knowing the meaning of those words, fitting the words into recognized patterns of grammar and vocabulary, discerning the significance of the tone used, and understanding the cultural situation in which the words were or are spoken.

To maintain interest and get the most out of class assignments, your language students may need help staying motivated and will need your immediate, frequent feedback. Language students typically need more short quizzes, papers, and interviews than in most other courses. You may also want to emphasize that “cramming” is typically even less successful in language courses than in most other courses. To encourage sustained engagement in the class, assess students’ reading, listening, and writing skills, as well as their mastery of vocabulary, grammatical structures, and cultural knowledge. Test authentic language used in realistic contexts, and ask students to communicate their own ideas as much as possible. When speaking skill is one of your goals, evaluate its development with oral proficiency tests. For general testing recommendations, see “Evaluating Students’ Work.”

Within their foreign language class, students should participate in a wide variety of activities in order to practice their speaking and listening skills. To facilitate that participation, The Modern Language Association of Departments of Foreign Languages recommends 12 students as the ideal enrollment and recommends no more than 20 students in any language course. Finally, because of the multifaceted nature of language study, and its demand for student participation, specific learning disabilities can often be more visible in language courses than in many other courses. For tips on spotting and accommodating learning disabilities, see “Teaching Students with Disabilities” and the TRC handbook Teaching a Diverse Student Body; for information about treating individual cases, check with your supervisor or departmental chair.

Class Activities
Details about organizing and teaching your language classes should primarily come from your
supervisor or course chair. We offer here, however, some initial tips and insights into language teaching:

- Plan a variety of activities for each class, both to develop different skills and to tap into students’ individual strengths and interests. To maximize students’ attention, vary the length of individual activities to between two and fifteen minutes.

- Begin with a conversational warm-up to immerse students in the language of your course. Discuss a current event, discover what your students have been doing, find out more about their lives and opinions, and so on. Integrate grammar, vocabulary, culture, or important information into the warm-up in a natural manner.

- Then review a point from the previous lesson or material basic to the new information that you will present during class. In the best reviews, students are able to practice and demonstrate their level of mastery. You may also want to preview or outline the upcoming lesson.

- Practice new material: vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, skills activities, and cultural units.
  - If you introduce new vocabulary early in the class, you can review it later with grammar, culture, or pronunciation activities.
  - Rapid and/or repetitive pronunciation drills can wake up lethargic students and help those who are attentive confirm what they have been learning.
  - Grammar activities usually work best when students have studied textbook explanations before class. Try to keep your explanations to a minimum and ask students specific questions about what they have already learned.
  - Integrate cultural information by using websites, readings, video and audiotapes, slide shows, and conversation in class.

- Finally, integrate the parts of the class into a coherent whole with a closing activity that encourages students to use new material to communicate. They might use new vocabulary to create dialogues about future plans; play a game to practice vocabulary, letters, pronunciation; or discuss a reading and brainstorm ideas for a composition comparing their experiences with what they’ve read. Students leave more excited and more confident in their learning when they’ve used what they’ve practiced.

**General Tips**

- Make sure students understand how important it is for them to prepare before class. Ask questions to verify their preparedness and comprehension and to show them that preparation is key for achieving the course goals. If you have established this strategy from the beginning, call on students who don’t raise their hands to answer questions; it is likely that those who volunteer are prepared.

- Distinguish between what you can do best in class and what the textbook offers. For example, you can explain grammar differently than the textbook, with more, personalized examples. The textbook may provide written grammar rules and mechanical practice activities that you need not cover in class. It will list and define vocabulary; you need to show students at elementary and intermediate levels how to pronounce the new vocabulary and help them make the words their own. The text and manual provide reading and listening activities; you may need to give students the appropriate context in which to read or listen.
• Use the target language (that is, the language students are learning) to communicate, not merely to instruct. Give assignments in the target language; don’t lapse into English when you have something really important to say.

• Remember that communicating with language also means understanding culture well enough to communicate with speakers from a different background. Integrate both the acquisition of language skills and learning about culture in lessons and in the overall curriculum in order to replicate language use in the “real world.”

• Stress oral-aural skills in class. Besides language lab work, students do not practice speaking and listening much outside class unless you create activities and assignments that require it.

• Use accompanying workbooks, lab manuals, audio and video lab programs, test banks, and computer software to reinforce material in the main textbook, following the recommendations of the course supervisor. These are ideal for self-study when answers are provided for immediate feedback.
Deciding which combination of teaching methods to use is, of course, only one of the important factors to consider as you plan and implement your course. Another significant aspect to consider is how you and your students will know whether they are meeting your course learning goals and objectives. In many cases, you cannot measure all course objectives with a single in-class exam; rather, you may want to check on students’ learning in a variety of different ways over the course of a semester. To construct a fair and comprehensive system to assess student learning, determine which course goals you can best measure by tests and which by papers, projects, problem sets, in-class discussions, group presentations, oral exams, or take-home tests. You might consider:

- What formal and informal assignments and activities will help you (and your students) gauge whether they are mastering course content or crucial problem solving skills?
- Which of these activities and assignments are best aligned with your overarching course goals?
- How much time will it take students to complete the assignment? What kinds of practice and feedback will they need in order to do well on and learn from it?
- How will you stage assignments so that students are able to build skills or knowledge throughout the semester? Which skills, knowledge or processes must students master first, or which can they best demonstrate in a cumulative assignment?

You will be able to evaluate your students’ efforts fairly and productively when you know why assessment is important, when you recognize the students’ perspective, and when you create and deploy balanced, unbiased evaluation tools. When preparing and grading examinations and assignments, keep in mind the following important principles:

- Students will believe that what you test and evaluate is important. If your graded assignments test their ability to memorize but not their ability to analyze information or make clear arguments, for example, they will leave your class believing that memorization is what learning means in your class.
- Fair exams, unambiguous project assignments, and clear, consistent grading guidelines and rubrics enhance learning and reduce stress and anxiety for both students and instructors. Practice and respectful feedback can also help.
- Evaluation and assessment can be an opportunity to help your students learn, not just a means of discovering what students know or don’t know, can or can’t do, think or don’t think.

This section focuses on effective means to design assignments that help students learn and help you assess how well they are doing so and includes short, ungraded assignments and activities as well as more formal, graded ones. Subsections include some ideas for giving students practice and feedback so that the exam or project won’t be their first exposure to what they are being asked to do.

Providing frequent opportunities for practice and feedback allows both you and your students to find out how well they are learning. It gives you the opportunity to let students know what they can do to improve, and it can help you to find out what adjustments you might want to make to the rest of your course.
Assessing Students’ Learning

If you have prepared goals and objectives for your course, you already know what you would like for your students to have learned at the end of each class, at the end of each unit, and at the end of the course. Here are some techniques to assess your students’ learning frequently and informally, in ways that are typically ungraded and anonymous (Angelo and Cross, 1993):

**Background Knowledge Probe.** In order to collect more specific and useful information about students’ prior learning, distribute short questionnaires at the beginning of the semester or before introducing a new topic, thus previewing what is coming and reviewing what students already know. Ask at least one question that most students should already know before taking your class and at least one other question that may be more unknown, but that this class will teach them eventually. Avoid unfamiliar vocabulary because it may obscure what they know about fundamental facts or concepts. Emphasize that these questionnaires are ungraded and that they are not tests or quizzes. You may want to report the results at the next meeting, so that individual students will be able to gauge their level of preparation relative to that of the class as a whole and to take a proactive approach from the start by working hard to catch up. You might offer the students recommended reading or activities for this purpose and reiterate your expectation to see them in office hours, so that they take advantage of the resources at their disposal.

**The One-Minute Paper or the “Muddiest Point.”** Stop class a few minutes early, put a question on the board, and ask students to write an anonymous response on a half-sheet of paper or 3x5 card you distribute. Pose questions about course material, in-class activities, assignments, or anything you’re curious about. Check on factual understanding: “Which of the compounds described today are the most stable, and why?” Check on students’ ability to draw inferences: “From what we’ve seen of French culture, why would you think French people often say that Americans have no friends, only acquaintances?” Or ask students to write down what they found to be the “muddiest point” or most confusing part of the lesson (Mosteller, 1989; Angelo and Cross, 1993). After reading through student responses to note trends or patterns in what they know or are confused by, you can briefly discuss those during the next class. For example, you might review part of your previous lecture, give more information about a topic students misunderstood, or solve more problems as examples.

**Pro and Con Grid.** To assess students’ level of analysis, ask them a question that will elicit a thoughtful consideration of the pros and cons in relation to an important issue, dilemma, or judgment in your course. You may want to indicate a specific point of view that certain portions of the class should adopt for the exercise; be sure to tell students whether to write in full sentences. In analyzing students’ responses, you can begin with a simple frequency count, looking at how students tend to perceive the issue—have they listed mostly pros or mostly cons? Their responses may well provide you with feedback that will be useful as you prepare for the next class. All of these assessment techniques will help you learn more about your students learning and, by extension, your teaching.

Designing Effective Exams

A well-constructed exam can teach students almost as much about a subject as it tests their knowledge of it. If you are using tests merely to assign grades, you are missing out on an opportunity to facilitate student learning. According to McKeachie (2006), students’ learning is directly related to what and how you test; therefore, you should decide what you want to emphasize in the exam, based on what students have been learning in your class so far, what you hope they learn from the exam itself,
and what your overall course goals are.

When you follow a few simple guidelines, your examinations and quizzes will be fair, reliable, and defensible. Most importantly, your exam must reflect course goals and objectives. “Of course,” you say. But studies have repeatedly shown that many exams require only the regurgitation of information, even when instructors embrace and proclaim on their syllabi higher-level cognitive goals, such as critical examination of ideas, analysis of principles, problem-solving, and inquiry. Given your course goals, it may be important to test students’ knowledge of facts; if so, be sure to test important, fundamental concepts, principles, and generalizations (rather than trivial details) by constructing good short-answer or objective items. To design an effective exam, follow these steps:

- List the topics you have taught and what students should understand about each.
- Determine how important each topic has been in class and in assignments.
- Write the exam to reflect the topics covered in class and their relative importance.
- Tell your students what you plan to emphasize, so that they can devote the most energy to studying the most important material.
- Give an ungraded quiz during the first four weeks of class so students will know what to expect, how to focus their studying for future exams, and how to adapt their test-taking for future success.
- Help students become test-wise by spending some time explaining effective test-taking strategies in advance (see also “Preparing Students for Exams” and McKeachie, 2006, pp. 105-111).

