It's Only Syllabus Day- Who Cares?

Robert V. Vavala, Instructional Designer
Center for Transformative Teaching
Engineering and Computing Engineering Core

Why the First Day of Class Really Matters and How You Can Use it to Set the Tone for the Entire Semester

UNIVERSITY OF Nebraska Lincoln®

Typical First Day of Class

- Take attendance
- Read the syllabus
- (maybe) Introduce first topic
- (maybe) Give first assignment
- Focus on DOs and DON'Ts
- End class early
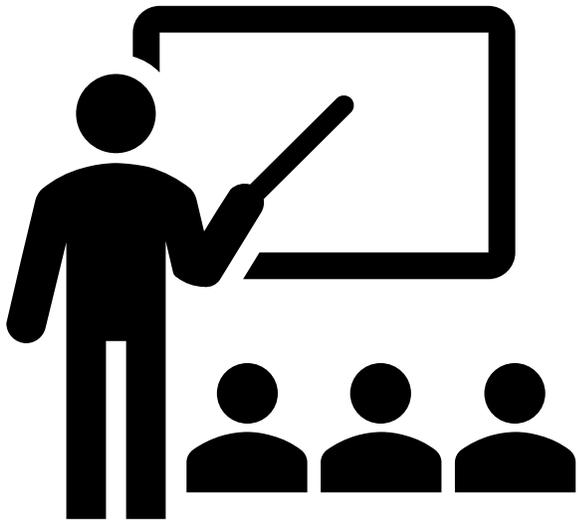
It's Much More Than "Syllabus Day"

- On the first day of class "…your students are forming a lasting impression not just of you as a teacher but of your course, too. Their early, thin-slice judgments are powerful enough to condition their attitudes toward the entire course, the effort they are willing to put into it, and the relationship they will have with you and their peers throughout the semester."—James Lang

On the First Day You Can…

…create a positive first impression

o Professional attire

o Arrive early and greet students as they arrive

o Introduce yourself and provide your qualifications to teach the course

o Tell students how to address you

o Share some personal information

o Help students learn about each other

o Ignite students' interest in course

Four key concepts for the first day of class

- Curiosity

- Community

- Learning

- Expectations

8 Strategies to use on the first day of class

Title: Instructor Interview (Strategy 1)

Time: 10 minutes

Benefits: - Establish credibility

- Students get to know the instructor

- Humanizes the instructor

- Allows instructor to explain
why they enjoy teaching the subject

-Piques interest/starts learning

How: **-** Put students in groups or pairs
- Each group comes up with two
questions to ask the instructor
- Instructor answers student questions

Title: Student-Generated Course-Related Questions (Strategy 2)

Time: 10 minutes or longer

Benefits:

-Students get favorable impression of course and instructor

-Students believe they have relevant knowledge

-Instructor identifies students' knowledge base and potential misconceptions

How:

-Students, alone or in pairs, write anonymous course-related questions

-Instructor reads some questions out loud to the class

-Students try to answer and/or discuss the questions before instructor gives the answer (or you don't give the answer-will address during the semester)

**Title:** Student Introduce Each Other (Strategy 3)

Time: 20 minutes

Benefits:

-Builds community

-Students get to know each other

-Students make connections on campus

-If students have a buddy, they won't ask you

How:

-Put students in pairs or let them do it themselves

-Students introduce themselves to each other

-Students ask questions you've provided (name, hometown, major, unique fact about themselves)

-Students introduce their partners to the class
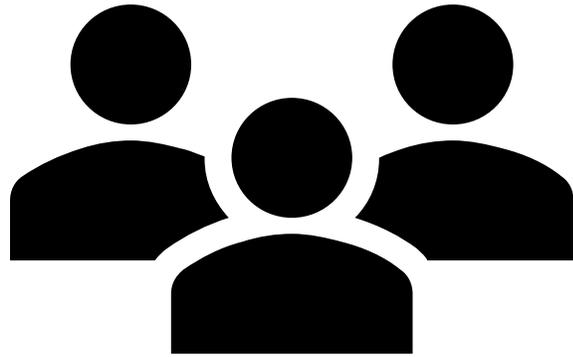
Title: First Day Card (Strategy 4)

Time: 15 minutes or longer

Benefits:

-You get an understanding of where your students are

-Students know you care-creates environment of safety and trust

How:

-Place flip charts around the room with statements:

- I learn best in classes when the instructor_____.

