

Guidebook for Teaching Assistants

Institute for Teaching and Learning, The University of Connecticut

Sponsored by Institute for Teaching and Learning

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WELCOME

Welcome to your new position as a Teaching Assistant at the University of Connecticut. You will find yourself taking on many new challenges as you embark on your dual role as a graduate student and a teaching assistant. The University would like to support you in fulfilling these obligations. Feel free to contact Teaching Assistant Programs (486-2945) or visit our website at www.tap.uconn.edu for more information on the kinds of support available.

WELCOME

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What can I do to not feel nervous?

Feeling nervous is a problem faced by almost all new teachers. There are a few things you can do to at least reduce how nervous you'll feel the first time you meet your class. Make sure that you know where your classroom is and how all the equipment in the room works so that you do not become flustered in front of your students. You should check out your room a couple of days before classes actually start in case there are any problems to be addressed. Be sure that you have read over your syllabus and are prepared to discuss it with your students. Remember that your students are nervous too and plan some introduction activity so that the students will do some of the talking. As the students get to know each other they will begin to relax.

2. How important is it to learn every student's name?

Learning your students' names is critical to communicate to them that you care about them as individuals. Although it may seem daunting at first, you'll be pleased at how much your efforts will be noticed and appreciated by the students. For ideas on how to learn a lot of names, see our suggestions on name

learning in the **Preparing to Teach** chapter of this booklet.

3. What do I do if I have a student who makes trouble?

While it is good to be prepared to deal with a troublemaker, your best bet is to try to avoid this situation by making your expectations about classroom behavior very clear from the first day. Also remember that your department is your first line of defense. Always check with your department head or advisor on how to handle these types of problems. You can also consult with the Teaching Assistant Programs (6-2945) or the Dean of Students Office (6-3426). You should never try to handle a problematic situation by yourself. For more suggestions see pg. 42, **Student Conduct**.

4. Should I be friendly or formal?

Generally speaking, an informal and friendly attitude is the norm for American classrooms, but the issue of just how friendly you should be is not always clear. You want your students to feel comfortable with you in the classroom but you don't want to undermine your authority in the class. It is possible to be friendly while maintaining your authority as long as your students do not mistake your friendliness for leniency on deadlines and grades. See **Preparing to Teach, Formal or Not** for more information on this topic.

5. What if my students don't like me?

This is a common concern among new TAs, but one that rarely actually arises. As long as you are enthusiastic about your teaching and subject matter and show a genuine interest in helping your students learn, your students will likely respond very positively.

6. How can I tell if my students are actually learning what I am teaching?

In addition to the tests and quizzes, which some departments supply, there are some informal and ungraded methods you can use to check your students' comprehension. For example, the **One-Minute Paper** is a quick and easy way to find out what your students are learning or struggling with and it does not require much class or outside time. See the section on **Getting Feedback** (Pg. 21) for details on how this method works.

7. Where can I go to get help with my teaching?

You will be able to get help from your supervising professor as well as your peers in your department. Don't hesitate to ask the experienced TAs in your program for help with all aspects of teaching. The Institute for Teaching and Learning and the office of Teaching Assistant Programs also has a range of services available to help teaching assistants. Contact them for an

appointment or check out their website (ITL website, www.itl.uconn.edu and TAP website, www.tap.uconn.edu) for workshops and available services.

Responsibilities

At the University of Connecticut, teaching assistants may:

- prepare and deliver lectures
- monitor examinations
- grade exams and papers
- conduct discussion or laboratory sessions
- conduct drill or practice sessions
- tutor students on a one-to-one basis

The critical thing to remember is to discuss your responsibilities with your supervising professor to make sure that you understand what is expected of you. Also try to establish a regular weekly meeting time with your supervising professor in order to discuss any questions or problems that come up.

Help for TAs

Your primary source of guidance and teaching assistance is your department. Both your faculty advisor and your teaching supervisor can give you information regarding teaching methods in your discipline, departmental policies and routines, departmental curriculum, testing and anticipated student performance. Some of this information may be received in a pre-semester orientation and some will be shared in various formats throughout the semester from structured meetings to

casual interaction in the office. Also, don't hesitate to ask the experienced TAs in your department for help and guidance.

In addition to the help you can get in your department, the Institute for Teaching and Learning offers various services through its TA Program. There is a one-day pre-semester orientation as well as various other training modules throughout the semester. You can also contact the program for individual consultations and observations.

Preparing to Teach

Effective Teaching

Do we really know what constitutes effective teaching? Is teaching effectiveness something that can be defined, evaluated, measured? What does the research tell us?

The studies which have been done on this topic have used various approaches and perspectives to examine the construct of "effective teaching," ranging from classroom observations to measuring student learning outcomes to expert opinion and learning theory. (Chism, N. 2004)¹ Although the approaches varied considerably, there is consensus on what makes teachers successful. Enthusiasm, rapport, interest in students, organization and intellectual challenge are the traits that appear over and over again in descriptions of excellent teachers. Think about your own experience and your best teachers and these traits will undoubtedly come to mind.

In terms of effective methods, there are many to choose from depending on one's own context. When deciding what methods to use, it is helpful to keep in mind the **Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education**:²

¹ Chism, N. (2004) *What is Effective Teaching, Anyway?*. POD conference presentation. Montreal, Canada.

² The Johnson Foundation. (1989). *The Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education*. Winona, MN: The Seven Principles Resource Center, Winona State University.

Good practice:

1. Encourages Student-Faculty Contact:

Frequent student-faculty contact in and out of classes is the most important factor in student motivation and involvement. Faculty concern helps students get through rough times and keep on working. Knowing a few faculty members well enhances students' intellectual commitment and encourages them to think about their own values and future plans.

2. Encourages Cooperation among Students:

Learning is enhanced when it's more like a team effort than a solo race. Good learning, like good work, is collaborative and social, not competitive and isolated. Working with others often increases involvement in learning. Sharing one's own ideas and responding to other's reactions improves thinking and deepens understanding.

3. Encourages Active Learning:

Learning is not a spectator sport. Students do not learn much just sitting in classes listening to teachers, memorizing pre-packaged assignments and spitting out answers. They must talk about what they are learning, write about it, relate it to past experiences and, most importantly, apply it to their daily lives. They must make what they learn part of themselves.

4. Gives Prompt Feedback:

Knowing what you know and what you don't know focuses learning. Students need appropriate feedback on performance to benefit from courses. When getting started, students need help in assessing existing knowledge and competence. In classes students need frequent opportunities to perform and receive suggestions for improvement. At various points during college and at the end, students need chances to reflect on what they have learned, what they still need to learn and how to assess themselves.

5. Emphasizes Time on Task:

Time plus energy equals learning. There is no substitute for time on task. Learning to use one's time well is critical for students and professionals alike. Students need help in learning effective time management. Allocating realistic amounts of time means effective learning for students and effective teaching for faculty. How an institution defines time expectations for students, faculty, administrators and other professional staff can establish the basis for high performance for all.

6. Communicates High Expectations:

Expect more and you will get it. High expectations are important for everyone—for the poorly prepared, for those unwilling to exert themselves and for the bright and well motivated. Expecting students to perform well becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy when teachers

and institutions hold high expectations for themselves and make extra efforts.

7. Respects Diverse Talents and Ways of Learning:

There are many roads to learning. People bring different talents and styles of learning to college. Brilliant students in the seminar room may be all thumbs in the lab or art studio. Students' rich hands-on experience may not do so well with theory. Students need the opportunity to show their talents and learn in ways that work for them. Then they can be pushed to learn in new ways that do not come so easily.

As far as your role as a TA goes, students should be actively involved in the learning process and encouraged to ask questions. Students asking questions of the teacher is considered normal learning behavior and in no way implies any fault in the instructor's teaching. It is of critical importance for international teaching assistants especially to pay close attention to student questions and to spend the time and effort necessary to make sure they have understood the question before they give an answer. Furthermore, it is better to say you don't know an answer and will find it for the next meeting, than to pretend you know or to ignore the question. One of the major roles a TA has is to answer student questions and nothing frustrates undergraduates more than feeling that a TA does not understand or is not willing to answer their questions.

Additional Tips to Become a More Effective Teacher

1. Overplan:

- Material to be covered.
- Estimated time needed for each topic/segment/lesson.
- Techniques (e.g., case studies, games, role plays, video, small groups, etc.)
- Handouts and other materials: Put them in the order in which you will use them.

2. Prepare several lessons at a time:

- Try to stay ahead in the course preparations.
- Keep in mind the “big picture” of the learning objectives and course goals.
- Give yourself enough time to get comfortable with the material for each class so you don’t need last minute, frantic changes.

3. Visit the classroom or laboratory ahead of time:

- Know where the equipment is, find out if you need a key to open cabinets for access in high-tech rooms (contact AV Technologies at 6-1774 for keys and training sessions); in labs find out where first aid kits are located.

- Make sure classroom is appropriate size for your enrollment and contains whatever media equipment you will need.

4. TAs should attend the professor’s class to identify gaps to be filled and to prevent redundancy.
5. Don’t assume the students know the basics of a discipline. Find out the students’ backgrounds and realize that the basics may need to be taught or reviewed.
6. By the same token, don’t assume students know how to learn. Discuss good study or reading strategies in class so the weaker students can find out how the better students go about the task of learning.
7. Do all homework assignments yourself BEFORE you give them to students so you can check for any mistakes and anticipate their questions or difficulties.

Following the guidelines above will help you decide what teaching methods will work best for your class and help you avoid some of the usual beginner’s mistakes. But remember, no matter what methods you choose, nothing can substitute for your enthusiasm for your discipline and your interest in your students.

Formal or Not?

One of the most difficult areas to negotiate is setting the right tone for your relationship with your students. Friendliness is highly valued by

undergraduates but you are not their “friend.” While you want your students to be comfortable learning with you, they must also respect you as the instructor of the course. How can you establish yourself as the authority figure in the class while maintaining a friendly and comfortable learning atmosphere? If you are a new TA it may take some experimentation to get the right balance. You must recognize what kind of teacher you are and decide what kind of behaviors are compatible with your personality. Do you want students to call you by your first name or do you prefer Ms. or Mr.? Are you more comfortable teaching in jeans or in more formal clothing? While there are no right and wrong answers to these questions, there are some general guidelines that will help you negotiate this terrain.

- Decide what you want your students to call you and put that in writing on the syllabus and introduce yourself that way in class. Make sure you announce verbally what you want your students to call you. Write your name on the blackboard, as you want to be addressed—if you want them to use Mr. or Ms. plus your last name, then don’t just write your first and last name on the board. Be sure you repeat this information for the first 3-4 classes so that students who’ve missed a class get the information. You would be amazed how many undergraduates at mid semester cannot name their TA and if they don’t know how to address you, then they aren’t going to be comfortable talking to you.