Writing Essay Items

After you have decided on your exam goals and objectives, consider which of the following types of questions are most appropriate to include: essay, short answer, identification, multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blank, true/false, and so on. When skillfully crafted and carefully evaluated, essay and short-answer items can measure students’ ability to analyze, apply, or synthesize ideas because they allow students to show their thinking in a more flexible, extended, creative, and thorough fashion than other formats. Experts recommend that you use at least one essay question per test (McKeachie, 2006). Here are a few guidelines and examples:

- Make sure each question clearly defines the task. Avoid the broad or ambiguous “Summarize the Vietnam War,” for example. Phrase the question specifically and give enough details to explain the question without giving too much away or confusing students. Here is a sample prompt that meets these standards:

  In designing a one-hour Culture Fair presentation to educate Americans about Arab culture, which three cultural aspects would you emphasize and why? And which three stereotypes would you challenge and how?

- Choose your verbs carefully to match the type of reasoning you want students to demonstrate on the exam. Here are some examples:

  **Comparing**  Describe the similarities and differences between...

  **Justifying**  Which of the following alternatives would you favor, and
why?

**Summarizing** State the main points included in...

**Generalizing** State a set of principles that explain the following events...

**Inferring** How would (Person A) be likely to react to this issue? Explain why you answer as you do.

**Classifying** Group the following items according to...

**Creating** Write a list of questions that should be answered before...

**Applying** Using the principle of X as a guide, describe how to solve the following situation...

**Evaluating** Describe the strengths and weaknesses of...

(From Gronlund, 2008.)

- Indicate the scope of the required answer by defining the length of time, space, and/or value in number of points that the answer should receive.

- If you are asking students to write an essay, remind them that it must have a thesis—a main argument—that is clearly stated and coherently supported.

- Ask students questions that could prompt a variety of correct essay responses. Essay questions should measure students’ knowledge and reasoning ability, not the opinions or attitudes you hope they have adopted during the course. Students won’t be able to show you the breadth and depth of what they’ve learned if they are just telling you the answer they think you want. Instead of asking, “How do you think crime could be eliminated?” consider, “Describe one proposed method for controlling crime. Give four reasons why this method would be effective or ineffective.” Score the essay based on the accuracy of the information and the quality of reasoning it demonstrates.

- Allow for “thought time” for essays in planning exam length. Students need time to read and assimilate the question, recall the requisite information, choose a position, and organize their answer. A good rule of thumb is to allow five minutes of “thought time” for an answer requiring fifteen minutes to write. Note this “thought time” and encourage students to take advantage of it.

- Consider the relative value of shorter and longer test items. Short-answer items are more specific, better define the task, and are easier to score. You can include more items and test basic knowledge of more topics; however, short-answer items provide limited information about a student’s complex reasoning abilities. Longer essays better evaluate students’ ability to integrate material, explain complex ideas, and apply important concepts.

- Use optional questions sparingly. Because questions are not equally difficult or clear, students’ choices may unintentionally make the exam harder for them. Choice also penalizes students who waste time trying to answer all of the questions before choosing the one they think they have answered “best.”

- Before administering the test, develop a scoring guide that weights content, reasoning, and style. Tell students your expectations and share this guide with them. Draft a scoring key for yourself as well. Writing the guide and key will help you spot confusing, ambiguous, or awkward questions; having the key as you read the first papers will save you from grading them too easily or too harshly (Brown, 1981; see also Little, 2006).

Essay items can help you see how students think about the course and your discipline more broadly if you ask questions that provoke them to apply, analyze, evaluate, synthesize, or create.
Likewise, short answer questions can be used to test more than facts if they ask students to demonstrate that they can apply that information to other situations. If you specify the type of information you seek, you will prevent students from writing down everything that they know about a subject in the hope that the right answer is in there somewhere. Additionally, such specificity will make it easier for you to judge whether the student has actually supplied and understood the required information.

Grading Strategies for Exams
To score essay answers fairly and reliably, try these techniques:

- Construct the exam so that you cannot see students’ names while scoring. You might have students write their ID numbers on the exam and then match names to numbers after scoring.

- In addition to assigning numerical or letter grades, note common mistakes or areas of mastery and convey those to all students when you return the exams; consider providing a handout of such information, so that students know what they did well and what they need to work on.

- Read all students’ answers to one question at the same time before scoring the next. You will better remember your expectations and more satisfactorily compare student performances. Moreover, grading by individual question rather than by exam makes you less likely to be biased toward a student who, for example, responds poorly to one question.

- After finishing each question, review a few of the ones you graded first to make sure your criteria remained consistent.

- Shuffle the exams before starting a new question. Imagine being the student who is always graded after a particularly brilliant writer or the one who is rewarded for writing only average essays because her exam is always graded after a terrible one. Neither situation will help the student to receive useful feedback. Keep in mind that your preconceptions and comparisons can warp grading and affect student learning.

- After grading all of the exams, see if there were any items that posed consistent problems for the class. Check to make sure they were unambiguous and keyed correctly. If they weren’t, it could be a sign that the material wasn’t properly introduced or explained to students. Be willing to adjust students’ grades and take the opportunity to spend some extra class time in class clarifying the confusing material.

Writing Objective Items
Objective items or tests can be more reliably graded than essay answers because a good objective question has only one correct answer; scoring is not subject to the same personal impressions or biases as essays are. For the same reasons, objective multiple-choice, matching, true-false, or fill-in-the-blank items normally do not allow students an opportunity to show how they arrived at an answer. Well-written objective items can, however, measure students’ ability to analyze, evaluate, and apply course content to new situations. In addition, they do measure both simple knowledge and precise discrimination. However, while grading multiple choice exams is generally faster and easier than reading essays, constructing good questions can be quite difficult. To create effective multiple-choice questions, you must imagine and offer students various plausible interpretations of a given situation (“distractors”) as well as the correct explanation (Grzelkowski, 1987; see also Haladyna, 2004).

Here are a few tips to help create effective objective items for an exam:

- In order to measure students’
understanding, use questions that ask them to predict the outcome of a situation rather than simply to recall or label a phenomenon.

- The suggested wrong answers should represent common or reasonable errors.

- Ask students to apply information to a real-world situation using concrete rather than abstract terms.

- Use a series of related items in order to measure more complex thinking about a single issue or situation. Avoid, however, interlocking test items, in which a student’s wrong answer at one point will mean they get all of the other questions wrong too.

- If you can’t think of a good distractor, don’t waste your or your students’ time by constructing an answer that doesn’t really test discrimination. Three possible answers can be just as effective as four (Costin, qtd. in McKeachie, 2006, p.88).

- Use “all of the above” and “none of the above” rarely. These phrases are not particularly useful in testing discrimination or knowledge.

Testing with objective items enables you to reduce grading time and improve the reliability of your grades while receiving some indication of how your students reason. If you decide to try out test items that may be unfamiliar to students, be sure to discuss samples ahead of time and group these questions separately from other, more familiar questions on the exam. To construct problem sets that frequently occur on math and science exams, use these guidelines:

- Make sure your problems resemble, but are not identical to, those students have already encountered in practice exercises.

- Make the problems interesting by giving real-world applications or by combining two concepts for a more engaging challenge.

- Concentrate on the main ideas rather than on long, detailed computations.

Although grading objective questions can be quick, writing them can take time and thought. As with essay questions, you will want to match them to course objectives and maintain the balance of topics in the course. Use the inset checklist to review your objective questions:

### Writing Objective Test Items

Do you have:

- clearly defined course goals?
- items that match your course goals?
- clear and well-defined directions and questions?
- all of the information necessary to answer the question?
- a difficulty level appropriate for your course and students?
- questions that are new, but that require skills the students have practiced?
- questions of varying difficulty?
- items cast in positive form? If you must use negative items, do you point them out to students?
- a scoring key? Does every item have a single correct answer? Is the right answer unquestionably right?

Have you:

- avoided giving grammatical clues or response-length clues to right answers?
- avoided a pattern of correct responses (e.g., abab)?
- had a colleague review questions for clarity?
two multiple-choice questions and one essay or problem per class, you will accumulate an item bank for exam preparation. Select a good cross section of items to create the final test, and consider a mixed format of subjective and objective items. This will save you time later on when you are ready to create the entire exam.

You will probably not be able to test all of the material as you would like; after all, students must have enough time to attempt all of the questions. To check on the exam length, try taking the exam yourself or have a generous colleague take it before you administer it to your class. Read each question thoroughly, including all options, and write out each essay completely. Students may need three or four times the amount of time an expert needs to answer the same question. As a rough guide for objective items, assume that a simple recall item will take 30 seconds to answer; one that requires any analysis or evaluation will take one to two minutes; and one that requires any calculation will vary according to the complexity of the calculation. If scheduling allows, you may want to consider giving your students untimed exams, allowing students to begin early or continue beyond the class time or allowing them to work on the exam at home; you are then more certain to measure what students know rather than how fast they can read, process information, and record answers.

Frequency of Testing
Undergraduate students need to know whether they are studying correctly and learning what they should; you need to know whether they’re learning what you’re teaching. Frequent assessing helps to achieve both of these goals.

- To help your students learn best, test them (if only with a short quiz or ungraded practice exam) no later than one month into the semester and return the results promptly. You can get a sense of what prior knowledge and experiences students are bringing to class by giving them an ungraded exam, perhaps even the final exam, on the first day.

- Be sure to balance quizzes, exams, papers, projects, and presentations reasonably so that you have time to do as many of the other activities and lessons that students will need.

- If you plan to have several short, ten-minute quizzes throughout the semester, announce them beforehand and allow questions in the classes prior to the quizzes. “Pop” quizzes and tests on reading or lectures that students have not been able to discuss with you may produce undue anxiety and create an unpleasant learning environment unless they can have only a positive effect on a student’s grades (see Wegner, 1996; see also Nilson, 2010).

