

## PREPARATION CHECKLIST FOR THE FIRST DAY

You should meet with faculty to clarify expectations about:

	Already Know	Find out or do now	Do later or not relevant
<b>Workload</b>			
Number of students/sections			
Number and kinds of assignments			
Number of exams and papers			
Expected turn around time for grading			
My role in grading			
My role in lecture			
My role in student evaluations (end of class)			
<b>Policies</b>			
Purpose of section			
Attendance mandatory?			
Deadlines/late work (penalties)			
Plagiarism/cheating (penalties)			
How will students be evaluated			
<b>Resources/logistics</b>			
Access to photocopying			
Phones			
Desk copies of course material			
Where will students turn in papers/hw?			
Office space (for office hours)			
Course webpage (who manages it?)			
<b>Supervision</b>			
Weekly meetings?			
Will Prof review your paper or assignment evaluations?			
Will he or she visit your section?			

2. Visit your classroom(s) before you hold section in them.
3. Clarify your own:
  - Goals for the section
  - Expectations for people's behavior in the section
  - Pedagogical view
  - How students will get in touch with you
4. Prepare handouts (or be prepared to talk about number 3)
5. Read materials for the lectures of the week, and skim the readings for the next week if possible.
6. Make an outline for what you'll cover in the first section.

## **TAing Large Undergraduate Non-major Courses**

What you can do to make discussion class more worthwhile and enjoyable for your students:

### **Learning Students Names**

- This is one of the most important things you can do.
- Students feel much more comfortable with you if you know their name
- They also feel like you care about them because so few TAs bother to do this. It startles them at first when you actually call on them to answer a question and you already know their name.
  - Hint: Take pictures of your students in front of the chalk board with their names next to them. This way you can memorize their names before the next class
- Doing this makes a big impression and their respect for you usually jumps up about 10 notches.

### **Manage student participation equitably**

- Don't favor only one student in class
- Try to hit as many students as you can during class allowing everyone the chance to answer
- Encourages active student participation
- With a large class it's easy to overlook the quiet students when there are a few who are willing to participate. Try to involve everyone

### **Vary your teaching methods**

- Try to teach in different ways using more than just the blackboard to get the material across.
  - You'll have 60-100 students to teach, not all of them will learn the same way!
- If you're going over homework problems here's an example of something that worked very well for me:
  - Give a problem to the class. Have them work on it individually for a few minutes then get in groups of three or so to compare answers/help each other out. Then have the groups help you solve the problem on the board.
- **Group work is amazing**
  - Students can talk with each other and help each other. I did a small experiment when I taught my sections differently for 4 weeks, (one with group work and one with lecture only) switching each week. When the students worked in groups their grades were higher on their homework every time, by a startling amount.
- Try to include visual and or hands on activities whenever possible
  - Using props or demonstrations to explain difficult concepts discussed in class allows those students who learn best by visual means, rather than by taking notes, an opportunity to learn the material as well.
- Uses clear and concise examples and illustrations
  - Get used to drawing figures and diagrams on the board; they can be your best friends.

What you can do to make your job easier

### **Be Prepared in Section/Discussion**

- One of the easiest ways to make your life easier is to have lecture notes (If applicable) ready for section.
  - Attend lecture if necessary, take notes along with the students. This way you know exactly what was covered in class and what material they are expected to know.
- If you're doing Homework review have solutions ready – and know them!
  - Have solutions handy but try to be comfortable enough to work through problems without constantly referring to the solutions.
  - If you're prepared and you show that you know the material it comes across much better than if you're second guessing yourself and always checking your notes. It gives them confidence in your abilities.
- If you're learning with your students you should plan more time for your own review of the material. You need to know it better than they do so you may have to delve a little deeper and read extra material.
- Be able to give alternative explanations when needed
  - This is important because sometime what the Prof says just doesn't make sense to the students but you may be able to offer several different explanations giving more students the opportunity to understand the material being covered.

### **Tips for Grading**

- It's very easy to be overwhelmed by the sheer volume of homework or exams you may be expected to grade. Keep track of the time you spend grading the first two weeks, as well as all of your other duties. If you end up going over your 20 hours a week, talk to the professor about possibly getting a Reader to do the grading for you.
- Grading Fairly
  - With upwards of 100 homeworks to grade it's hard to guarantee that everyone will be graded the same way. There are some easy ways to make your grading more consistent:
    - For example, if there are 4 problems/questions – Grade all of problem 1, then all of problem 2... etc. This way you can be as consistent as possible and can deduct points equally for mistakes on all student work.
    - Write up a detailed grading sheet with points allotted for each question. Know how many points a “math” error or “significant figure” error is worth, be consistent.
    - Discuss with the professor if they are to receive partial credit for their work, or if they get credit if they follow through with the correct procedure (even if they get the answer wrong due to an early math or other mistake).
    - Determine points for partial credit, stick to them and be consistent.

### **Handouts – Online Lecture Notes**

- On some occasions it may be necessary to have handouts in section. This comes in handy if there is additional material you're including in your discussion that was not covered in class.
- Have extra plots or graph photocopied and available if they need them for their assignment.
- I have taken notes during the main class and posted them online with helpful hints and links. This is very time consuming but can be very beneficial to you and the students.
  - Typically, posting the notes a week after the class prevents students from skipping class but allows them to have access to the notes when doing their assignments.
  - You can refer to the notes, by date at page, during section if students have printed them out. This can come in handy!!

### **Before an exam**

- Ask them to review their class notes/ chapter from recent lectures. Have each student write out one possible essay/test question for that material. Put them into small groups. Have the groups exchange questions and try to answer the questions. You could end with each group reading the top one or two 'test' questions to the class.
- (for an upper division course) Break class into groups and give each group a topic that needs to be covered/reviewed. Ask them to prepare a 5-10 min lesson on the topic. Provide overheads and pens or other supplies that might be useful. Give yourself enough time to clarify and add any forgotten information.
- Offer to give extra review sessions (other than those done with the professor). It takes some of your time, but the students will appreciate it and do better on the exams because of it. A lot of times they're afraid of asking the Prof questions but if you've gained their confidence and they trust you they'll be willing to asking you questions at your review instead.
  - If you're the baking type – Providing brownies or cookies entices more people to show up for the reviews.

### **General Helpful Tips**

- These are things that are ok to say in class if you don't know the answer to a question or the question is way off topic, which is going to happen on some occasions:
  - I don't know the answer to that (but I'll check it out and we'll talk about it next class).
  - That's a great question but we can talk about it in office hours.
  - That's a great question but we'll be covering that in class at a later time and will be able to discuss it in more detail at that time.
  - We're not covering the material in that kind of detail, but if you're interested we can talk about it more in office hours.

### **All not going well?**

- Ask for feedback. Put out a survey. At the end of class ask each student to write down one thing they liked about class and one thing they didn't like about class and hand it in to you anonymously. Then you can begin to make specific changes.