- Use self-disclosure sparingly. Do not share too much personal information with your students; rather talk about campus events, course issues or small-talk topics such as sports or weather to build rapport. Of course, when appropriate, you should feel free to talk about things like trips you’ve taken, pets or your hometown, but you should not discuss your personal life or problems with your students.
- Be aware of your body language. Nonverbal messages are very powerful. Reduce the distance between you and your students by moving around the classroom rather than standing behind a desk or lectern. Be sure you make and maintain eye contact with all students in the classroom. Don’t forget to smile and show your enthusiasm for your subject material.

These guidelines will help you establish rapport with your students regardless of your preferred style of teaching. While engaging in friendly discussions outside the classroom and acquainting yourself with your students’ lives can facilitate teaching and learning, you must maintain some distance and objectivity.

In the classroom there are many ways to communicate your interest and concern for your students. Remember that your students are likely to learn better when they feel that their experiences, thoughts and feelings matter and when they know that they will be treated with respect. Here are

some suggestions to help accomplish these goals:

- Call your students by name. If you have trouble learning names, contact the Institute for Teaching and Learning for a copy of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Teaching and Learning Center's "*Learning Students' Names.*"
- Watch students' body language for signs of boredom or lack of comprehension (e.g., dozing, chatting with a neighbor, paper rustling). If you see this behavior, try moving around the room, changing the pace of the lecture or asking questions.
- Be aware that students are trying to take notes and do not write quickly on the board and then erase the material before the students can catch up. Use verbal cues such as "There are four reasons why... and the first reason is" to help students take effective notes.
- Be sensitive to students who have different cultural backgrounds and therefore different cultural interpretations of behavior. For example, an unwillingness to express an opinion may be a culturally-based norm, rather than a sign of lack of preparedness.

If students perceive that you are friendly and interested in their success at the University, you may find that they will approach you for assistance in other areas of their lives. Be sure you are familiar with the counseling and tutoring

resources available on campus. (See the General Information section, pp. 12-17, of the Undergraduate Catalog for descriptions of services and the UConn Connects list of offices in the appendix for phone numbers). Remember your role is not to solve all the students' problems, but to refer them to the appropriate office.

Relationships with the Supervising Professor

In terms of the teaching assistant's relationship with the supervising professor, good communication is again important. Each of us can gain knowledge about teaching by talking with our supervisor and learning from their years of experience. By working with different professors, different styles can be observed and our own individual approaches to teaching can be developed.

It is also important to talk with the supervising professor if the TA's role and/or responsibilities need clarification. Questions you may wish to discuss with your supervisor are suggested below. (*Segerstrale, 1982*)

1. What do you want the section to accomplish?
2. How much leeway do I have in running sections?
3. Will there be separate readings assigned for sections by the professor or may I make my own assignments?

4. Is section attendance mandatory?
Will there be a section grade?
5. How much responsibility for grading will I have?
6. How can I get some help for my teaching?
7. How often will I meet with the professor?
8. If there are several TAs working with the professor in the same course, to what extent am I to coordinate my plans with theirs and what is the mechanism for doing this?

Many of these questions may be answered in initial meetings, but if you have any unanswered questions, be sure to find a time when it is convenient for your supervising professor to answer those questions **BEFORE** the semester begins so that you can communicate expectations clearly to your students.

Teaching Freshmen

Adapted with permission from the University of Massachusetts for Teaching Assistants.

There are some special characteristics of freshmen students that set them apart from other students and which teachers of freshmen should keep in mind. Entering freshmen have been socialized for twelve years into a system of primary and secondary education in which:

High School

- They perform according to a set schedule of daily assignments that are often collected
- Many students moved together from class to class and from term to term, forming a continuing and strong support network
- Weighted grading systems differentially rewarded performance in courses by level of difficulty
- All of the institution's resources (including the teacher) were right there every day in the classroom

As a result, the expectations of university academic life, emphasizing self-initiation, independence and responsibility may be quite jarring for first-year students. Some factors to consider are:

College

- Most often, college is the first extended experience freshmen have had with independent living. The transition from family, town and school to the newness of independence and the wonders of university life can all too easily overshadow what may be perceived by the student as dull academic responsibilities.

- The very size and complexity of the university can be tremendously confusing and intimidating to students whose entering class is often larger than the population of the entire high school from which they came; whose classmates and even roommates are strangers to them; whose training to be mostly passive receivers of educational services makes them unused to seeking out assistance, especially in an alien environment.
- For the most part, entering freshmen are used to being in the upper halves of their graduating classes, to being widely known and respected by their peers and teachers - in other words to being "big fish in small ponds." At the University, many of them are anonymous, submerged in large classes and competing with the cream of the crop of a number of high schools - very "small fish" in an awfully "big pond." This is often a difficult transition.
- Unlike upperclass students, whose prerequisites assure some consistent entry levels into courses, the variety of learning styles and the level of preparation of freshmen students varies as widely as do their study skills. Students are often shocked to discover what is expected of them as freshmen.
- Therefore, as you prepare your course plans and materials, try to build in structures and strategies that will help minimize the difficulties faced by freshmen in your classes.

Syllabus Guidelines

The syllabus is an important tool in any instructors' repertoire whether they be faculty, TAs or adjuncts. It sets the tone for the course and provides documentation of all the key course elements. It gives the students a sense of where they are going and how they are going to get there. The items below comprise the elements of a good syllabus:

1. **Course information:** Course title, number, credits; meeting times and locations including laboratory or computer facilities; textbook and other required reading including where to buy or find; course description with sequence of topics to be covered with a calendar for assignments, dates of exams, due dates for end-of-semester papers/projects; other required student supplies (e.g., calculators, art supplies, safety glasses, etc.) with detailed description, prices and when they are needed.
2. **Your information:** Your full name and title, how students should address you, your office location and office hours, phone number and email address and preferred mode of communication, home page URL, departmental office phone number and location.
3. **Student Learning Objectives:** What will students be able to do at the end of your course as a result of taking this class? Use concrete terms and action verbs: "To identify the influences...", "To solve problems

using...," etc. (See Bloom's taxonomy pg. 28 for more examples of verbs relating to learning) Even when "understanding" is a goal, try to frame it in concrete terms, so instead of "To understand and appreciate irony in literature," use "To identify instances of irony in an unfamiliar work of literature." Nilson (2003)³ suggests the following caveats in order to encourage students to see learning as something for which they are responsible:

- a. Students may vary in their competency levels on these abilities.
 - b. Students can expect to acquire these abilities *only if* they honor all course policies, attend class regularly, complete all assigned work on time and in good faith and meet all other course requirements and expectations. (p.28) *See section on **Learning Objectives** for more details on this topic.*
4. **Grading:** All policies and procedures should be explicitly stated, including your rationale for your choices. All scoring for assignments, exams and papers/projects should be clearly laid out, including whether or not the lowest score can be dropped. Decide whether grading will be criteria-based or whether the grades will be curved. Weightings for the various course components (attendance,

participation, assignments, tests, quizzes, etc.) should be given. Policies on make-up exams and rescoring of exams (requests in writing? Whole test rescored?) need to be included, as well as penalties for late work or missed assignments and your position on extra-credit assignments.

5. **Classroom Management Policies**

- a. **Attendance:** Is attendance required? How will it be monitored? Will there be excused absences? What documentation is required? How much of the grade (if any) does attendance constitute?
- b. **Late arrivals/early dismissals:** Late arrivals and early departures can be disruptive to other students, but not in every class situation. Decide how much these behaviors may affect your class and set your policy accordingly. State any policies or procedures that you wish to use, such as early departures submit a request in writing before the start of class and sit in designated seats near the door. Will late arrivals pose a problem for your class or not? Will there be a penalty? Whatever policies you set, you must be consistent and firm in your implementation.
- c. **Cell phones, Eating, Talking, etc.:** Optional statements on these behaviors, depending on

³ Nilson, L. (2003). *Teaching at Its Best*. Bolton, MA.: Anker Publishing Company, Inc.

class size and context (lab? discussion? art studio?).

6. **Academic Dishonesty:** Define cheating and/or plagiarism in the context of your course as well as giving your institution's definition of the behaviors. Refer students to The Student Code, Parts VI and VII for UConn's definitions of academic misconduct and the attendant judicial processes. (Available online at www.dosa.uconn.edu) Let your students know exactly how you define cheating on every assignment and what the penalties will be. To discourage cheating in courses with significant writing components tell students what search software you will be using to check for plagiarism. Encourage students to check their own work with the same program. Tell students that cell phones are NOT allowed to be taken out during examinations to avoid cheating behaviors that are on the rise (Nilson, 2003) such as text messaging a friend outside the room who has a textbook or photographing pages of texts and storing them in the cell phone. Review syllabus information before significant assignments are due.
7. **Be sure to make enough copies!** Copy your syllabus onto brightly colored paper so that it will be easy to find among all the other papers students receive on the first day.
8. **Present your syllabus:** Plan how you will present the syllabus on the first day. Depending on the length, you may have students read it in

class, discuss it in groups and then sign a statement of understanding and cooperation. Have them discuss what they are looking forward to in the course or what they think will be difficult for them. You might assign it for homework and give a quiz on it the next day, either graded or ungraded. You can also include personal response questions regarding their opinions or feelings about items on the syllabus. Only by involving the students in some kind of syllabus-centered activity will you get them to read the document thoroughly.

If you would like more help composing your syllabus or you want someone to check your syllabus over, please contact the Institute for Teaching and Learning. You can email Keith.Barker@uconn.edu to make an appointment or send your syllabus.

International Teaching Assistants

International teaching assistants (ITAs) face many challenges in their introduction to the American university classroom. In addition to taking on a new role as an instructor, they must also overcome language barriers, cultural gaps and differences in academic expectations in the classroom. The International Teaching Assistant Program offers a one week orientation every August and January for newly-arrived international TAs. During these orientations there is preparation for both the classroom experience and for the spoken English proficiency testing required for all non-native speakers of

English. For further information on the English proficiency requirements, go to the ITA home page on the TA Programs' website at www.tap.uconn.edu. On the website you will also find information about the non-credit courses offered to help ITAs improve their spoken English and classroom presentation skills.