Preparing Students for Exams
In order for students to be successful, they need to be prepared to take the type of exam you design. Here are a few ways you can help them:

- If you mostly intend to test learning at an analytical and intellectual level, be sure to show during lectures and discussions how to reason towards solutions, analyze problematic circumstances, and weigh pros and cons and include short activities to give students practice with these skills. Call attention to the fact that you are modeling critical thinking for them. This strategy will especially help students learn who in the past have been rewarded for only encoding and recalling information and who don’t know how to answer other types of questions.

- If you will be using multiple-choice items to assess learning, consider handing out two previous exam questions in class, prior to the exam, and giving students a few minutes to answer the questions. Afterward, tell students the correct answers, explain why these answers were correct, and respond to
any questions they might have. Students will be able to see the formatting of the questions and learn how to think for this part of the exam. Plus, they and you will both see how much they understand. Some faculty find it effective to ask students to write exam questions and to have a class discussion about what makes a good exam question. Not only does this add to your test bank, it also helps students understand how exams work and motivates them to study the material as they compose questions.

- Prepare students for essay questions. A week before the first exam, explain your expectations for essays, including study techniques, ways to answer questions, and specific details on grading factors. If you have created a grading rubric, which we recommend, give it to students and go over it with them. (See White, 2006, for further tips.)

- Before administering the exam, consider handing out three sample responses to exam questions (written at “A,” “C,” and “F” levels) for students to grade according to your criteria, with a short justification. As soon as possible, average the grades students assigned to the sample questions and discuss them with the class. Explain why you gave the essays the grades you did. Students will quickly learn to distinguish good essay answers from bad ones.

Administering Exams
When administering an exam, it is important to clarify the students’ task and to create a supportive atmosphere. It will help to do the following:

- Be sure that all copies of the exam are legible, paying special attention to graphs or diagrams. Bring extra copies of the exam in case pages are missing or illegible. If errors are discovered, write corrections on the board and clearly draw all students’ attention to them before the exam begins.

- Review the exam’s instructions orally, and note exam length.

- Suggest that students first browse through the exam and ask necessary questions.

- Let students know how much time is left in the exam by writing the time on the board and quietly updating it each 15 minutes without interrupting. Call attention to the last 5 minutes.

- One way to avoid after-the-fact disputes about unintentionally ambiguous items is to let students justify possibly questionable answers on the back of the test. Be sure to clarify before the exam whether and, if so, how much, you will give credit for these justifications. Their responses will also help you to avoid similar problematic questions in the future.

- If you choose not to remain in the room, tell students where they can find you during the exam if they need any help.

Scoring Services
If you use a multiple-choice format, your tests can be electronically scored with the ITS Data Security Office in Carruthers Hall. For details about how to do this, see the ITS website: http://its.virginia.edu/scanning/home.html. If you are giving several computer-scorable tests in a course, you can use a grading program to add subsequent scores and know the total points for any student at any time. COLLAB’s Tests and Quizzes feature also lets you design exams and quizzes that students can take online.

After the Test
Students will learn the most from exams when your feedback is timely and clear. Write specific corrections and responses on individual exams
and distribute or post a key for objective answers. Offer feedback in marginal comments on the essay portion of the exam, if there is one, to help students perform better next time. Studies have shown that when marginal comments on earlier tests emphasized a particular skill (e.g., creativity or presenting coherent arguments), use of that skill was improved on the next exam (Johnson, 1975, qtd. in McKeachie, 2006, p. 86). Return exams as quickly as possible (ideally during the next class period), and clarify major misunderstandings revealed during scoring, without walking students through the entire exam. Give students discussion guidelines to help keep the conversation productive: for example, set a time limit for questions raised in class or offer to consider an argument for an alternative answer if the student submits it in writing. Exams can also facilitate learning if you allow failing students to take a make-up exam and earn up to the passing grade. Rewarding students who are willing to study material and gain mastery reduces test anxiety for most students.

Papers and Class Projects

Designing and Assigning Papers and Projects

Designing effective paper or project assignments is similar to conceptualizing exams. First you will want to decide what aspect of student learning or achievement you wish to measure with the assignment: Will a review or summary suffice or are you expecting a logical or original argument? Are you flexible regarding style or should students learn how to follow a format specific to your discipline? Does the complexity of the topic fit the course level, your students’ abilities, and the assigned page limit? Keep in mind that the way that you choose to construct and phrase the assignment will influence what students learn and submit.

- Phrase the assignment to solicit the learning that you would like students to demonstrate. Words like “review,” “describe,” “survey,” and “summarize” will prompt most students to write reports rather than encourage them to engage in higher-order learning. Words like “analyze,” “critique,” “judge,” “explain,” and even “create” or “design” will more likely produce the deep thinking you may be seeking in their projects. Be sure that you go over these terms with your students, though; for teachers, they may seem perfectly comprehensible, but students won’t necessarily know what you mean by “critique” or “design,” for instance. (See Nilson, pp. 137-144.)

- Hand out assignments in writing so that students can frequently refer back to the assignment as they work on it. Moreover, if your students seek help from tutors, it will be helpful for the tutors to see the actual assignment rather than depend on students’ recollections.

- Make sure your students understand the conventions and expectations of the course and its discipline. A student who is studying a new subject, especially, will find a lab report, a psychological case study, or a literary analysis equally alien. Provide examples of your academic genre, and review basic genre conventions. Students are particularly baffled when asked to write a “book review”; you may have in mind The New York Review of Books, but their experience may be limited to high school book reports. For most of us, our discipline is second nature, so it may be difficult for you to explain it simply or...
clearly to others. If this is the case, consider taking your written instructions and a sample assignment to the Writing Center; as outsiders, the tutors will be able to tell whether you are requesting what you think you are.

- Define the audience for each assignment. Is it you? Other students? An academic journal readership? A generally intelligent public? This information helps students know how much summary to include, as well as the best tone to adopt. It also helps them to realize that they will always need to adjust their approach based on their audience.

- Note and explain potential booby traps in the assignment. For example, unless you clarify otherwise, a “compare and contrast” prompt may well lead students to write thesis-free essays that either spend half the pages on each topic or simply list points of similarity and difference. It is thus important that you tell students what kind of comparison paper you are expecting and that you give them examples to guide them. (Annotated examples are especially effective.) Likewise, the series of questions you offer with the intention of exciting students and stimulating their thinking may lead them to produce an unfocused presentation that merely answers each of the questions in that same order. Try to make your prompt as concise and straight to the point as possible. If you do want to give students a list of questions to consider, be sure to make it clear to them, both verbally and in writing, that you are simply asking these questions to help them brainstorm ideas and that you do not expect them to answer all of the questions, in that order, within their own work.

- Help students get started early on their assignments, especially at the beginning of the course. You might ask for a thesis statement about two weeks before a paper is due, together with notes about proposed supporting evidence and a list of sources in bibliographic form. Or you might ask for a selected topic and an initial outline of their final presentation early on. You could even have students swap papers or projects with their peers to get feedback early on. If they know they will be showing their work to their classmates, and not just you, students may feel especially motivated to put in extra effort. As the course goes along, hand over the reins to students more and more, giving them the responsibility for starting early.

- Assign frequent shorter papers or projects. This will allow you to give more feedback to students, which in turn will help them improve their work. These can even be low-stakes assignments that you do not grade, but simply give credit for completion. If possible, assign and assess a short (one- to three-page) essay, a piece of a multimedia project, or a three-to-five minute presentation early in the semester. The purpose of this assignment is to help you quickly identify specific aspects of students’ writing, design, or presentation skills that they may need to focus on throughout the course. You can also use some of their writing, anonymously or with their permission, to explain revision techniques later on.

- When possible, give students opportunities and motives for revision. If you incorporate an earlier, shorter essay into a longer final project, or if you ask students to do research that they will then turn into a PowerPoint later in the semester, students will have more of a stake in improvement. It helps students when assignments build on one another, so that what they learn at one point during the class helps them at a later point. For best results, ask that students turn in a draft of their papers or projects prior to the due date; check over them quickly, note successes and confusions, and suggest
specific ways to improve. This may be more work for you in the beginning, but you will also receive better final versions. Alternately, consider having the students do a peer review workshop on essay drafts in class or present their progress on a project with the rest of the group; they will gain valuable practice giving feedback and they will also receive ideas to improve their own work, without you having to spend a lot of time providing comments. Either way, be sure that the bulk of the reworking is left to the student. You or the peer reviewers shouldn’t point out every single instance of a problematic pattern. Let the students apply the feedback on their own. This will serve them better in the long-run.

- Finally, if your class attracts first- or second-year students or non-majors, and written essays are an important way of achieving the course goals, consider requiring each student to submit a thesis statement in advance of the final due date; then, if possible, have conferences with students who you think may be heading in the wrong direction. You can also lead a class discussion about general strengths and weaknesses (as well as some common mistakes) of thesis statements; it is especially helpful to pair this discussion with specific examples. This approach can enlighten several students at once. For an effective, detailed process to help students create and complete a long-term project, consider the “Paper or Project Prospectus” (Angelo and Cross, 1993, pp. 248-53).

Grading Papers and Projects
It is important for students that you assess their papers and projects according to the criteria you have given them, as well as the course’s overall goals. It may help to refer to the techniques described in the section on grading essay exams. When students have a longer period of time to work on a paper or project (as opposed to an in-class exam), you can expect a much higher quality of work. Consider creating and distributing a rubric for the paper or project ahead of time, so that students will know how you will be assessing their work and so that they can target their efforts accordingly.

Even if you are not teaching a “writing” course, you can still note and comment on students’ writing, organization, logic, and style. To help you decide how much time or space to devote to comments on aspects of writing that students are not explicitly learning in your course, consider which of these criteria are more and less important in your grading scheme before you grade any essays. This will help you focus your comments and help the students understand that while, say, argument or data analysis is more important than grammar, how one chooses to express ideas, either verbally or in writing, affects the way that the reader can (or cannot) understand these ideas. It is important for students to realize that they are representing themselves through their work and that their audience will form impressions about them based on this work. This is not just true in essays written for a class, you may want to emphasize, but also in email communications, cover letters, poster projects, PowerPoint presentations, and so on.