- Students in courses help me learn when they_____.

- I am most likely to participate in class when_____.

- This is something that makes it hard to learn in a course.

- This is something that makes it easy to learn in a course.

-Collect charts and read/discuss highlights-explain how you will work to accomplish the things on the lists

Title: Interest Inventory Cards (Strategy 5)

Time: 15 minutes

Benefits:

- Instructor gets information about students

 - Students feel instructor cares

 - Humanizes instructor

How:

-Give students index card and have them put answers to questions

o Name, preferred name, pronouns

o Why are they taking the course

o Fun questions—for example, "If you could have a song play as you entered the room what would it be?" Or "What would you spend on first if you won the lottery?"

-Could have students share their cards with partner and have partner introduce them

Title: Write the Textbook (Strategy 6)

Time: 30 minutes

Benefits:

- Instructor understands students' knowledge base

-Students feel instructor cares

-Students interact with peers

-Gets students interested in and thinking about course subject matter and understand they have relevant knowledge

-Exposes potential misconceptions

How:

-Students, individually write a list of topics that might be in a textbook for the course

-Students are paired and put their lists into categories and name categories

-Join two or more pairs who combine ideas, create a table of contents for the 'book', and write it on chart paper or white board

-Share lists and discuss

Title: Challenges and Solutions (Strategy 7)

Time: 20 minutes

Benefits:

-Proactively overcome challenges

-Students feel motivated by their peers

-Immediate engagement with course concepts

How:

-Individually or in pairs students answer the questions

- What one thing do you think might be most challenging for you in this course?

- How do you plan to overcome that challenge?

-Put students in pairs or small groups and have them share

-Groups share their answers with class

Title: Canvas & Syllabus Scavenger Hunt (Strategy 8)

Time: 15-20 minutes

Benefits:

-Highlight or emphasize most important components of syllabus

-Familiarize students with the course Canvas page

-Immediate engagement in course

-Students make connections

How:

-Create questions about the syllabus (When's the first assignment due? How do you submit assignments? How do you contact me? Where is the math tutoring office?)

-In pairs or small groups students answer questions

-Have them share answers OR create low-stakes syllabus quiz for them to submit on Canvas
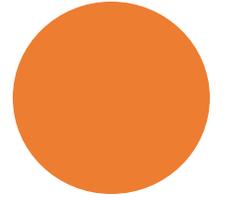
Instructional Technology

Instructional technology resources that will help you deliver course content and engage students

- Canvas
- CATME SMARTER Teamwork
- Creating Equations
- Microsoft Teams
- OneNote
- Team Maker for Canvas
- VidGrid
- Yellowdig
- Zoom

Teaching and Learning

Teaching and learning resources that help you design and deliver your course

- Academic Integrity
- Engaging Students in Synchronous Sessions
- Open Educational Resources
- Reflecting on Teaching
- Teaching Inclusively
- Student Self-Reflection
- Tips for Implementing Best Teaching Practices
- Being a successful online learner canvas module
- Course Review and Syllabus Review

Assessment

Program and classroom assessment resources

- ABET assessment
- Classroom Assessment
- Teaching Evaluation

References

- From The Chronicle https://www.chronicle.com/article/how-to-teach-a-good-first-day-of-class/?cid2=gen_login_refresh&cid=gen_sign_in

- Robinson, D. (2019). Engaging students on the first day of class: Student-generated questions promote positive course expectations. *Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Psychology, 5*(3), 183–188. https://doi.org/10.1037/stl0000139

- "Teaching College in an Age of Accountability" Lyons et al. (2003, p. 87)

- From Faculty Focus https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/course-design-ideas/first-day-of-class-activities-that-create-a-climate-for-learning/

Thank you.

- Questions?