The Language Barrier

For many ITAs the language barrier is one of the toughest problems they must face going into a classroom. It is not, however, an insurmountable problem if ITAs realize that there are many ways to improve COMMUNICATION which go beyond language alone. ITAs can use some of the following strategies to build rapport in the classroom, which will have the effect of lessening the focus on their English problems:

1. Come to class a couple of minutes early and make "small talk" with your students as they enter the room. You can talk about the weather or ask your students how the football/soccer/basketball team is doing, the topic is not important. What is important is that you are signaling to your students that you are friendly, interested and approachable; three traits of an instructor that undergraduates value highly.
2. Get to know your students' names. By making an effort to pronounce and learn their names you are showing your students that you care about them as individuals and want to get to know them.
3. Prepare very carefully. If you are organized and well prepared for each class, language problems can be minimized. Students will perceive you as a competent and knowledgeable teacher.
4. Acknowledge, but do NOT apologize for, any language limitations. Let your students know that you know your English is not perfect and that you want them to correct you or ask for clarification if they don't understand. Try to keep a sense of humor about miscommunications that may arise and don't hesitate to write on the board or use overheads/handouts/PowerPoint if they can't understand you. If you cannot understand a student's question, don't give up. Ask the student to repeat the question slowly or ask if another student can rephrase the question.
5. Always check for student comprehension of the material by asking them some questions or by asking for a summary of what was just presented. Do not ask "Does everybody understand?" because most of the time you will get no response. Prepare some real content or process questions to check comprehension.
6. Remember to speak slowly and project your voice. If students can't hear what you are saying they may think that your English is a problem, when in fact, you are simply not speaking loudly enough.

Cultural/Pedagogical Barriers

Another area where ITAs need special preparation is that which pertains to the differences in our cultural and pedagogical norms.

Beginning with admissions to the university, you will notice that our undergraduates are a very diverse group in terms of levels of preparation for your classes. Admissions here are not based solely on qualifying examinations, so you may find your students' backgrounds vary more than those of students in your countries. The lack of preparation some students may exhibit should not be confused with lack of intelligence, however. It is simply the result of not having a mandatory national curriculum, particularly at the high school level. The quality and variety of courses available vary considerably at each high school and in general, high schools in the U.S. emphasize a broad liberal arts approach to course selection, in contrast to the more specialized curricula in European and Asian high schools.

In addition to preparation for college, another area of difference is that of acceptable classroom behaviors. Unlike many European, Middle Eastern and Asian students, American students tend to behave very informally in class. You may find students wearing torn clothing, drinking sodas or coffee in class, putting their feet up on an empty seat next to them, etc. Some students may interrupt to ask questions or talk out of turn. Try not to take this behavior personally, it is not meant to insult you.

One final note on differences between U.S. classrooms and those in other countries is the relationship between students and instructors. Students expect their instructors to be accessible outside of the classroom. This informal interaction is a critical part of undergraduate learning although it often takes place after class and during office hours. International TAs will have to make an extra effort to put their students at ease in approaching them and actively encourage them to come see them during their office hours.

By and large, the ITAs will find their students interesting, challenging and friendly if they themselves can be open to getting to know their students and the undergraduate culture.

The First Day of Class

Before Class

Obtain a copy of your class registration list.

Classroom

Make sure that you have visited your classroom ahead of time and find out if you will need to get keys, for example, to open the cabinets in the high-tech rooms. Also, check the size of the room with your class list to see if the room is going to be big enough to accommodate all those who have registered. Note whether the desks/chairs are fixed installations or whether they can be moved about and decide how this may affect your choice of class activities. Notice whether you will need chalk or markers to write on the board. Is there an overhead projector in the room? Are any lights in need of replacement? What's the temperature in the room like? Do the windows work? Is there construction going on right outside? If necessary, contact the administrative assistant in your department office to make a room change.

Course Materials

Prepare whatever copies, overheads or lab materials that you might need well ahead of the first class. Never leave these tasks until right before class because you will most certainly be interrupted by a copy machine jam or a long line of instructors waiting ahead of you. Make copies of your syllabus on bright colored paper so that students can always find it easily. Always have a few extra copies of your syllabus

because there will be students who have not yet registered who will simply show up on the first day. Gather whatever other materials you will need (markers, erasers, keys, pen, class roster) and put everything together with your handouts.

Instructor

Calm your nerves. Remember that your students are likely to be just as nervous as you are. If you can relax, the students will also feel more relaxed. For more tips on how to relax, see **Appendix A, To Evolve from the Nervous to the Natural**. Review your class list and practice any difficult names. Make an outline of everything you want to do in the first class. Be sure to arrive at your classroom early in case the door is locked or the board needs cleaning. Chat with the students as they enter. Making small talk is a great way to build rapport and put everyone at ease.

During Class

Instructor

Introduce yourself! Your students are very interested in finding out who you are and what kind of teacher you will be. Say your name and write it on the board. Be sure to tell your students how they can address you: Ms? Mr.? First name? Nickname? If you are an international TA, have the students practice pronouncing your name. Tell them you will be giving them a quiz on your name in the second class! Share a bit of your background so that your students know why you are teaching this course. If you are a teaching assistant, be sure your students

understand which parts of the course/assessments you can change or not change. Make sure they know who to talk to about issues which are beyond a TA's control. Tell them why you are excited about this course. Be sure that while you are talking to them, you make eye contact with all the students, even those in the back of the room. Walk around the room if possible. Be sure to end the first class formally. Closure is an important part of the lesson.

Summarize the important points and reiterate assignments for the next class (even if it's written in the syllabus!). Don't be tempted to end the class early—if you do all of the activities suggested in this unit, you will have more than enough activities to fill the allotted time. Don't forget to SMILE!

Students

Begin to learn your students' names from the very first class. Try to talk to each student during roll call, check your pronunciation of their names, and ask if they prefer a nickname. Have your students fill out an index card with their names, email addresses, reasons for taking this course, majors, related courses they have taken and any other information that will help you get to know them better as learners. Have your students get to know each other through some kind of icebreaker. You can do a "stand-up, sit-down" activity where you ask students to respond to questions such as "I am a psychology major" or "I am from Connecticut" by standing up and then sitting back down. The students can take turns introducing each other to the class or you can have them do a scavenger hunt where they interview their fellow classmates to find

names for items like "has traveled in Europe or Asia," "lives in a dorm," "prefers sports to movies," etc. Once the students get to know each other, they will be much more comfortable interacting and participating actively. However, even with icebreakers, students may be too shy to ask questions during the first day of class, so at the end of class have them write anonymously (give them about two minutes) their reactions to this first day.

Course Materials

Distribute the syllabus. Go over it in class or better, have the students read it and explain it to teach each other in pairs and then give them a quick quiz on it. Be sure you draw their attention to the learning objective which you have on your syllabus and show them how the materials and assessments all relate to those learning objectives. Be sure to emphasize policies on missed exams and make-ups, absences, and late work. If you are using a daily quiz, be sure to mention that late arrivals will be penalized by a missed quiz score. Ask the students if they have purchased their books yet and point out to them features of their textbook which they may not have noticed, such as a glossary of key concepts/terms in the back, appendices which may contain useful data/charts/maps, etc. and any answer keys for student self-correction. Use this time to give them some tips on how to read effectively, how to find main ideas and identify the key concepts. Don't assume that they know how to read for learning.

After Class

Instructor

Try to plan to stay a few minutes after class ends, especially on the first day, because students will need to talk to you about registration problems or questions about whether they can take the class or not. If possible, jot down the student's name and what you talked about so that you will remember what you told them. If another class needs to come in, just move out into the hallway to continue your discussion or invite the students to your office if it is close by. Once you get back to your office, organize your notes and materials, attend to any changes that need to be made and if possible, write down what you thought went well and what you felt didn't go well. This will help you in future lesson preparations. Now, take a deep breath—you survived your first day!

First Day Checklist⁴

1. Am I energized and enthusiastic about this class?
2. Is the classroom arranged properly for the class activities?
3. Are my name, course number and course name written on the board?
4. Do I have an icebreaker planned?

5. Do I have a way to start learning names?
6. Do I have a way to gather information on student background, interests, expectations for the course, questions, concerns?
7. Is the syllabus complete and clear? Do I have enough copies?
8. Have I outlined how students will be evaluated?
9. Do I have announcements of needed information ready?
10. Do I have a way of gathering student feedback?
11. When class is over, will students want to come back? Will you want to come back?

REMEMBER: Relax, have fun and be yourself.

⁴Wright, Delivee. *The Most Important Day: Starting Well*, Teaching and Learning Center, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, www.unl.edu/teaching/FirstDay.html

In The Classroom

Engaging Students

An effective teacher needs to be interested in and enthusiastic about the subject. Your enthusiasm will signal to the students that this is a topic worthy of attention and study. Communicate your enthusiasm by using your voice effectively. Remember to vary the pitch, volume, tone and pace of your voice to emphasize new and important information and to keep the students' attention. Walk around the classroom so that all students feel your presence. Leaving the front of the classroom removes a psychological barrier between the teacher and the students. Use eye contact as another source of communication. Good eye contact combined with knowing your students' names ensures that your students will remain involved and motivated. Be sure to smile from time to time and not just at the students who smile back! Here are a couple of classroom techniques designed to keep your students actively involved in the learning.

- **"Pair and Share:"** After posing your question to the class, allow the students to discuss it with a neighbor before giving an answer to the whole group. Ask for volunteers to discuss the answers their pair came up with.
- **Questions Beforehand:** At the end of one class, pass out the questions or problems for the assignment/next class. Make sure you have multiple copies of each question/problem so that each group

of students answer the same questions. Allow time for the groups to compare answers and have each group write one of the answers/problems on the blackboard. Or, group the students by same question and have each group responsible for just one question, which they must present to the rest of the class.

For more tips on teaching large classes or teaching with cases, simulations or games, see McKeachie, W.J. (1999)⁵

Tips on Sustaining a Positive Learning Environment⁶

1. Be concerned about the physical setting.
 - a. Check the lighting in the room. Make certain all can see to read the texts, overhead or large screen projection. On the other hand, there is no good reason why every light has to be on at eight o'clock in the morning.
 - b. Encourage students to inform you about any discomforts. For example, if an open window is causing a chilling draft, tell them to feel free to make needed adjustments.
2. Make the examples you use relevant to your students' lives: 'How would

⁵McKeachie, W.J. (1999). *Teaching Tips*, Chapter 3, (10th ed.). Houghton Mifflin.

⁶ Herr Gillespie, K., Hilsen, L.R. and Wadsworth, E.C (2002). *A Guide to Faculty Development*. Anker Publishing

you feel if somebody dropped a whole load of oil in Lake Superior? `How will this current drought affect your budget?"