When commenting on students’ work, remember to frame your commentary respectfully. Even if you are tired or frustrated, avoid letting that show. Refrain from ambiguity, sarcasm, or insults. Students who submit a weak assignment may have tried their best, and may simply not know how to do any better. Give them the benefit of the doubt and take advantage of the opportunity to encourage them and guide them toward improvement.

To help students improve their writing, be as specific and descriptive as possible in your feedback. Tell them about what you experienced as a member of the audience or as the reader, not what you would have done. (See Elbow, Writing Without Teachers, 1998 for further information on reader-based feedback.) If you, as the reader, couldn’t find a thesis statement, note that or ask “where is your thesis?” If you thought a sentence
on a poster sounded “awkward,” explain what made the sentence awkward to you and how to fix one example of awkwardness. If a particular graphic didn’t seem to relate to the text of a slide, note, “What is the connection between this visual and the bullet point list? I couldn’t figure it out.”

Giving detailed feedback can sometimes be time-consuming, especially if the essays or projects need a lot of work. To save yourself time and to offer as much help to as many students as possible, consider creating a checklist with specific examples of common errors and corrections that you can share with the whole class. Use this to supplement, not substitute for, individualized comments, though. (See also “Interacting with Students.”) Also consider suggesting that students work with each other on future versions or go to the Writing Center for additional assistance.

**Class Participation**

In most disciplines, classroom activities help engage students’ learning and help them to demonstrate their mastery of important skills, such as analyzing, summarizing, evaluating, supporting opinions, developing logical arguments, responding to others’ ideas, and participating respectfully within a communal setting. If classroom discussion will help your students to achieve the goals of your course, it makes sense for participation grades to make up a significant part of the overall course grade.

As with any other aspect of their progress, students need to know how they are doing with participation. Some students will need confirmation that they are doing well. Others will need to know what to do to improve. (For details about individual problems, see “Interacting with Students.”) Check in with students about their participation in the course about a month into the semester, and suggest improvements. A form such as the following one can be helpful:

Grading participation may motivate students to contribute and to practice this important skill, which will ultimately help them learn what they need to in your course (see “Preparing a Course”). Grading class participation can be difficult, however. To avoid misunderstandings, share your standards for evaluating class participation early in the semester. The sample scale on the following page comes from a course based on the case method approach.

Finally, take into account students’ differing personalities and abilities. Some may need to begin by answering factual questions, learning first from you and other students how to express and defend opinions before venturing out on their own. Other introspective students may benefit from taking a moment to gather their thoughts before responding to a question. Your most successful discussion classes will not necessarily be those in which all students engage exactly to the same degree; you also want to help students understand the different but important roles one can play in a discussion (from asking thoughtful questions to synthesizing other points, to playing devil’s advocate, and so on) and help them improve their discussion skills.

**Determining Final Grades**

Assigning final grades is usually a part of our teaching duties, so it is important to consider them even as you prepare the course (see “Preparing a Syllabus”). Your students will learn best from your course if you are fair and reasonable in your expectations, and if you stick to the grading standards you have designed according to
your course objectives. If you are a beginning teacher, you may find yourself grading more leniently or harshly than your colleagues at first; it can take some practice to find a happy medium. To find that middle ground, though, it helps to keep your objectives and standards firmly in mind, and let your students know your policies and expectations.

Keep written, accurate, complete records of all grades; routinely photocopy them in case of loss, fire, hard-drive crash, or other disasters that can happen. (Also, keep your records for several years; these records are especially useful if students return later with requests for recommendations.) To find out how your students are doing as a group, figure out the average grade for each assessment or, better yet, plot the scores on a graph. Such a graph will show students how they are doing with respect to the group and lets you know if there are any uneven distributions, which may suggest an inadequately explained concept or a poorly designed test. Comparing the distribution graphs for different types of assignments will show you students’ relative success on tests, quizzes, problems sets, or papers.

### Academic Honesty and the Honor System

Academic honesty is a vital ingredient in the University of Virginia Honor System, a structure maintained by students since the 1840s (see details at [http://www.virginia.edu/honor/](http://www.virginia.edu/honor/)). Within the Honor System, students are understood to live in a community of trust, wherein they are honest and committed to the ideal that a person’s word is his or her bond. A student who breaches the Honor System can be expelled. As faculty members and TAs, you don’t directly participate in governing the Honor System. However, by teaching at U.Va., you implicitly affirm that you understand, accept, and comply with the Honor System.

The Honor Pledge is assumed for all written work done by students of the University of Virginia, regardless of whether instructors require students to write it on their assignments. The standard Honor Pledge reads: “On my honor as a student, I have neither given nor received aid on this assignment.”

- Remind your students, especially first-years, of the pledge; show that you take the Honor System seriously by requiring them to sign some version of this pledge on the tasks they submit. This version can be as short as “I pledge.”
- Make the acceptable parameters of assignments clear to your students. Revise the Honor Pledge to correspond to specific assignments or exams. If you recommend,
for instance, multiple drafts in consultation with a writing tutor, have students acknowledge such help: “On my honor as a student, I have received editorial help from the following people....”

- State requirements unambiguously in writing to help students avoid honor-code violations. For example, for a timed take-home assignment, state explicitly whether students should return the project within four hours, have four hours to finish once they start, or can spend a total of four hours, working in shorter blocks of time. Is typing time part of the four hours?

- Reduce the temptation to cheat. For instance, create entirely new exams each time you teach a course, and distribute previous exams so that all students have equal access to your format and style. Even better, create exams that are impossible to “cheat” — essays, for example, that require the integration of each particular student’s life experiences. In addition, you may want to require that students submit early drafts of written assignments with their final copy.

- Explain and discuss plagiarism with your students. Many students may not understand what plagiarism is, let alone the specifics of U.Va.’s Honor Code. Even more may not know the standard citation rules, often discipline-specific, that can help them avoid inadvertent plagiarism. Take the time to teach students such rules. Talk with your students about why the Honor Code is important and what violations of trust mean for a community of scholars. Help students to understand that academic integrity is just as important as the personal integrity they demonstrate outside of the classroom. Good examples and some rules appear in the booklet “Academic Fraud and the Honor System,” available from the Honor Committee (924-7602) or online at http://www.virginia.edu/honor/.

- You may choose to remain in an exam room while students take a test. By being there, you can answer students’ questions and post the time remaining for those without watches or who would otherwise be too engrossed in their work to be aware of the time. Try not to give students the impression that you don’t trust them on their own, though.

If you suspect a case of cheating, consult with your course supervisor, department chair, faculty representative to the Honor Committee, or student Honor Advisor. Be sure you have read about the Honor System as explained by the Honor Committee. If you plan to pursue the matter through the Honor System, do not approach the student directly; by doing so, you eliminate the student’s right to conscientious retraction, a voluntary admission of responsibility that absolves the student of guilt under the Honor System. Questions of discipline for honor violations are a student responsibility, delegated to them by the Board of Visitors.

The Honor System does, however, recognize that instructors have sole authority over the grading in their courses. If you have evidence that a student cheated or committed plagiarism consciously, you may grade that assignment as you deem appropriate. Do keep in mind, though, that what may initially look like strong evidence can prove inconclusive. In cases of suspected cheating, faculty grievance committees, which investigate students’ appeals of their failing final grades, have disagreed over instructors’ evaluations of “evidence.” Consider evidence meticulously before assigning any final grades.

By being upfront and honest with yourself and your students from the beginning, you will be able to maintain academic integrity and create a positive learning environment for everyone.
SPECIFIC TA CONCERNS

As a graduate teaching assistant (GTA), you are an invaluable part of the educational process at the University of Virginia: at the core of the graduate programs, where you are students, and up front in undergraduate classrooms, where you are teachers. At the Teaching Resource Center, we consider you an instructor when you interact academically with students in any context: discussion section leader, laboratory instructor, instructor for your own course, lecturer, grader, tutor, or problem-session leader. Each of those possible roles, in a variety of departments and disciplines, entails a different set of expectations, rules, and responsibilities for you. In this section you will find some general notes on being a TA (also known as GTA, “graduate teaching assistant”) and directions to other pertinent handbook sections.

Teaching
Because graduate instructors usually teach students in relatively small classes, you have the opportunity to influence them immensely. Moreover, as TAs, you often teach introductory courses in which students decide whether they want to learn more about your discipline and in which they learn the basic information necessary for continued study.

No matter what type of teaching or grading you do, remember that you educate undergraduate students by what you know, how you act, and how you encourage them to think and learn. Those who might say, “TAs are only in charge of lab courses (or do grading, tutoring, etc.); they don’t really teach,” define teaching far too narrowly. Discussions, well taught, not only help solidify students’ knowledge, but can also teach critical thinking skills. Labs teach in hands-on, real-world ways. Review sections teach students to use the material they’re learning. Effective comments on students’ written papers teach clarity of thought, help writers develop a sophisticated style, and can make or break students’ desire to improve. You help students learn no matter what TA task you’re assigned.

Making Connections in Your Department

Normally, you will find out about your specific TA duties from one or more designated faculty members in your department, whether a supervisor of all TAs or the specific faculty member you assist with a course. If you have questions about procedures in your department and have no assigned faculty supervisor, check with your departmental chair or graduate advisor. After you have some experience with a course, you might like to play a larger role in determining the direction of your section or even the entire course. If so, ask; many faculty members appreciate the fresh ideas you can bring and the give-and-take of collaboration. Here are the ways various types of TA assignments are normally supervised (see “Sharing Teaching”):

- If you are teaching one or more discussion or lab sections related to a central course taught by a professor, that faculty member will likely supervise and coordinate your efforts. Make sure that you meet regularly with the faculty member and other course TAs; shared talk about teaching is one of the best ways to widen your own knowledge and your repertoire of techniques.

- If you are teaching your own section(s) of a multi-section course (as in foreign-language courses and some lab courses), a faculty member will usually serve as the course supervisor, making sure that sections are comparable to each other with respect to content, pace, and grading. Be sure you know these course policies and follow them for the sake of fairness to the students and your colleagues.

I valued my first teaching because of what the teaching taught me about how to learn, what to learn, about the complexity of the discipline, and indeed about the possibilities of serious scholarship within the discipline.

• If several TAs are teaching a multi-section course, the faculty member may designate a “head TA” who takes on basic administrative tasks. Performing such extra duties can give you valuable administrative and leadership experience.

• If you are teaching your own course, as experienced graduate students do in some departments, consider consulting with faculty members who have previously taught the course to be sure that you are consistent in the focus and requirements of that course. If possible, observe an experienced instructor teaching the course before or during the semester you teach to pick up valuable techniques. You may be responsible for ordering your own books, equipment, etc.; check on these important details well ahead of time (see “Preparing a Course”).

• If you are a grader, make sure you understand the course instructor’s expectations, standards, and concerns. If possible, attend at least a few course meetings to see how the course is taught and to get to know the students a bit. Although you certainly don’t need to know individual students to grade their papers, you will want to get a sense of what you can generally expect from students at this level in this field. If the faculty member does not offer to grade initial papers with you to help clarify expectations and standards, ask for this training. If each of you grade a few papers independently, including comments and scores, and then compare your reactions, you will quickly realize what the instructor expects students to learn from the course, how the instructor grades, and how you should adjust your approach to align with his/hers.

Mentoring
Being a TA also provides numerous opportunities for mentorship. By working closely with faculty members as a TA, you can benefit from their experience as teachers. Find out how your professor approaches course design or individual class topics. Ask how a particularly successful lecture or discussion was organized and why. Use meetings with the professor to gain insights into how the course was prepared and into her philosophy behind teaching and learning in your particular discipline. By analyzing and even discussing the teaching you see the professor doing, you will be able to further develop as an instructor in your own right.

You and the Undergraduate

Your Multiple Roles
Even if you aren’t thinking about it, students tend to make implicit assumptions about the roles you play as their teacher, based on their previous experiences with certain instructors or common cultural expectations of how an instructor does or should behave (Magnan, 1989; see also Carroll, 2003, and Nilson, 2010). Think about these various roles and how you will respond to them in a way that honors your own integrity.

• You’re the expert in the classroom, because of your age, your education level, your knowledge of the subject, your experience, and your wisdom. Students may expect expertise, but if you don’t know the answer, just say so, and then find out. Students will appreciate the honesty and the extra effort.

• You’re the formal authority. As the instructor, you will likely set the standards, goals, and deadlines for your students’ learning. Many instructors find that it’s much easier to loosen an initially strict stance than to try to regain control after losing it. If you’re a softie, try acting tougher than you feel, but avoid treating college students like high school students. Remember that most of your authority will come through your conduct: for example, if you don’t extend deadlines,

Students really want their instructors to **succeed**, to be engaging, humorous, wise, and informative. They will do everything within their power to draw these qualities out of us if given some indication that these qualities are there to be tapped.  

--Dennis Proffitt, Psychology
students will quickly learn not to expect exceptions.

- You’re a socializing agent. For your students, you represent the values, assumptions, and intellectual styles of your discipline and even the university. Help them step inside that world.

- You’re a facilitator. Listen to, question, and challenge your students to facilitate their learning. Some students enter some courses with average or inadequate preparation or skills, but students should not be categorized as either teachable or unteachable. Everyone has the capacity to grow and it is important that you convey this belief to your students, so that they know you are confident in their ability to progress.

- You’re a role model, whether you are aware of it or not. Think about the kind of example you want to set for your students. Try to remember the teachers who best helped you learn as a student. Emulate them.

- Finally, you’re a person. You can develop a personal rapport with your students to help their learning. This rapport may inspire trust, encourage students to express freely their ideas, opinions, and feelings, and help them more willing to think on their own.

Your Role as Advisor

Given the nature of the courses you teach, you may see students in smaller groups than faculty members do. Thus you have the opportunity to help them mature in ways that go beyond simply the subject matter:

- You can help students take responsibility for their choices, for instance, whether to turn in an assignment on time or to attend class. Know the rules that govern undergraduates’ academic lives; consult The Undergraduate Record (available in your department and on-line at http://records.ureg.virginia.edu/) when students ask you to make an exception to a College or School rule (see also Appendix IV). From the beginning of the course, set clear guidelines about attendance, late assignments, and so on, which will help students achieve the goals set out in the course (see “The First Day of Class”). Refer back to these expectations throughout the semester.

- You can save students’ time and help them feel like part of your department when they turn to you for general information or advice, academic advising, and consultation about problems. Be willing to listen and know University resources and the courses relating to yours as corollaries or prerequisites (see Appendix II and “Interacting with Students”).

- You can assist students’ social development by supporting their interactions with classmates (see “Teaching a Diverse Student Body” and “Discussion Sections”).

- You can promote students’ intellectual development by challenging them to think more clearly and critically, by requiring intelligent work for a good grade, and by setting an example of rigorous intellectual inquiry. Think of your students as citizens, not just of the university, but of this country and the world. What habits of mind and inquiry would you like them to have, and how can you help them develop them? (See “Teaching the Whole Student” and “Promoting Students’ Intellectual Growth.”)

- You can demystify the student-instructor relationship, thereby opening a door to intellectual exchange. You can let your students see how you explore and extend the boundaries of your discipline toward understanding and knowledge. As a graduate student involved in studying and learning, you can show your students the process and excitement of discovery.

Balancing Your Teacher/Student Roles

Although your graduate student experiences can contribute greatly to your TA successes, the two roles can be ironically dichotomous: in one, you give grades, advice, and information; in the other, you receive
And we recognize that both roles place important, and often time-consuming, demands on you. It is important to remember that your teaching assistantships are a vital part of the professional training necessary for a graduate academic degree. If scholarship is attaining and imparting knowledge, then teaching is an essential part of scholarship.

So, although being a graduate TA may put numerous, varied demands on your time and energy (see Appendix III), balance your life as best you can. If the equilibrium slips, avoid blaming one part of your life for lapses in another. Simply apologize for jobs delayed or deadlines missed, remedy the situation as soon as you can, and discern the source of the problem in order to avoid future conflicts. If you feel consistently overloaded and see no solutions, discuss your predicament with your faculty supervisor, advisor, or even other colleagues in similar positions; they may be able to help you.

**Communicating Your Discipline**

Teaching the subject matter you are pursuing at the graduate level can present another dichotomy: frequently the difference between the introductory level you’re teaching and the advanced level you’re studying can make them seem like two totally different subjects: for instance, the basic biology of earthworm anatomy compared to doctoral research on neurobiology. It can be difficult to know how to approach teaching when you feel this disparity.

It may be true that you and your students are at very different stages of development within the subject you are both studying. This difference may at first seem to separate you and your students and may even seem like it would prevent you from relating to them or helping them to learn. Sprague and Stuart (2000) have offered a four-stage developmental trajectory from novice to expert that may be helpful to consider here, when thinking about how both you and your students are developing mastery or expertise. (See Ambrose et al., pp. 95-99, for a more detailed explanation of the four stages.)

The first level—"unconscious incompetence"—is where your novice students are and where you began when you first started studying your area of specialty. Learners at this level haven’t developed any skills or knowledge within a particular subject or field yet, so they simply haven’t learned enough to realize all there is that they don’t know. In short, they don’t know what they need to know. For instance, students who have never taken a course on Islam might enroll in “Introduction to Islam,” thinking, “Well, I know all about Muslims—they are all Arab terrorists.” These students don’t have any academic experience with the study of Islam—which is why they may believe such stereotypes—but, more than that, they don’t understand all that there is to learn about this rich tradition with over one billion followers from around the world.

As students acquire more experience and knowledge, they move on to the second stage of development—“conscious incompetence.” At this stage, students become more aware of what they don’t know and need to learn, but they just haven’t done so yet. In short, they know what they don’t know. The students of introductory Islam may experience such an awakening in the classroom. They may realize just how much there is to learn about the different practices, beliefs, and backgrounds of Muslims around the world. But, especially early on in their studies, they may not have learned much about this diversity.

The third stage of development is called “conscious competence.” Students at this stage realize that they have learned a good deal in their studies, but they are still very aware of and about their level of competence. This is when they know what they know; graduate students often find themselves in this stage. You may have studied Islam for many years and may realize that you know much more than the beginner “Introduction to Islam” student. Yet you are also very aware of the fact that you are a relative newcomer to the vast field of Islamic Studies; you may feel tentative or self-conscious about your growing mastery at this stage. You may even think of yourself as an “imposter” at this time.

The final stage in the development of mastery is “unconscious competence.” Students at this level have reached a point where they exercise skills and apply knowledge so naturally that they no longer realize their own competence, that is, how competent they have really become. That is, they no longer know all that they know. This might be the situation for scholars who have been studying Islam for decades, teaching introductory and upper-level courses, publishing research in top journals, presenting papers
at conferences, collaborating in edited volumes and anthologies, and so forth. The study of Islam, and the exciting complexities therein, will seem so obvious to such a person that they will take it all for granted.

It is important to remember that we are all at different stages of mastery in different areas of our lives. Some of our students may be experts in areas we ourselves are novices, even if in a particular class we are the experts, compared to them.

As a teacher, though, there are some common worries associated with all four stages. Experts worry about forgetting what it’s like to be a beginner and being unable to relate to students. Novices worry about simply not knowing enough to be able to teach well. Yet there are distinct advantages for teaching at all stages, as well. As a TA, you are likely an expert in at least one field; if you are teaching a subject in this area, you can use your confidence and knowledge about the subject matter to inspire your students’ learning.

If you are a relative newcomer to the field—let’s say you just began graduate school or you are running a section outside your area of expertise—you can still help your students learn. Like your students, you may not know much about the subject—you are what some might call a “content novice” —but you are likely aware of what you don’t know. This awareness often yields greater preparation and the exciting experience of learning along with your students. You know personally what it’s like, or you have a very recent memory of what it’s like, to learn the basics. This may lead you to have more realistic expectations of students, offer more concrete explanations, and even foster deeper learning (see Huston, 2009, pp. 45-54). In fact, as a beginner, you may have a distinct advantage over experts who have been teaching in the field for years. Whatever your level of mastery, consider how you can use it as an asset in helping students learn and how you can use your own teaching to help you move toward the next stage of expertise.