3. Do not be so rigidly tied to your syllabus that you do not take the time to capitalize on real life situations. If Jesse Jackson visits your campus, find a way to connect this event with what is going on in your class and your students' lives.
 4. Address students by name. Use a seating chart, name tags, the Polaroid technique or whatever may work for you to learn their names.
 5. Remember not all reasons for incomplete assignments are excuses. Yes, we must establish rules, but there are occasions where the rules need to be broken. Be compassionate, not cynical. Grandmothers really do die.
 6. Constantly read your audience's response:
 - a. If it is clear from the expressions on their faces they have no idea what you are talking about, be willing to take the time to present the concept in different words, with different illustrations. Expecting their confusion to disappear with time is not good enough.
 - b. If students are bored or you have just covered an in-depth topic intensively, there is nothing wrong with stopping. Allowing them to talk or stretch for a
- minute or two and then continuing.
- c. In long classes, provide a short break to address human comforts. Students have a difficult time following you if they have pressing needs.
7. Provide nonverbal encouragement:
 - a. Maintain eye contact.
 - b. Move about the room. Come out from behind that podium. Display your willingness to be a person; sit on a sturdy desk or table. Move into their space.
 - c. Be animated and expressive, both facially and bodily. Let them see and feel your enthusiasm.
8. Model the thinking processes in your field for your students. Do not just tell them; show them and then let them practice. If you are not talking, it does not mean you are not teaching.
9. Use positive reinforcement:
 - a. Give students recognition for contributing to in-class discussions or answering questions. Use positive reinforcement when possible, but if the answer is incorrect, try to lead the student through continued questioning to reach an acceptable position.
 - b. Use student test answers to review material after a test.

Keep track of good answers as you correct the tests and let the students "star" a bit. This is a lot less boring than you reading all the right answers.

- c. After getting permission from the student, share good student work with the rest of the class.
 - d. Validate student opinions by referring to points students made previously, not always using "as I said last Thursday. "Say, "to follow up on John's point Tuesday..."
10. Keep constant tabs on how your students are progressing:
- a. Use conferencing outside of class to discuss problems and areas where students are doing well.
 - b. Be willing to provide review, catch-up or further explanation sessions.
 - c. If students are not going to make it, honestly counsel them out before you are forced to fail them.
11. When asking questions, pause. Students need time to process the questions and their answers. Count to 15 before moving on. If you do not, the message you are giving is, "I really don't want to take away from my time to listen to a student." This is not the message you should be sending out if you want your students to learn. Verbalizing information helps

students internalize it. We should provide as many occasions as feasible for them to verbalize. Invite responses by pausing for a good length of time. If you wait long enough, you will get an answer if you have not worded the question in an alien language or manner.

12. Do not talk down to students:
- a. Avoid judging behaviors, which cause students to feel inadequate.
 - b. Avoid stereotyping. Do not think that females have a certain set of interests and males have another. Do not think that all older students like to talk in class. Do not target examples and questions towards certain groups in your class.
13. Be a facilitator during discussions, not the emcee. You do not have to do all the talking in your classroom. Let the students help each other learn as you guide them. A marvelous peak experience occurs when the students forget you are there and pass right by you in the discussion. It is then that you know you are going your job.
14. Use peer pressure to your advantage on assignments and classroom decorum. Students can motivate and reprimand each other.
15. Give your students possibilities for providing feedback during the course. You might want to try one or two of the following:

- a. At the end of the first week, ask students to take out a piece of paper and anonymously comment on "things I like about this class," "things I dislike," "how I would like to see things change."
 - b. Have a suggestion box outside of your classroom or office.
 - c. Establish a lecturer's feedback group. Any student can attend to bring up anything about the course. Usually these groups meet in the instructor's office or the cafeteria.
 - d. Use a formative evaluation instrument to get a reading early in the course. My favorite happens to be "Teaching Analysis by Students" (TABS).
 - e. Have a consultant from your instructional development service discuss the course with the students during part of a class hour.
 - f. Have a random sampling of students interviewed by a consultant to answer questions you have composed.
16. The classroom climate is enhanced by out-of-class contact. Recognize students in the halls and malls.
17. Read the dean's lists, the school paper, the sports section of the local paper, etc., to learn about the accomplishments of your students. Mention them in class.
18. The climate in your office is just as important as the one you establish in class.
- a. Let students know where your office is and how to find it.
 - b. Make conscious choices about how you arrange your office. When going over papers, have the student sit beside you so you can both see the product being discussed.
 - c. If you are located in an inner complex, inform your students that the secretary doesn't bite.
 - d. If you are working when a student appears, don't ignore the student. Take a moment to set a meeting time which is mutually agreeable.
 - e. Personalize your office. Family photos, rugs and plants help.
- If you make appointments with students, keep them. If you are detained, call someone to post a note for the student.

Getting Feedback/The Minute Paper

In order to stay in touch with your students and to find out how effectively you are teaching, the Minute Paper, which was developed by Cross and Angelo (1993), is a quick and easy way to gather information. It takes almost no time and is quite easy for students to complete. The basic concept is that your students will take a minute or so to

write out an anonymous response to a question which you pose. The question can concern the students' learning "What is the most important point you've learned today?" your teaching "What was the muddiest point for you in today's class?," or how the class is proceeding for the students "What can we do to improve your learning in this class?"

The procedure for administering this type of evaluation is quite straightforward. You can either hand out index cards or have the students take out a piece of paper. State your question and write it on the board. Give the students a minute or two to respond, reminding them not to write their names on the paper. Collect the papers or cards and go through them after class. In the next meeting, give the students a brief summary of the results and if necessary, how the results will affect the class.

Use of Humor in the Classroom

"How can I use humor in my class?" is one of the most common questions asked of good teachers. Teaching Assistants experience faculty members who are clearly comfortable using humor in its many different forms but do not know how to start to build it into their style. There is little mention of humor in teaching texts so here are a few suggestions.

If a cell phone rings, say "If that's for me, tell them I'll have Swiss cheese on rye." Depending upon your personality and your students, you may find other

ways to alter their behavior through humor.

Feel free to use humor in your syllabus, printed notes or web pages, but don't overdo it. Use humor, stories, jokes etc. only in context of your subject. Gratuitous use of humor may work once or twice but may become tedious after a while. Use humor to break up your presentations. You will get more attention immediately afterwards.

Humor can often help a student remember a point. There becomes an association between the (remembered) humor and your instructional item. Be sensitive to gender issues and do not use possibly offensive items. Be careful not to use humor involving ethnicity, race, sex, disabilities and other sensitive issues. Some humor is high risk. For example, quick quips may come out wrong and offend. Cartoons and other proprietary humor can be used in the classroom but not posted on the web. Copyright is something of which you should always be aware. Self-effacing or self-deprecating humor is very safe. It is often best to laugh at yourself. Humor can be a lot of fun for you too!

Why would you not use humor? It might offend your students, embarrass you, not be your style, completely fail, take too much time, not be appropriate or break copyright. If you are a sensitive person you will be OK. There are lots of sources of humor around. Exploit it and use its great educational effect.

Using Media in the Classroom

The most important thing to remember about the use of media in the classroom is that you should not use it just because you can, but use it because it makes sense. Your slogan should be "pedagogy before technology." In other words, you should design your class activities and presentations based on what you want to achieve and if using technology helps you to achieve your ends, then use it.

However, using technology almost certainly will require significant effort on your part. The results of using it can be very rewarding for both you and your students but do not have any delusions that it will always be easy. Using technology *can* be very easy but using it *well* requires preparation and training. Spending time to learn how to use technology in the classroom pays great dividends and can make you an effective and enjoyable instructor.

At the University of Connecticut, there are many hi-tech classrooms. They are all similar in functionality but are not exactly the same. You need to be trained in the room you will use (see the training schedule issued by AV Technology Services) so that you can obtain an access key to the technology (phone # 6-1774). Training on the use of technology can be obtained through the workshops offered by the Institute for Teaching and Learning or by visiting the Instructional Resource Center in CUE 422 (phone # 6-5052).

Here are a number of basic hints for using a computer-generated and projected presentation:

- Engage in some form of training in the use of any technology you plan to use. At least check your presentation methodology and materials with a peer or collegial professor.
- Practice with the technology before you meet with your class (ideally before classes begin or during break).
- Use font styles and sizes that are clearly legible from the back of the room. You should also make rational decision regarding positive or negative images and colors. Be aware that a projected image may not look exactly the same as it does on your computer screen. Be also sensitive to the ambient light situation that may exist in your room.
- Provide handouts if possible. These do not have to be totally comprehensive or complete but it avoids the students trying to copy everything you project on the screen.
- Be succinct in the amount of material you present. "Death by PowerPoint" is a course-threatening disease. Use the projected frames to provide an outline or points of discussion. You should provide the details in your oral message.

- Use pictures and graphics to illustrate your points, to put breaks in the textual material and to regain concentration.
- For educational purposes in the classroom, most uses of copyrighted material are acceptable. However, you should take advice from your professor should you wish to include such material in printed handouts.
- Create some form of evaluation to determine the acceptability and effectiveness of your presentations. Help is available through the Institute for Teaching and Learning.
- Be prepared for a technology breakdown. Although you do not need to have a complete back-up system, give some thought as to how you will proceed with the class should, for example, the computer/projector system fail.

Courseware on-line

If you are a TA for a course that employs WebCT or other web uses, be very familiar with the material that someone else has created. You should also be very comfortable navigating around the site. As indicated above, there will be times when the technology fails and the server may be down at a critical time. Be prepared with a back-up plan.

Help with the use of online delivery of course material is available at the Instructional Resource Center in the Center for Undergraduate Education (CUE) room 422.

Learning about Your Teaching

There are several ways you can get information about your teaching from different sources. You can ask your supervising professor or your advisor to sit in on your class and do an informal observation. Some departments have a formal system of observation and feedback for all new Teaching Assistants. Department observations are particularly useful as they can offer you feedback on the content as well as the form of your lesson. If your department does not offer this option, you can contact the Institute for Teaching and Learning and arrange to have your class observed and/or videotaped. If you have your class videotaped, you will meet with Keith Barker, Director of the ITL, to view and discuss the tape. These sessions are confidential and will not be shared with anyone in your department.

You can also get valuable information from your peers. You can ask other TAs, both experienced and new, to sit in on your class and then discuss it afterwards. You should also get into the habit of observing both your professors and your peer TAs teaching undergraduate courses. We often get insights into our own teaching by observing how someone else is presenting the same lesson or material.

Students are also a valuable source of information about our teaching. We look for evidence of successful teaching every time we evaluate our students. When we see them fail to learn, we look back to our own teaching to try to figure out what went wrong. This is an

indirect way of getting feedback from your students. There are also direct ways to get this information, such as the minute paper (see **Getting Feedback**, pg. 21) or 'the muddiest point' exercises. For more information on these types of assessment or for help implementing them, contact the Institute for Teaching and Learning.