Teaching American Students
(for International TAs)

If you are a teaching assistant who comes from a country other than the United States (an International Teaching Assistant or ITA), your experiences teaching at the University of Virginia may differ in some ways from those of American TAs. All new TAs experience a shift in perspective when they move from being a student to being a teacher. But, as an ITA, you may face some unique challenges and surprises as you reach across cultural differences to interact with your American students. American assumptions about students and learning may differ from those in your culture. By examining assumptions — both yours and your students’ — you can better understand your students and become a more effective teacher in an American setting.

What Do U.Va. Students Already Know?

Students in U.Va. classrooms may surprise you, not only by their informality of dress, but also by their academic preparation. Although most U.Va. students were at the top of their high school graduating classes, they come from a wide variety of educational backgrounds. Because the United States has no standardized national curriculum, individual course content and student preparation differ dramatically, and you may find unexpected disparities and gaps in students’ knowledge. In addition, the amount and sophistication of equipment varies among high schools; some students may have no experience with what you might consider basic equipment.

In many countries, higher education is reserved for a few; in the United States, more than half of the high school graduates attend college, and students enter U.Va. with a variety of goals and interests. Some are looking for intellectual development or career preparation; others seek independence through new personal, social, and cultural experiences. To teach successfully, you may need to adjust your expectations.

Unlike students in many other countries, American students normally take a broad range of courses during their first two years in college and generally choose a “major,” or an area of concentration, by the third year. Since TAs often teach first- or second-year students in introductory courses, you may find that students’ preparation and reasons for taking your course vary widely. Before classes begin, ask your supervising faculty member or an experienced TA about the expected level of students’ preparation. Find out who usually takes your course and why, and
find out all you can about the course: is it introductory, part of a sequence, required? What are the prerequisites, if any? The answers to these questions will help you prepare for the students.

On the first day of class, ask your students about their background and interest in taking the course (see “The First Day of Class”). Ask them to list on index cards related courses they have taken and their reasons for taking your course. As you teach, keep their varied levels and interests in mind; check regularly to make sure everyone understands the material.

**How Should You Interact with Students?**

It may be that U.Va. students are more informal in class than you might expect. It is not unusual to see students in class eating or drinking, putting their feet on chairs, or playing on their computers or cell phones. If you don’t know how to deal with unfamiliar classroom behaviors, consult an American TA in your department or observe other TAs’ sections to see how their students behave and how the instructor reacts. If student behavior annoys or distracts you or others, make specific rules for your class after consulting with your supervisor and communicate these clearly, early on, to the students. (See also “Interacting with Students.”)

American students also interact informally with their instructors. They often ask questions in a way that may appear to challenge the teacher. American teachers are respected, but, unlike teachers in some countries, they are not regarded as absolute authorities who cannot be questioned, doubted, or approached. More importantly, American teachers often encourage students to challenge them and to think for themselves because such behavior lets the instructors know that the students are learning and engaging the course material. Teachers encourage students to have independent opinions and to make the course relevant to their own interests and goals.

What do American students expect and appreciate from their instructors? Here are a few common expectations, together with suggestions about how you can successfully respond to them, even though your cultural background may be different.

- American students usually expect to be recognized as individuals, in and out of class, and they appreciate friendly teachers who in turn communicate something about themselves as individuals. It is helpful to learn students’ names and use them in class. Most often, American instructors call students by their first names; many TAs allow students to use their first names, although it’s certainly not required. If you prefer that students use your family name, ask them to do so; if you use your family name as your familiar name, explain that that is the name your friends use in your country. Also, let your students know who you are as a person. Many American students want to learn about life in other countries; some have traveled extensively, and many others would like to. In class, share information from your own life, as you feel comfortable doing so.

- American students want their teachers to be approachable, available for questions, and responsive to helping them learn, even informally or outside of class. When you can, arrive early to class for informal conversations. Stay after class for a few minutes, so that students can speak with you. Invite students to your office hours to get better acquainted. Be flexible in accommodating students for office-hour appointments, but do not feel compelled to rearrange your entire schedule for them. Before mid-term or final exams, consider holding special office hours or review sessions. Students will appreciate this extra assistance. During office hours, students may want to discuss more than just questions about your course; they may seek general advice or ideas about study strategies. Furthermore, they may not know how to ask the questions they need.

*Photo by Scott Crittenden*
for clarification. Be patient and offer various responses; if they know you aren’t judging their ignorance, they will feel less threatened by exposing it to you (see “Interacting with Students”).

- Students expect teachers to fully explain the course goals, materials, and requirements, as well as how their learning will be assessed. Your department should provide a syllabus and a grading scheme for your course; be sure you understand them and can answer students’ questions about them. Make all assignments and deadlines clear (see “Preparing a Course”). Grade and return assignments and exams promptly, giving written comments to help students improve (see “Evaluating Students’ Work”). If in doubt about the grading scale, consult with your supervisor or an experienced American TA.

- Students value interacting with the teacher and other students in the class. Allow time for students to ask you questions, and feel free to elicit comments from your students.

- American students typically understand their mistakes to be part of the learning process. Consider mistakes as an opportunity to discover how they’re thinking and learning. Why did the student make that particular mistake? Does it reveal a common misconception about the subject? How can you explain the right answer? What can you do next time to help students avoid any misunderstanding? Be sure to always respond to students’ errors politely and patiently.

- Students often look to TAs to translate the formal and often complicated language of the lecture into everyday language they can better understand. Make sure you can explain technical and professional terms to a beginner. Use concrete examples to illustrate these concepts.

- American students like knowledgeable instructors who are willing to admit when they do not know something. Prepare for class thoroughly. Try to anticipate areas of difficulty for your students and prepare responses to potential questions. If unexpected questions arise and you are unsure of the answers, that’s fine. Simply tell the students, “I don’t know, but I’ll find out.” Then be sure to find out and report back to them the next class period.

How Can You Improve Your Communication Skills?

As an International TA, you may worry that you will have trouble communicating with your students. And because English is not your native language, your students may fear they won’t understand you and will miss valuable information. Here are a few suggestions to help you improve your communication skills:

- Remember that language is only part of the way we communicate. People from different cultures use nonverbal, or body, language and even spoken language in different ways. An American smile is usually a sign of amusement; a Japanese smile may indicate embarrassment. Questions in English normally provoke an immediate response; questions in Chinese may require a certain amount of thought from the person responding. Students will interpret your eye contact, gestures, facial expressions, and other nonverbal messages by the American system, and you will interpret theirs through your own. But, by becoming aware of cultural differences in nonverbal cues, you can begin to use them to help you communicate better with your students.

- Study how American students and other instructors interact. Note the signals that show they’re listening and the expressions that show agreement or disagreement, interest or boredom, understanding or confusion. Use as many of these signals as you can. If you regularly use nonverbal behaviors from your culture that might cause misunderstanding, tell your students what they are and what they mean. This will provide a wonderful opportunity for your students to learn more about another culture. Also, consider having your class videotaped and consulting with your supervisor, an American friend, or a TRC staff.
member to analyze how effectively you are communicating with your American students.

- Do all you can to improve your English. Even though it may be more comfortable to spend most of your time with people who speak your native language, try to seek out English-speaking roommates, office partners, lab partners, and friends. Take advantage of the services offered by the Center for American English Language and Culture (CAELC), including tutors, classes, and language labs; for more information, visit their website: http://www.virginia.edu/provost/caelc/

- Openly acknowledge on the first day of class that you and your students may sometimes have difficulty understanding each other because English is not your native language. Everyone will feel more comfortable. Ask your students to let you know when they don’t understand. Tell them you may need to ask them to repeat or rephrase what they have said. Understand that they may need you to do the same.

- In class, if you’re not sure what a student has said, restate it to confirm your understanding. Avoid pretending to understand or trying to answer an unclear question. If students find you to be confident of your knowledge of the material, well prepared for class, and interested in them, they will overlook many language difficulties.

- Rely on the blackboard or PowerPoint slides to display key words that may be misheard or misunderstood and to emphasize their importance. Give your students verbal signals to let them know what you are doing, or where you are in your organizational plan as you lecture. Words such as “first,” “next,” or “an example of…” help students organize their notes and their thinking along with yours.

- Ask your students to comment on the course three or four weeks into the semester. A short evaluation of the progress of the class gives you valuable information about what students have learned and what you can do to improve communication while you still have time. You can find sample comment forms and individual help in the Teaching Resource Center and online.


How Can You Expand Students’ Cultural Awareness?

American students’ ignorance about your country and international affairs in general may surprise you. Partly because the United States is large, many Americans don’t know much about the rest of the world and may think that the United States is superior to other countries. Frequently unaware of the geography, the politics, or even the levels of technical and cultural advancement in other countries, most students do want to learn about them, however. You can help educate them by answering questions that they might have about your country of origin. Understand that their ignorance isn’t related to you personally; in fact, you can best overcome it by allowing students to get to know you. American students will be able to defeat some stereotypes by getting to know a compassionate, intelligent person who is not from America.

Conclusion

Improving teaching skills is an ongoing process that instructors find both challenging and rewarding. Although some of the demands made on international TAs are different from those facing American TAs, many others are similar. Thus the Teaching Resource Center sponsors programs throughout the year to respond to your general needs, which align well with the Center for American Language and Culture’s offerings tailored to concerns specific to ITAs, such as a training course where you can examine teaching issues, practice techniques, and improve your communication skills.

In your own department, you can attain help from your supervising faculty member and more experienced TAs. If you establish a friendly relationship with your students, they can help you with
the English language, especially with idioms.

You are a needed and welcome part of the U.Va. community as a graduate student, scholar, instructor, and representative of another way of viewing the world; you will contribute to the University’s educational system by sharing a cooperative learning relationship with your students. We hope you find your TA experience at the University of Virginia positive and rewarding.
ANALYZING AND IMPROVING YOUR TEACHING

This section offers ideas to help you keep growing as an instructor. It includes ways to analyze and develop your perspective and skills as a teacher, to share ideas with colleagues, and to find out what and how your students are learning and how you can help them learn in more effective ways.

Attending Workshops
You may find that attending interactive workshops is the most efficient, engaging way to discover new approaches to teaching and reflect on your own teaching. The Teaching Resource Center (TRC) offers a number of workshops each year that are interdisciplinary, where faculty and graduate students consistently find that they learn new ideas from colleagues in other disciplines. The TRC also offers workshops for specific departments, and these too provoke enlightening exchanges and inspired teaching.
To request a workshop on a particular topic, contact the Teaching Resource Center; to receive regular e-mail announcements of upcoming events related to teaching, sign up through the website to be on the TRC list of interested teachers at http://trc.virginia.edu/. Attending workshops like these and applying the ideas you learn therein not only allows you to grow as a teacher, but also expands your personal connections at U.Va.

Consultations to Analyze Teaching
To understand why your teaching works well and what improvements may be made to your teaching practices, it can be helpful to reflect on such practices with a sympathetic colleague, whether someone in your department, a Teaching Resource Center consultant or, if you are a TA, your faculty supervisor. Such consultations are opportunities to help you improve, not to compare you with others or judge the value of your work.

Teaching is a skill that may be developed and improved with study and practice, just like any other scholarly activity and skill. Asking for the perspectives and advice of other teachers is one way to continue to learn pedagogical tools and techniques, so that your hard work in the classroom will be more productive and satisfying. As an added benefit, consulting with your colleagues across disciplinary lines can reduce the isolation we often feel in our work, allow for mentoring relationships to form, and can offer serendipitous opportunities for research collaboration.

Consulting with a Colleague
One way to consult with your departmental colleagues is to initiate mutual classroom observations or videotaping to benefit both you and your colleague. Here are some suggestions:

- Begin with someone you feel comfortable with.
- Request that the colleague visit your class or join you in watching a videotape of one of your classes. Before meeting with that person, consider aspects of your teaching that you’d like an outsider’s opinion about: How can you encourage all students to discuss? How could you better explain difficult concepts? Limit your questions to about four.
- Before the class, meet with your observer for fifteen to thirty minutes to share
specifically what you would like the observer to look for. What evidence will help you analyze your questions about your teaching? If, for example, your concern is equal participation in discussion, the observer might note how you call on students, how much wait-time you allow, your eye contact with various students, how well students pay attention, what learning activities you use in the classroom, and how well students have apparently prepared. Ask your colleague to provide evidence rather than only offering general impressions.

- As class begins, introduce the observer to the students in whatever way you and the observer prefer. Sometimes instructors are concerned about students’ reaction to an outside observer or camera. But experience shows that although a videotaped or observed class is, no doubt, subtly changed by the presence of an unfamiliar person, students normally appear to forget the camera or observer after about ten minutes. In effect, if the camera doesn’t bother you, it won’t bother most of them either. (Note: some students may have religious or cultural reasons for not wanting to appear on camera; please be sensitive to these requests by announcing your intent to videotape during the next class session and asking students who have legitimate reasons for not appearing on camera to speak with you after class.) Make it clear that the observer (or camera) will help you improve your teaching.

- As soon as possible after class, in a relaxed setting, review the observer’s notes together and draw conclusions about what the evidence might mean. You may find that you focus your eye contact and questions on students in the front. The observer may have noted that non-discussants spent a lot of time flipping through the assigned reading. By examining appropriate detailed notes, you can draw useful conclusions yourself: for instance, you may decide that students were flipping through the pages because they were confused or they read the text before class.

- Finally, decide what few teaching changes you will make to address each major challenge noted. For instance, you may decide to talk individually with students who seem unprepared. Or you might make a conscious effort to look more frequently at the students in the back of the classroom, and call on them directly – or reconfigure the classroom or your own position so that there is no “back” of the classroom. Likewise, you may consider preparing class activities that will not allow students to be disengaged, and make your expectations of active participation clear. After your colleague observes your classroom, you may both want to switch roles. As an observer, you will discover a number of valuable teaching strategies to try, and perhaps see some techniques you’d like to work on yourself.

Consulting with TRC Staff
The Teaching Resource Center exists to help individual faculty members, graduate instructors, and teaching assistants teach as effectively as they can. All consultations with TRC staff are voluntary, confidential, and available upon request. You can sign up for a confidential consultation through the TRC website at http://www.trc.virginia.edu/Consultations/Consultations.htm. Using the online form, you can request a Teaching Analysis Poll, an in-class observation, a videotape analysis, or a one-on-one consultation on a teaching or learning topic of your choice. The procedure for each of these types of consultations is similar to the process explained above. TRC staff members focus on your goals for improving your teaching and are happy to help you brainstorm ideas and locate
resources for addressing the challenges you face in your classrooms. For more details, see the TRC website at http://trc.virginia.edu.

Students’ Feedback
Although your students should not be the only people to evaluate your teaching, they can offer valuable insights that are different than those gained through classroom observation and videotape analysis (see McAllister, 1999). In addition to noticing what and how well your students are learning in the classroom, there are a variety of methods to gather productive feedback from students about your teaching.

Seeking Students’ Comments
In addition to assessing student learning in your course, you may want to ask students directly what they think about the course and your teaching. To gain the most benefit from student comments, seek such comments early in the semester, preferably no later than a month into the course. Soliciting early evaluations will allow you to use student comments to make useful changes. First, you will have time to improve in areas where you and the students agree improvements can and should be made. Second, you can seek students’ feedback about certain aspects of the course that most concern you. Students value the chance to give their opinions, and they notice and appreciate ensuing changes, often applauding such improvements on final course evaluations. Finally, devoting a little time to analyzing teaching and learning increases the dialogue between you and your students about the course, motivating some of them to work harder in their role as learners.

Comments forms. Use the One-Minute Paper format (“Do you find that small-group or whole-class discussions facilitate your learning better, and why?”), or create a brief questionnaire to gather precisely the information you would like to receive. It can be as short as three or four questions:

- How well do class discussions help you digest the assigned readings?
- What could the teacher do to better facilitate your learning in discussions?
- What could other students do to better facilitate your learning in discussions?
- What could you do to better facilitate your learning in discussions?

Use only questions that require students to create an answer beyond “yes” or “no,” and try to generate as many ideas as you can. Open-ended questions work well. For instance, you might ask your students to fill in the blanks in the following sentence: “I learn the most when we ________ because ________.“ For help with formulating productive questions or constructing a useful format for comment forms, contact the Teaching Resource Center and/or check the website for teaching tips. (trc.virginia.edu)

Ask your students to provide their feedback anonymously during class; rates of return are much higher when the feedback is solicited in class. Announce that you will read their comments shortly, summarize the results, and discuss with them your plans for the rest of the course. While reading students’ remarks, consider both how you could incorporate helpful suggestions and why you think that some of the proposed changes would not facilitate learning in the course. During the next class period, explain what you will and will not change and why. Students who learn early on why a desired modification is not possible usually accept the reason and get down to the business of learning.

Teaching Analysis Poll (TAP). The Teaching Resource Center can also give you a summary of your students’ views about their learning in the course by conducting a Teaching Analysis Poll for you. Simply request that a TRC consultant visit your class, sharing with them why you want to have a TAP, and what possible dates and times you would prefer that the TAP be conducted. On the day of the TAP, thirty minutes before the end of the class time, you introduce the consultant, letting the students know that she is there to help you figure out how to improve the teaching and learning in the
course. You may also want to tell students that you will talk about results with them during an upcoming class session. You leave the room, allowing the TRC consultant to perform the TAP in your absence, with an appointment to talk with the consultant about the results in the near future.

While you’re out of the room, the consultant gives groups of four or five students five minutes to answer three questions:

- What most helps you learn in this class?
- What impedes your learning in this class?
- What suggestions do you have to overcome each impediment?

One student from each group writes on the board, in three columns, the answers about which most of their group members agree. With the class as a whole, the consultant reviews the comments on the board, clarifying ambiguities and keeping only those observations that a majority of the students approve. The consultant thanks the students and reiterates that the instructor will receive the summary of reactions remaining on the board.

During the follow-up meeting, the consultant conveys the students’ information, adding details from the conversation and discussing possible refinements and modifications. The consultant can help you decide what modifications to make to your course, if any. The TAP gives you more feedback than do individual written evaluations because students have time to discuss the course in a safe atmosphere and because the consultant talks with students to reduce vague responses. Furthermore, when you receive the TAP results, you will know that the majority of students concur with the recommendations. Gone is the one negative remark that you can’t forget for days; gone are the ambiguities of written remarks. The TAP is completely confidential, the consultant keeps no written notes, and a TAP can be requested only by the instructor or teaching assistant involved.

**Final evaluations.** Use your departmental and/or school-wide standardized final evaluation form, which usually allow you to include your own questions as well. Most departments use online course evaluations, which will be released to you in the aggregate after you have submitted final grades. Do read your evaluations soon after you receive them. Make notes or highlight positive comments; list negative comments with the number of times each appears. Look for overall patterns in the feedback, rather than isolated comments at either extreme. If you have at least a dozen responses, you can probably ignore a negative comment that occurs only once unless the author offers a useful suggestion. Evaluate the positive comments alongside the negative ones; you will see contradictions. These will require you to assess such feedback in the context of your larger frame of reference for the course and your teaching methods and goals. Most importantly, assimilate the useful suggestions and consider possible ways to respond to trends in the comments that suggest means for improving the learning environment.

**Decide how you will improve next time, and note your ideas.** If your evaluations frustrate or confuse you, discuss them with a supervisor, colleague, or TRC consultant. It can be enlightening to see the evaluations through the eyes of a less personally invested observer. Finally, be sure to download and keep your students’ evaluations; you may need them when you’re nominated for a teaching award, when you are writing your teaching portfolio, or when you apply for a job.