You yourself are a valuable source of feedback on your teaching. You can feel it when a lesson goes well or when something you planned just did not work the way you expected it to. By taking some time to reflect on these experiences and think about why they happened, you may be able to identify those things that work well for you and your students in your classroom and those things that don't.

The Lecture

Lectures, as we all well know having come this far in academia, can vary tremendously in their quality and yet they remain one of the favored methods for the delivery of academic information. We can all, from our own experience, name the various qualities of a bad lecture:

- poorly organized
- droning, monotonous delivery
- too fast or too slow
- repeating information from the text, previous lecture
- students not engaged
- lack of examples/relevance to students' lives
- poor use of technology
- reading of lecture notes

In contrast then, a good lecture should have the following qualities:

- material organized and framed keeping students' level of knowledge in mind
- key points and ideas highlighted by speaker's intonation and voice
- enthusiasm conveyed
- use of active learning techniques
- refers to text or other lectures to scaffold learning but does not repeat old information
- technology used effectively and competently
- use of examples, relevant personal experience or reference to recent news item or startling fact to capture interest

The good lecturer uses a variety of techniques to capture and maintain audience interest. Be yourself, don't be afraid to show your enthusiasm for your subject and surprise your students once in a while. Walk around the classroom, speak loudly, speak softly, make eye contact, laugh and ask the students to participate. Be aware of your students' body language as a gauge of how well they are following and attending to the material. McKeachie (1999) suggests building in summaries of the material periodically within the lecture. This allows the students to catch up both with processing the information and with taking notes. It also makes for a clear transition to the next topic, which helps the students organize their notes and ideas more effectively. Be sure to take time during your lecture to ask your students specific questions to keep them involved and to check comprehension.

Leading a Discussion

Discussion sessions hold a central place in the teaching and learning that occurs in university courses. Memory research has shown that active engagement with material, whether elaborating, questioning, connecting or summarizing, greatly enhances our long-term retention and retrieval of the information. If we think about the goals of our courses and we know that we want our students to be able to analyze, synthesize, evaluate and apply the new information we are giving them, then we need to provide them with an opportunity to actively practice these higher-level thinking skills. This practice is the purpose of discussion sessions.

Starting a Discussion

One of the biggest challenges facing a new instructor is how to get the students talking. McKeachie (1999) offers the following suggestions for initiating discussions with your students:

- Start the discussion with a common experience: If you can relate your topic to some common experience that all your students have had then they are more likely to participate in discussing it.
- Start the discussion with a controversy: While this can often get the students talking very actively, it can be difficult for an instructor to get the students to consider all the positions on a topic. The instructor may have to play devil's advocate in order to get

discussion of the other side. The instructor should make it clear that this is role-playing by using phrases like "Suppose I take the position that _____" or "Let me play the role of devil's advocate for a bit." (McKeachie, p. 49), so that the students don't think they are being tricked or deceived.

- Start the discussion using questions: There are several types of questions (see **Bloom's Taxonomy** on page 28) that you can use to start a discussion. While you may want to ask a couple knowledge or comprehension questions to make sure the students have understood and read the material, the best questions for starting a discussion are application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. Be sure you pose the question at the appropriate level or the students may not be able to answer it. Don't give up if you get no response to a question; try rephrasing it or giving an example. Check to see if there are any terms you are using that the students don't understand or if they have a question about the material that is preventing them from answering your question. The most important thing to remember about using questions is to WAIT for an answer. Higher level thinking takes time and it may take a minute for the students to gather their thoughts before they can speak up.

Dealing with Problems

The two most common problems in running a discussion are actually the flip sides of each other - the student who is too talkative and dominates the class and the student who says nothing at all. Despite their opposing characteristics the solutions for dealing with these two types of students are similar.

One solution is to use small group or pair discussions before opening up the discussion to the whole group. This forces the quiet students to participate and at the same time reduces the anxiety about being wrong or talking in front of a whole group of strangers. It allows the students to get acquainted and reduces the amount of time any one student can continue talking to the detriment of the other students. You can also ask students to write their responses first and then ask them what they wrote. This bolsters the shy students and limits the talkative student. Sometimes the simplest solution is simply to meet with the student individually to find out why they are not participating or to discuss the impact of their monopolizing the discussion on the rest of the students. But regardless of which method you use, be sure you know your students' names and find out a little about their backgrounds so that you can better understand their motivation for taking the course and what they hope to learn from it.

Ending a Discussion with Summary Learning

Students may need some help realizing how and what they are learning by participating in discussion sessions. By carefully formulating your questions in

class and by giving students questions to guide their reading before the class meets, you can make explicit the learning goals of the discussion and the main ideas/topics involved. Provide clear transition points to new topics or problems. Before you move on to a new topic/discussion, either give a summary or ask a student to summarize the material that was just discussed. In this way the students can see what they have gained by going to class. You might also have one student present a summary of the previous class discussion at the beginning of the next class. This is especially helpful for sections that meet only once a week as it allows the students to connect the discussions and keep in mind the learning objectives of the entire course. Be sure to write your learning objectives (2-3) for each class or the blackboard and return to these objectives at the end of class to summarize what was accomplished in the discussion.

Using Questions to Teach

Questions are an integral part of the classroom discourse and can originate either from the students to the instructor or instructor to students. In order for questions to succeed and learning to occur, there are certain conditions that must be met:

Instructor to Student

1. Questions should be at the appropriate level and there should be a variety of levels of questions in each class. (see **Bloom's Taxonomy** on pg.28)

2. You must allow sufficient wait time (minimum 10 seconds) for students to answer the questions. The more complex the question, the more wait time they will need.
3. Do not answer your own questions. If no one volunteers an answer after a reasonable wait, rephrase your question. Tell students to discuss their answers with a partner or write down their answers and exchange them for discussion before asking for an answer in front of the whole class. Always give students the message that they must attempt to answer the questions and that you will not jump in to do it for them, just to save time.
4. Never ask “Any questions?” because you will most likely not get any responses. Either ask students “What questions do you have?” or ask them a real question about the material you have just covered.
5. Think about the kinds of questions that will match your learning objectives and help your students integrate the new material they are learning with what preceded it.

Student to Instructor

1. When students ask questions, make sure you listen to the whole question and then repeat it, paraphrasing if necessary, so that all of the students know what the question is before you begin answering it.
2. Never brush off a student’s question or answer sarcastically. If you don’t know the answer, be honest and tell

them you will find out before the next class meeting.

3. Don’t feel you must answer every question—let other students respond to student questions when appropriate.
4. Encourage your students to ask questions—this promotes engagement in the material and lets you know when they are having difficulties.

Question and answer is a form of dialogue between students and teachers. Remember that getting answers to questions is never a waste of time from the students’ perspective, even if it means that less content is covered in the class. There is not much point in covering more material if the students are not following you and staying engaged and the best way to judge that is through the effective questioning techniques outlined above.

Bloom’s Taxonomy

The various types of questions that we use with our students can be categorized in many ways, but probably the most often cited taxonomy is Bloom’s. Bloom based his taxonomy on the types of tasks most often called for in academic settings.

1. **Knowledge Questions:** recall and recognition: major ideas, dates, names, places, etc.
 - **Key words:** Who, what, where, when, define, describe, select,

identify, tell, choose, match, which one, omit, etc.

2. **Comprehension Questions:**

understanding, interpreting facts, translating knowledge, comparing and contrasting

- **Key words:** summarize, contrast, explain, predict, state in your own words, demonstrate, discuss, show, give an example, select the best definition, which statements support, infer, etc.

3. **Application Questions:** use information, solve problems, apply information to new situations

- **Key words:** Calculate, illustrate, show, relate, what would result, modify, judge the effects, tell what would happen, complete, discover, examine, etc.

4. **Analysis Questions:** finding patterns, parts, organization, components

- **Key words:** Identify, analyze, connect, classify, arrange, order, what does the author believe or assume, find the inconsistencies, separate, compare, what conclusions, separate fact and opinion, etc.

5. **Synthesis Questions:** creating new ideas from old ones, generalizing from facts, relating elements or knowledge in a new way, predicting, drawing conclusions

- **Key words:** Combine, develop, choose, state a rule, solve the following, plan, formulate, rearrange, compose, modify, generalize, propose an alternative, etc.

6. **Evaluation Questions:**

discriminating between ideas, making choices and defending them, assessing the value of theories, verifying the value of the evidence, identifying subjectivity

- **Key words:** Assess, criticize, judge, recommend, convince, appraise, what fallacies/inconsistencies appear, what is more logical/better/appropriate/moral, rank, support, grade, summarize, measure, discriminate, etc.

Teaching in a Lab

Lab classes, like all other types of classes, have goals that relate to the course as a whole and to each lab session as well. With regard to viewing the course and lab as a whole unit, there is usually a general goal that the labs will provide a concrete, hands-on experience that will help the students tie the abstract concepts to a concrete process of discovery. Each lab session furthermore provides students with an opportunity to master technical skills such as measuring, calculating, using microscopes, preparing an agar plate or setting up needed equipment, etc. In mastering these technical skills, students are learning the skills we associate with scientific inquiry: observation, hypothesis, pattern

recognition, inference, classification or categorization. And of course, each lab is making some concept presented in the lecture come to life in a way that students can see, feel, touch, smell and count. Labs, like discussion sections, also have a social aspect in that students typically work together in groups as collaborators and learn the value of teamwork. Weaker students can particularly benefit from this aspect of a lab course by observing how the more successful students go about accomplishing the tasks laid out for them. It is critical that all students be encouraged and shown that science is something everyone can DO, not just a body of knowledge that must be memorized.

Like other types of teaching situations, a good lab should be well organized and should have three distinct components: 1.) an introduction which links the lab to previously learned material and explains exactly what is expected, 2.) the active part in which the students are working on their lab problems and 3.) a closing or summary, in which you generalize the results back to the lecture or upcoming lessons and give the students a take-home point to help them retain what they have learned. Any presentations you make should be short and to the point as the students are there to work, not to hear your version of the lecture. In longer labs you may also want to build in a short 3-5 minute stretching break to help the students stay focused and on task. Due to the amount of equipment involved in most labs, thorough advance preparation is critical.

Before you teach each lab you should:

- Read the lab assignment and do the experiment so that you can anticipate difficulties that your students may have with either the explanation or implementation.
- Ask other lab instructors who have already taught the course where their students had difficulties.
- Check out all the equipment at each station to be sure everything is working on the day of your lab. Be sure you know whom to contact about broken or malfunctioning equipment.
- Make sure you know where to get any materials you need for your lab, where refills are kept and whether or not you will need keys to access any cabinets.
- Think about what safety issues might arise and whether your students will need any protective gear or safety reminders.
- Explain all grading criteria and lab report requirements such as the weighting of content versus form.
- Decide how you will form student groups: randomly, their choice or by your design.

While you are in the labs you should:

- Write an outline of the lab on the board.
- Begin on time so students have the full amount of time to work.
- Be active while your students are working in groups, walking around and listening to make sure they are on the right track, offering suggestions or questions to help those who are having some problems and keeping tabs on how they are doing in terms of time.

- If you find yourself answering the same question or addressing the same problem more than 2 or 3 times, take a few minutes and address the issue with the entire class.
- Give students some reminders about where they should be in their labs given the time elapsed.
- Plan to end with time to summarize and conclude.
- Remind students of reading and preparation for the next lab.

After the lab you should:

- Give prompt and explicit feedback on any lab reports which are turned in.
- Don't overwhelm the students with comments - be selective and focus on what will help them the most in their next lab assignment.

Don't forget that in addition to thorough planning, your best resource for planning a lab is someone who has taught it before you. Use their experience to help you in planning and anticipating where the problems may arise and seek their advice as to how best to avoid these problems.

Teaching Responsibilities

Testing

Testing is probably the most commonly used type of assessment instrument in education, along with paper writing and quizzes. Everything we say about testing however, can be applied to all types of assessment: projects, homework assignments, presentations, journals, surveys, case studies, etc. All types of assessment require careful consideration and planning in order to provide you and your students with valid and reliable feedback on how well the learning is progressing. Any assessment you develop requires a backward look at the learning objectives that you established when you first designed your course. Just as those learning objectives shaped your decisions on what teaching methods to choose, so they should guide you on deciding what kinds of assessment you need. The goal of assessment is to show students (and you of course) whether or not they are meeting your learning objectives.

The other factor in testing, which also links back to your learning objectives, is the cognitive level of the tasks. Remember Bloom's taxonomy (pg.28) and consider carefully the match between the cognitive levels used in your learning objectives and the levels used in your assessments. If your goals involve synthesis and application, your tests should not be just about knowledge and comprehension.

General Testing Practice Guidelines

The following guidelines can be considered "best practice" advice for all types of testing situations:

- The more tests (and other types of assessments as well) the better. It is better to begin testing early in the semester and have multiple opportunities to evaluate your students' learning. The more data you have the easier it is for you to evaluate your students and the students will be more relaxed when they know that there will be other chances to show what they have learned in case they have a bad day. Also, early test feedback allows students time to change the way they are studying in order to be more effective test-takers.
- A good way to develop test topics/questions is to write down a couple of ideas after class. That way you don't have to go back to your notes to see what you covered in class and the material will still be fresh in your mind. You can also solicit potential test questions from the students as an exercise in identifying the key concepts covered in a class period.
- Carefully check all tests for any errors and make sure the formatting is user friendly. Leave enough space so students can write out their answers legibly and make sure the instructions for each section are explicit. Tell students (on the test) how many points each section is worth and how much time they have

for the test so that they know how to prioritize their responses.

- In the beginning of the test, start off with some simpler tasks/questions to allow students a warm-up period. This technique also builds student confidence and gets them thinking about the topics before they tackle the more difficult questions.
- Always give a verbal announcement of the upcoming test, even though it's printed on the syllabus. Remind students of the learning objectives and go over what material will be on the test. Tell them about the format of the exam.
- Always have someone else proofread or even take your test to make sure that the instructions are clear, the items themselves are unambiguous and that it can actually be completed in the time allotted.
- Be sure to vary the types of questions/tasks on any given test so that students can find some question styles that are a good match for their preferred learning styles. See section below for more guidelines on writing both objective and essay tests.

Test Development

Objective Tests

Suggestions for Developing Objective Tests:

1. Write clear and unambiguous directions for the test and each section.

2. Write the items clearly and simply, avoiding double negatives or "trick" constructions. Try to put the question in a positive form, since the use of negatives can be confusing. Anxious students may not see the word "not," so underline or boldface the word "not" if it must be used. Double negatives involve using a negative in both the stem and options.
3. Group questions by type (e.g., true/false, multiple choice, etc.).
4. Start questions with words like "who," "when," or "where."
5. If questions are interrelated so that a student must use a correct answer to one question in order to correctly answer another question, partial credit should be considered.
6. Be sure that the true/false questions are unequivocally true or false. Avoid qualifiers such as "always" or "in most cases."
7. In questions requiring the student to complete the sentence, avoid too many blanks. Also, if the blank is at the end of the statement, students can first get an idea of what the question is about.
8. Specify in the directions whether an answer in a matching test can be used more than once. Possible answers should be in the

same category (e.g., all parts of the body, laws, map locations).

9. Construct math and science tests using questions similar to class and homework assignments. Make the questions as interesting as possible and avoid long, complicated computations. Focus on ideas, not endurance.

10. The following suggestions deal with multiple choice questions:

- Write first the stem or structural element that remains constant. This may be in the form of a question (e.g., "In which of the following processes is it necessary to break a covalent bond?") or an incomplete statement (e.g., "In Experiment 19 you used a spectrophotometer to directly determine..."). The stem should be concise and clear. Students should know what is wanted without having to read all the options in order to understand the stem.
- Include as much of the item in the stem as possible to avoid repetition of wording in the options (e.g., rather than beginning each option with "in supply-side economics," include this wording in the stem).
- Write the correct or best answer after writing the stem. Decide whether this will be a "correct" or "best" answer in relation to the alternatives. This can influence your construction of the "foils" or

"distracters" (i.e., wrong answers) and your correct answer. Also, check with colleagues to ensure that authorities in the field would agree with you on the "best" answer. Students should be made aware in the directions of whether they are providing the correct or best answer.

- Write the foils and correct answers the same length; otherwise test-wise students may be able to detect correct answers solely on the basis of the options' construction. Also, do not write the foils so similarly that students can quickly disregard them as a group.
- Construct foils carefully. A ridiculous option can relieve test-taking tensions, but if used too often the effectiveness of the test is undermined. Writing foils can be tricky because they need to be plausible enough for consideration.
- Avoid giving clues. Test-wise students realize that qualifiers (e.g., "all," "never," "always") are generally found in foils, while other qualifiers (e.g., "usually," "sometimes," "maybe") are often included in correct answers.
- Check that the stem and options make grammatically-correct statements.
- Avoid using difficult vocabulary on the test if it was not used in

class. Some students who have studied hard for the test may be penalized for having weaker vocabularies.

- Avoid using “all of the above” or “(b) and (c)” above. If you are asking for the best answer, these options are contradictory and strain logic. If you are asking for the correct answer, “none of the above” may then be appropriate.
- Advise students (e.g., before the exam, in the test's directions) whether they will be penalized for wrong answers, and if so how much.
- Avoid patterns in the correct answers to multiple choice questions. For example, having “a” be the correct answer for ten questions in a row.

Essay Tests

Suggestions for Developing Essay Tests:

1. Determine the processes you want to test (e.g., analysis, synthesis, etc.).
2. Start questions with words such as “compare,” “contrast,” or “explain.”
3. Word the item so that students know whether a broad and sketchy or specific and in-depth answer is required. If you want students to include particular concepts in their answers, phrase the question to make this clear.
4. Do not have too many questions for the time available nor have

questions too long to read. Students must take time to prepare their answers before writing them.

5. Take the test to ensure the time needed to complete it is appropriate.

Going over the tests and quizzes can help students learn. Generally a teacher should not change what is considered a correct answer despite possible student arguments; however, if the best students in the class get the answer wrong, the fault might lie with the wording or instructions of the test. Teachers can also learn from this process and identify areas to be reviewed.

After listening to student disagreements about test questions, be sure to summarize the correct understanding of concepts or procedures.

Preparing Your Students

How to get Better Test Scores

1. Keep Current

- Prepare for tests as if they occurred without prior notice.
- Instead of memorizing the subject matter, paraphrase it and integrate it into your total store of knowledge.

2. Be Prepared

- Bring several pens and pencils to the test.
- Arrive a few minutes early.
- A little excitement may improve your performance.
- Important: Self-control.

3. **Quickly scan the entire test at the start.**

- Ask the instructor immediately about any unclear phrasing.
- Be sure to follow all instructions exactly and to understand the criteria.

Example: If a list is requested, do not compose an essay.

- Ask if wrong answers will be penalized
If not, guessing may improve your score slightly.

4. **Mentally schedule your answers and set priorities.**

- For example, if the test lasts two hours, answer at the rate of 1% each minute. This pace gives you a little reserve time for the more difficult questions and for the all-important review.

5. **Study each question carefully and plan your answer.**

- Conserve time by avoiding repetitions.

Examples: Lab (do not write out) each question.

- Give as much detail as is requested, but no more.
- Omit side issues, especially if they encroach on other questions.
- Do not write out the same answer to more than one question.
- Cross out wrong answers (instead of taking time to erase them).

Exception: Computer-scored tests require complete erasures of mistakes.

6. **Avoid dogmatic presentations.**

- In an essay on a controversial issue, give all sides before justifying your view.
- A statement is false if any part of it is wrong.

7. **Don't belabor the obvious.**

- For example, don't write that a company should set goals.
Instead: Specify what goals are appropriate.
- Try to cover all bases, but briefly.
- Most teachers disdain padding.

8. **Use clear expressions.**

- Define technical terms so that a person who is not familiar with them would understand.

9. **Allow time for review.**

10. **Use the test as a springboard for further learning.**

- Don't blame the teacher or text if the grade received is lower than you hoped.
- Pinpoint and remedy the weakness.

Source: Dr. Harold W. Fox, former professor at Ball State University, Muncie, IN and George, A. Ball, business consultant.

Grading

UConn Procedures and Policies

If a teaching assistant is working with a supervising professor, s/he is not responsible for the students' final course grade. TAs who are Instructor of Record however, need to be familiar with the University's grading system.

The University General Catalog provides a description of the grading system. You can access the General Catalog online at www.catalog.uconn.edu You can see on the table the relationship between final grades, grade points, course credits and fulfillment of the skill requirement.

Grading System

(from "Grades" www.registrar.uconn.edu)

A grade of 'I' (incomplete) is reported by the instructor when the work completed by the student is passing and the instructor decides that, due to unusual circumstances, the student cannot complete the course assignments before the end of the semester. If the student completes the work by the end of the third week of the next registered semester the instructor sends the Registrar a grade for the course. Otherwise, the Registrar converts the 'I' to an 'IF'.