**Teaching Portfolios**

Much of the documentation you gather in the activities explained above will be useful evidence in a teaching portfolio. Teaching portfolios are used for a number of different purposes:

- To allow you to reflect analytically upon your teaching
To help you improve your teaching through a process of self-analysis and reconsideration
To organize documents pertinent to teaching that you can mine later for grant applications or award nominations
To document your effectiveness as a teacher
To help you strengthen the relationship between your teaching and research
To organize evidence of your professional expertise

Rather like the professional portfolio of an artist, composer or writer, the teaching portfolio shows the person’s best work, and perhaps argues for better work to come.
--Robert Bruner, Darden

To create a teaching portfolio, you select, analyze, and comment on documents that demonstrate your teaching in your discipline. A brief opening narrative statement includes your reflections on teaching, summaries of what and how you teach, efforts toward improvement, and evidence of your teaching effectiveness. Evidence supporting your assertions appears in appendices or web links: for example, syllabi, students’ work presented anonymously (perhaps with your remarks or grades), students’ comments, a videotaped class, colleagues’ observation comments. If you are a graduate student, your letters of recommendation for the job market should also include details about how you interact and communicate with students in the classroom; if you have done collegial observations, you may have a proficient letter-writer handy.

Whether you plan to create a portfolio or not, think about what constitutes evidence of good teaching, so that, if needed, you can quickly gather some of the information that you will find invaluable in analyzing or presenting your teaching. For further ideas about what to collect, contact the Teaching Resource Center.

Analyzing Teaching and Your Career

College and university administrators want good instruction for their students; if you are entering or continuing in the academic job market, it will benefit you to convince search, promotion, and tenure committee members of your excellence in teaching as well as in research. In addition, spending some time and energy analyzing your teaching not only enhances your skills, but also your self-confidence: you know why you are effective.

If you are a graduate student planning for a career other than teaching, your classroom experience can still be quite beneficial. Your future employer will be glad to learn that you present yourself well in front of an audience, that you have strong organizational and/or leadership qualities, that you meet deadlines, and so on. While improving your teaching, you are also developing skills applicable to many other worthwhile endeavors.

As an assistant professor, if you consistently spend even a little time considering your teaching with colleagues’ assistance, you will improve your teaching. Doing so can help your chances of being selected for promotion and tenure. Many of your colleagues will enjoy conversing with you about the intellectual challenges of teaching and research and want to continue those conversations. In addition, colleagues who have seen you teach can speak or write first-hand about your teaching. That will give you the opportunity to construct a stronger dossier than one that only includes feedback from students’ evaluations. Using a teaching portfolio can help you organize pertinent evidence for the ease of your promotion and tenure committee.

Finally, never forget the personal satisfaction of teaching well: the excitement of a student who is constantly learning, the pleasure of creating and facilitating a beneficial learning environment, the thrill of opening new vistas to curious minds.

Work on your teaching practices as you would any skill you want to develop and improve. Over time and with consistent thoughtful practice, you will find facilitating learning in your classrooms to be a continual source of inspiration, energy, and meaning in your career.
APPENDIX I

TEACHING AWARDS

Several University-wide teaching awards, fellowships, and endowed chairs are available each year at U.Va. to recognize exceptionally effective teaching. Award descriptions appear below, as well as at http://www.trc.virginia.edu/Awards/Awards.htm, where you will also find the names and departments of all recent and previous award winners. Consult your department or school for various local awards.

The All-University Outstanding Graduate Teaching Assistant Award

Under the auspices of the Teaching Resource Center, winners of approximately thirty GTA awards of $250 are chosen annually through departments. These award-winners are considered for three $1000 awards, with one award in each of the three areas of arts and humanities, social sciences, STEM (math, sciences and engineering. Selection committees coordinated by the TRC selects the three major GTA awardees from this group.

The All-University Teaching Award

In a program supported by the Office of the Provost, three awards of $2,000 each are given to outstanding faculty members teaching undergraduate students in each of three broad areas: humanities, social sciences, and sciences. Six additional $2000 faculty awards are given for undergraduate, graduate, or professional teaching, and mentoring of students in any discipline. Nominations are solicited by the faculty Teaching Awards Committee.

The Alumni Board of Trustees Teaching Award

Any full-time, untenured assistant professor on a tenure-track is eligible for a nomination. Assistant professors are ineligible during the year they are under review for tenure. The Alumni Board of Trustees awards a $2,500 cash prize and a $1,500 research award. The Office of the Provost provides the winner with one-semester leave at full pay.

The Alumni Association

Distinguished Professor Award

The Distinguished Professor Award is conferred annually upon that member of the faculty who has, over a period of not less than ten years, excelled as a classroom teacher, demonstrated commitment to student success, and made significant contributions to the life of the University. The award consists of a cash prize of $10,000, and a lifetime membership in the Alumni Association. Nominations are solicited through the Office of the Provost.

Winners of this prestigious award are asked to share their teaching expertise with students and/or colleagues in one or more of these ways during the three years following their selection for this Award:
Work with the Teaching Resource Center to enhance teaching generally at the University by, for example, participating and/or presenting in teaching workshops; mentoring faculty colleagues on teaching issues; leading a faculty or TA reading group about teaching; organizing a departmental series of teaching workshops and/or panels.

Advise one or more undergraduate students on a research project, such as those funded by the Harrison Research, Creative Arts, Double Hoo Awards; and by the Jefferson Public Citizens Program.

Offer a special undergraduate course, such as an Academic Community Engagement (ACE) course, a University Seminar (USEM), a College Advising (COLA) Seminar, or a J-Term course.

Excellence in Faculty Mentoring Award

This award recognizes full-time UVa faculty who have demonstrated excellence and dedication in helping junior faculty members succeed at U.Va. both within and across departments and/or Schools. The award consists of a $5,000 prize.

Excellence in Education Abroad Award

Full-time faculty who demonstrate excellent leadership in developing study abroad programs, excellent fostering of study abroad, and/or excellent teaching of study abroad courses are eligible for this $2000 award.

The State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) Outstanding Faculty Awards

The Commonwealth’s highest honor for faculty at Virginia’s colleges and universities, this award recognizes excellent faculty on the basis of exemplary contributions to teaching, research, or public service. Winners of these state-wide awards are chosen by a committee made up of State Council leaders, business and community leaders, faculty members, and past recipients. The award consists of a $5,000 cash prize.

The Cavaliers’ Distinguished Teaching Professorship

Tenured, full-time faculty members are appointed to the Cavaliers’ Distinguished Teaching Professorship because of outstanding and enduring excellence in teaching. The Cavaliers’ DTP devote attention primarily to enriching instruction in their discipline during the chair appointment and beyond. They work with the Teaching Resource Center to promote the general enhancement of teaching and normally teach a University Seminar.

NEH Distinguished Professorship

In response to a proposal written at the Teaching Resource Center, the National Endowment for the Humanities awarded U.Va. a Special Challenge Grant. That challenge met, the University now has three rotating, three-year chairs for distinguished faculty members in the humanities to pursue special projects related to teaching their disciplines:
The Richard A. and Sara Page Mayo DTP
The Horace W. Goldsmith DTP
The Daniels Family DTP
Distinguished Teaching Professors also regularly share their ideas generated interdisciplinarily through TRC-sponsored workshops.

**U.S. Professor of the Year Award**

UVa can nominate up to three faculty for this $5000 award, chosen by a national panel of judges. For details about judging criteria and nomination dossier requirements for this highly competitive and prestigious award, see http://www.usprofessorsoftheyear.org. The University will pay the entry fee for all nominees selected by the Teaching Awards Committee to be put forward for this award.
WORKS CITED


Paul, Richard and Linda Elder. *Critical Thinking: Tools for Taking Charge of Your Learning and Your Life*


COLLEGE STUDENTS’ QUESTIONS—WITH THE RIGHT ANSWERS

NB: For details about regulations, consult the Undergraduate Record, Graduate Record or Faculty Handbook, as appropriate. Here are answers to frequently asked questions in the College of Arts and Sciences.

I’d like to change the grading option in this course to CR/NC. Would you please approve this request on a petition to my dean?
   The deadline for changing the grading option is always the same as the end of the ADD period, i.e., two weeks into the semester. This date is NOT flexible.

I just realized I’m taking this course CR/NC, and I need it for an Area Requirement course. Will you authorize a change in the grading status?
   The Deans do not approve late requests for changing the grading basis of a course.

I just realized I’m taking this course CR/NC, and I need it for a major (or minor) requirement. Will you authorize a change in the grading status after the deadline has passed?
   Such changes are normally not approved. The student must petition the relevant Department for credit toward the major, but the grading option will remain CR/NC. An individual instructor can always inform the department of the student’s grade.

I want to drop this class. But it’s past the deadline. Will you approve my petition?
   The Deans rarely approve petitions for late drops. If the deadline for withdrawal has not passed, a student may withdraw with the instructor’s approval, receiving a notation of W. The student asks the instructor to complete a Grade Indicator Form and has the dean sign it.

Since I just got my exam back now and discovered I need to drop this class, isn’t this justification for a late drop?
   No. Decisions cannot be based on return of exams. There must be an enforceable deadline.

If I take an Incomplete, by when must it be finished?
   Students have ONE MONTH to finish their work. Incompletes not approved in writing will convert to F’s. Students must pick up a form to authorize an incomplete in Garrett Hall, have it signed by the instructor, and return it to Garrett Hall for authorization.

I need a better grade for this course to count for credit in my major. Can I submit additional work after the grade has been submitted?
   No. See the grade change policy statement in the Undergraduate Record. Grade changes are allowed only for errors in transcription or in calculation.

How late can I withdraw from a class?
   The final withdrawal date is set at ten class days before the end of classes. After that, students must complete the work on time or through an Incomplete.

I have to take a plane to _____ over the break to see my family (or to be in a wedding, etc.). To get a reservation, I had to make one before the end of finals. Can’t I PLEASE take your final early?
College policy is that there are NO early exams. The instructor might allow a student to mail an exam in later, take an Incomplete, or complete the exam as a take-home.

**How do I postpone an exam because of an overcrowded exam schedule?**  
Students must go to Garrett Hall to complete the Exam Change paperwork.

**I was ill and missed a quiz. How can I make it up?**  
Instructors make their own decisions about make-up exams. Do not send students to the dean for an excuse.

**From an instructor: Several of my students are doing really poorly. How do I find their association deans to discuss the situation?**  
Call 924-8863 with a student’s name or U.Va. ID number and request the student’s association dean. You can learn the dean’s office hours, leave a message, or talk with the dean’s secretary.