An instructor reports an 'X' when a student misses the final examination, but only if passing the exam could have given the student a passing grade for the course. If the student would have failed the course regardless of the grade on the final exam, the students should receive an 'F'. If the instructor reports an 'X' and Student Affairs excuses the absence (only when due to illness or some unavoidable cause), the instructor will give the student another opportunity to take the test. The examination must be given before the end of the third week of the next semester that the student registers for. If no grade is submitted to the registrar by this time,

the Registrar will change the grade 'X' to 'XF' or 'XU'. In exceptional cases the Dean of Students may extend the time period for the completion of the 'I' or 'X'.

The letters 'L' and 'N' are temporary marks posted when the instructor has not submitted a final grade. 'L' is used when the instructor is late reporting final grades for the whole section, 'N' when no grade is reported for a student who has been registered in a course section. 'N' usually indicates a registration problem.

Students can place or remove courses on Pass/Fail at the Office of the Registrar without informing the instructor. In this case, the grading and testing of the student does not differ from other students.

Grade Reports

The first and most important thing to remember about grades is that they are privileged information between the student and the instructor and the instructor must always guard the students' privacy.

According to the General Catalog, instructors of undergraduate courses notify students of their mid-semester progress before the end of the eighth week of the semester. Students with low marks should be encouraged to consult with you or their advisor. The Registrar does not receive these marks and they do not appear on the students' permanent record. Beyond the midterm, if students are still failing, they should be advised of their academic

options and strongly encouraged to speak with their advisors. For more information on what to advise failing students, please contact Dr. Steve Jarvi at 6-6055.

TA Role in Grading

If you will be grading as part of a team or grading for a supervising professor there are some questions you need to ask.

- Who has responsibility for assigning the grades—the TA or the professor?
- Is there a departmental rubric that will be used to assign grades?
- Will there be opportunities to discuss grading issues with other TAs and/or a supervisor?
- Are there departmental guidelines on the expected breakdown of assigned grades?
- How do we handle grading for those students for whom English is not a native language (composition/writing based classes)?

Because students take grades personally, it is critical that your grading be perceived as accurate and fair. To help establish objective grading practices, you should have answer keys for objective tests, a list of acceptable alternative answers on short-answer questions (although every possible answer cannot be anticipated) and you

should know which answers may get partial credit. Points and weights for each question and section and the weights assigned to factors such as spelling and grammar should be determined ahead of time. Points and weights should appear on the test itself so that students can make informed decisions on which questions to spend the most time. And remember, what is right or wrong for one student should be right or wrong for all students. Here are some further suggestions and considerations while grading:

- If you are grading for a professor, do a trial run in which both of you grade a set of papers. Comparisons can be made and any differences can be discussed.
- Read and grade all students' answers on an essay question before going on to the next question to help ensure objectivity. Reading a few tests first can help a teacher get an idea of the range of responses and can help avoid grading early papers "harder" and becoming more lenient or vice versa.
- Grade as anonymously as possible. For example, do not look at student names on the work before grading it.
- Expectations should be based on the fact that undergraduate, not graduate, work is being evaluated.

- Be aware of your mood and its potential influence while grading. Do not drink while grading. Also, if you try to grade too many exams at one time, fatigue can dull your responses.
- Give grading your full attention—students have invested quite a bit of their time and work.
- Try to give the students detailed comments on their essay questions; an attempt should also be made at giving positive feedback. If the class is large, an answer key can be posted along with a list of common errors, which includes how many points were deducted for these errors. Comments should be more detailed for research papers on which students spend many hours. A couple of sentences can give students valuable information and show that you have read the paper carefully.

After the first quiz or exam, review (it should have been presented on the first day of class) the grading criteria on your syllabus. TAs should consult with the department about the appropriateness of grading students on a normal distribution curve.

You should be prepared for student questions and complaints about grades. Individual student performance should be discussed outside of class. You should listen to the students and take their view seriously; however, you should not be intimidated or abused. If the dispute cannot be resolved, the

issue should be directed to the supervising professor or department head.

Be proactive - use the following page as a handout or to discuss with your students to help them perform their best on tests.

Good Assignments

A well-designed assignment should be able to “meet the students where they are” and help them move forward in learning the new material. Both the levels of thinking (see **Bloom’s Taxonomy**, pg. 28) involved in the task and the content of the class need to combine to challenge and engage the students. Below is a checklist to create good assignments.⁷

- **Check for discipline jargon.** If you need to use certain technical words, be sure that your students know what the terms mean or know where they can find definitions.
- **Check for higher ed jargon.** Because you will be working with students who are primarily at the beginning of their college experience, their vocabulary may not yet be developed as fully as you might expect. Help them expand their knowledge by explaining any terms you use in your assignments. For example, when you say “Please interpret...,” make it clear whether you want them to offer their opinions or to cite evidence or sources. If

⁷ Adapted from *for Teaching Assistants*, The University of Iowa, Office of the Provost, August 2000.

you want citations make sure you tell them how they should be formatted and included in the writing.

- **Check to see that the assignments connect with the course objectives.** Look at the goals you've listed in the syllabus and determine how the assignment will help students achieve that goal. You can even have the students do a quick evaluation of an assignment in terms of how it helped them learn the material.
- **Check to see if the assignment is boring.** If you think the essay topic or homework question is boring, it probably is. Talk to other TAs about their assignments, ask them to look at yours or ask a faculty member who has taught the course for some ideas. You can also have the students do some brainstorming with the material and find out what they understand, don't understand or want to understand better in order to create more relevant assignments. Don't forget about the Institute for Teaching and Learning, 6-2686, we can help you evaluate your assignments and give you suggestions and some fresh ideas for using them.
- **Check to see if the assignment is too challenging.** When students are overwhelmed by an assignment they are more likely to resort to plagiarism or other forms of cheating. If you assign any large projects, be sure to break it down into more manageable assignments with timelines. Have students turn

in work as they go rather than all at the end of a large project. If students seem to be struggling too much with an assignment, discuss it with your supervising professor to see if there might be another way to approach it.

E-Mail

E-mail can be an extremely useful tool in communicating with your students, either individually or as a whole class. Students who are loath to come to your office hours may be very happy to communicate with you by e-mail. Although the majority of your students will be familiar with e-mail and will have university accounts, you should not assume that everyone is using e-mail on a regular basis. If you want students to use e-mail as part of the course, you must be explicit about it. You also need to find out what e-mail address they prefer using, since many of them will have accounts prior to coming to school. You can collect this information on the first day of class on the information cards they fill out. Or just ask all of your students to send you an e-mail as their first assignment and then you can create a class address list.

Caution

Be sure that you note on your syllabus what hours you will be checking and answering email. If you don't usually read your email after 6:00 p.m. then tell your students this so they don't assume you got an assignment they sent you at 10:00 last night! Like office hours, you can limit your email time as long as you establish this in writing on your syllabus.

You should also advise your students that email is not a secure venue for inquiring about grades. It is better for them to call you or stop by during your office hours. Office hours are more suitable for questions that require longer answers as well, so that you do not spend too much time typing something that could be discussed in person. Be sure to avoid sarcasm or even attempts at irony when emailing to avoid misinterpretation. Keep your tone friendly but professional and do not disclose personal information in an email.

Using Office Hours Well

In an ideal world students would use office hours to meet with you to discuss assignments (more than 10 minutes in advance of the due date!) to get clarification of a topic covered in the class or reading assignment or to see how they are doing in the course. In the real world, students all too often ignore office hours altogether or come only in a crisis situation. While some TAs don't mind the lack of visitors since it allows them to get other work done, you are missing out on one of the better experiences in teaching if you don't get to talk to your students one-on-one at least once during the semester. So how can you get them to come? Make it their first assignment. Pass around a sign-up sheet and have everyone commit to a day and a 10 or 15 minute block of time. Not only will your students feel like you care more about them, it will give you another chance to learn their names by finding out a little bit more about who they are as people.

This will make your teaching much easier in the long run.

Another idea for using office hour time is to provide tutoring for small groups or individuals that are having problems. One word of caution, however, don't let one student dominate your time if others are waiting. You can also have the students meet to do some group work with you there as a resource to supervise them. Although it is very tempting to simply let office hours evolve into a time for socializing with other TAs or working on grading, the benefits of using your office hours for their intended purpose will show up in better teaching for you and better learning for your students.

Student Conduct

Bad Manners

Most students in your classes will behave appropriately and in a respectful manner, but you may have an exception or two who will alter the tone of the class.

In the past few years, a new issue has developed in higher education. The issue is student classroom conduct or, more aptly, misconduct. While there have always been complaints of some sort or other about students, some new disruptive student behaviors have been noted recently. Among them are:

- students talking with one another in normal voices
- students yelling out expletives if they disagree with what's being said
- students answering and conversing on their cell phones or pagers ringing
- students disruptively reading newspapers

The causes of these behaviors are much debated, but the growing prevalence of such conduct is apparent from increasing numbers of articles in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and other professional journals.

Ideally, these problems aren't present when a course is of interest and value to a student. Instructors and students can work together (perhaps in a private conversation in an office or perhaps the whole class needs to be involved in the discussion) to discover personal value in

a course, especially a required course. However, even if you use a lot of active learning techniques and/or create some of the most enchanting lectures on campus, you may have students who want to be elsewhere and who exhibit their unhappiness in a noisy fashion.

As much as you may want to ignore bad behavior in class in the hope that it will go away, remember that the students who are acting appropriately will expect you to take action; they will applaud your efforts to deal with cases of bad manners if those cases are interfering with their learning. Here are a few techniques for tending to the problem:

Try to head it off: If part of the course grade includes participation, define what participation means at the beginning of the course (and a few times during the semester), including the fact that students need to be awake and listening. In order to encourage respectful behavior, you may also include remarks about how students' comments are valued and that listening well to others' ideas is part of class too.

Subtle messages: Some students respond to subtlety; you may want to try it first. For those who talk too much, try dropping eye contact after a few minutes and focusing on other students. Another tactic, if the geography of your room allows for it, is to move past the boisterous student so your back is turned to him/her.

Don't be subtle for more than one class session: Many teachers try to alter a student's behavior by ignoring it or by using other subtle techniques for

weeks, but in many cases, subtlety won't work. Speak to the student privately.

Watch your own behavior: Some research shows that student misbehavior occurs in response to instructor behavior. Things like arriving late, making little or no effort to learn students names, condescending through instructions or language choice and postponing students' in-class questions all contribute to students believing that the teacher doesn't care for or respect them. As a consequence, students will return that perceived attitude in one form or another. Some professors have included "conduct" comments in their syllabus; do so with great care. Some examples convey a very scolding tone, which is a bad idea when a teacher hasn't even met his or her students. Expectations, as research has shown repeatedly, play a large role in behavior.

Most instructors still believe that mutual respect is the key to a good teacher-student relationship. If you expect the best of your students and if you offer them your own best, chances are that your classes will run very smoothly.

Repercussions of Misconduct: It's a good idea to keep records of interactions with students regarding misconduct. This will help you justify any action you take as a repercussion of student misbehavior. You have the right and responsibility to ask excessively-disruptive students to leave your classroom, laboratory or studio. You may also refer a student to the Dean of Students, Lee Williams (6-3426) or Vice President of Student Affairs,

John Saddlemire (6-2265). As part of such a referral you may need to report in writing to the Dean any disciplinary action taken against a student.

Dramatic Cases of Misconduct: If a student is behaving in a way that endangers or threatens you or the students call the Department of Public Safety (6-4800) or in a clear emergency, call 911.

All students receive a copy of the **Student Conduct Code** and teachers should be aware of the students' responsibility as outlined in it.

A copy of the **Student Conduct Code** is also available on the UCONN Web at: <http://www.dosa.uconn.edu>

Some Forms of Misconduct

1. Giving or receiving assistance without permission. This includes, but is not limited to:
 - Writing another student's paper
 - Sharing ideas and answers during a test or quiz
 - Working together on assignments without the teacher's authorization
2. Not citing or referencing the ideas, findings or words of others which are used on assignments to be graded.
3. Submitting the same work for a different class without the teacher's consent.

Harassment & Biases

As teachers, TAs are role models; therefore, it is important that TAs conduct themselves in a manner free of racial, sexual and other prejudicial behavior. This is true for all aspects of teaching, not just in lecturing and grading. For example, required reading materials used to meet the course objectives should involve women and members of various ethnic groups; however, teachers in some disciplines may find this task to be more difficult (e.g., economics). This section will focus on sexism and racism and provide suggestions for dealing with behavior related to biases.

International teaching assistants (ITAs) are also encouraged to read the section on racism and sexism included in the ITA section of this manual.

The University's Policy on Harassment

The University of Connecticut's President in 1999 issued a policy on harassment. A current copy is provided below.

President's Policy on Harassment

The University of Connecticut reaffirms that it does not condone harassment directed toward any person or group within its community — students, employees or visitors. Every member of the University ought to refrain from actions that intimidate, humiliate or

demean persons or groups or that undermine their security or self-esteem. Harassment consists of abusive behavior directed toward an individual or group because of race, ethnicity, ancestry, national origin, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, physical or mental disabilities, including learning disabilities, mental retardation and past/present history of a mental disorder. The University (a) strictly prohibits making submission to harassment either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's employment, performance appraisal or evaluation of academic performance; and (b) forbids harassment that has the effect of interfering with an individual's performance or creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive environment.

The University deplores behavior that denigrates others because of their race, ethnicity, ancestry, national origin, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, physical or mental disabilities, including learning disabilities, mental retardation and past/present history of a mental disorder. All members of the University community are responsible for the maintenance of a social environment in which people are free to work and learn without fear of discrimination and abuse. The failure of managers at any level to remedy harassment violates this policy as seriously as that of the original discriminatory act.

Sexual harassment is defined as any unsolicited and unwanted sexual advance or any other conduct of a sexual nature whereby (a) submission to these actions is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an

individual's employment, performance appraisal or evaluation of academic performance; or (b) these actions have the effect of interfering with an individual's performance or creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive environment.

Examples of sexual harassment in the work place may include all activities that attempt to extort sexual favors, inappropriate touching, suggestive comments and public display of pornographic or suggestive calendars, posters or signs. All forms of sexual harassment and discrimination are considered serious offenses by the University. Such behavior is particularly offensive when power relationships are involved.

The University strongly discourages romantic and sexual relationships between faculty and student or between supervisor and employee even when such relationships appear or are believed to be, consensual. The lines of power and authority that exist between the parties may undermine freedom of choice.

Graduate students serving as teaching assistants are well advised to exercise special care in their relationships with students whom they instruct and evaluate, as a power differential clearly exists although teaching assistants do not hold faculty appointments.

Any person who believes that she or he is being harassed or otherwise subjected to discrimination because of race, ethnicity, ancestry, national origin, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age

physical or mental disabilities, including learning disabilities, mental retardation and past/present history of a mental disorder or other similar characteristics is encouraged to consult the Office of Diversity and Equity (ODE). The office is located in the Wood Hall Building, 241 Glenbrook Road, Storrs, CT 06269-2175. The telephone number is 6-2943.

Complaints against students are governed by the provisions of the Student Conduct Code rather than this policy. Any such complaints should be directed to the Office of the Dean of Students, Box U-4062, Wilbur Cross Building, Room 202, 233 Glenbrook Rd., Storrs, CT 06269-4062; telephone 6-3426. Any person who believes he or she is a victim of or witness to, a crime motivated by bigotry or bias should report it to the University of Connecticut Police Department at 6-4800, located at 126 North Eagleville Road, Box U-3070, Storrs, CT 06269-3070.

Deans, directors and department heads receiving complaints must alert ODE as to the nature of the incident and may refer the inquirer to the ODE or seek information on the inquirer's behalf to resolve the complaint. (The anonymity of complainant and accused may be maintained during the reporting and consultation). Other sources of information include the Women's Center, the Office of the Dean of Students, the Simons African-American Cultural Center, the International Center, the Puerto Rican/Latin American Cultural Center, the Center for Students with Disabilities, the Asian-American Cultural Center and the Rainbow Center.

Each office and person involved in advising complainants on sources of assistance must avoid comments that might dissuade victims from pursuing their rights or constitute threats of reprisal. Such behavior in itself is discriminatory and is a violation of this policy.

Sexual Harassment

Facts and Figures

Sexual harassment does not only affect women. Men can be harassed and there can also be same sex sexual harassment (woman to woman, man to man). In one survey, 33% of those reporting sexual harassment tried to ignore the unwanted attention. In 75% of these, the harassment continued or became worse. Ignoring sexual harassment does not guarantee it will stop. People who openly charge sexual harassment are often not believed, may be ridiculed, may lose their job, be given a bad grade or be mistreated in some other way.

People have little to gain from False Accusations of Sexual Harassment

Some people may confuse harassment with flattery or some may fear being criticized or ostracized if they do not go along with demeaning "jokes" or comments. It is important for both women and men to become educated in order to properly label discriminating behaviors so they can be stopped. Sexual harassment is not harmless or fun; it is a form of harassment that can profoundly affect its victims.

What is Sexual Harassment?

The University of Connecticut President's Policy on Harassment, in accordance with state and federal law, states that "sexual harassment is defined as any unsolicited and unwanted sexual advance or any other conduct of a sexual nature whereby:

- Submission to these actions is made explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's employment, performance appraisal or evaluation of academic performance (quid pro quo);
- These actions have the effect of interfering with an individual's performance or creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive environment."

Examples

This is harassment:

- Your TA asks you to stay after class to discuss a paper you wrote. After everyone has left, the TA suggests you come to the TA's apartment for a drink to talk over your paper.
- You are the only woman working with six men in a cafeteria in a small residence hall. Your supervisor continually tells degrading and sexually explicit jokes about women.
- You are a good student with a 3.5 average. Several times your professor has asked you to go out to dinner and you have refused each time. You are sure that the C you received on your midterm has something to do with your refusals.

- A man in your class continues to ask you for dates, even though you have said you are not interested. For several weeks he called every night even though you hung up on him. Last night he showed up at your room and asked to come in.

All of the scenarios listed above can be examples of sexual harassment.

The context of events can be important in determining whether particular acts constitute sexual harassment.

Signs of Harassment

- Slurs or abuse
- Sexual innuendoes and other suggestive, offensive or derogatory comments
- Humor and jokes about sex (or gender-specific traits)
- Sexist remarks about someone's body, clothing or sexual activity
- Sexual propositions or subtle pressure for sexual activities
- Insults of a sexual nature
- Requests or demands for sexual favors
- Catcalls
- Leering, ogling, whistling
- Suggestive or insulting sounds or gestures
- Use of inappropriate body images to advertise events
- Visual displays of degrading sexual images
- Unnecessary and unwanted physical contact (e.g. constant touching, brushing, pinching)
- Impeding or blocking movement
- Attempted or actual fondling or kissing

- Physical assault or coerced sexual intercourse

How to Help and What to Do

- Confront the offender directly as soon as the harassment occurs. State clearly what behavior(s) you want stopped. If you can't confront the offender directly, write a letter and give it directly to the offender. Make sure you keep copies of any correspondence you give the offender. The letter should consist of three parts:
 - A detailed account of the harassment
 - How you felt when this happened
 - What you would like to see happen in the future.
- Talk with others and see if they have had similar experiences with the offender. The more support you get, the stronger your case when you confront the offender.
- Call one of the resources listed to find out your options.
- Report the harassment. If the confrontation does not stop the harassment, report it to a supervisor or department that deals with harassment (see resources).

Resources

- **Women's Center and VAWPP**
(860) 486-4738
- **Student Health Services**
Main Number
(860) 486-4700
Women's Clinic
(860) 486-4837
Counseling and Mental Health Services
(860) 486-4705
- **University Police**
(860) 486-4800 (routine calls) or
911 (emergency calls)
- **Department of Student Affairs**
*Dean of Students Office/
Community Standards*
(860) 486-3426
- **Department of Residential Life**
(860) 486-3430
- **The Humphrey Center for
Individual, Couples and Family
Therapy**
(860) 486-3692
- **Domestic Violence Program,
United Services, Inc.**
(860) 456-9476 (Hotline for
Willimantic Area)
(860) 774-8648 (Hotline for
Danielson Area)
- **Sexual Assault Crisis Center of
Eastern Connecticut**
(860) 456-2789 Hotline
(860) 456-3595 Willimantic Office
(860) 774-9690 Danielson Office
(860) 442-0604 New London Office
- **Connecticut Women's Education
and Legal Fund**
C.W.E.A.L.F. (info. & referral)
(860) 247-6090
1 (800) 479-2949

UConn Branches

- **Avery Point**
Trudy Flanery
Director-Student Affairs
(860) 405-9024
- **Hartford**
Nadine Brennan
Dean of Students
(860) 570-9232
- **Stamford**
Sharon White
Director for Student Life
(203) 251-8487
- **Torrington**
Michael Menard
Director, Torrington Campus
(860) 626-6803
- **Waterbury**
Student to Student
Stuart Brown
Dean of Students
(203) 236-9847
Faculty to Student
William Pizzuto
Director, Waterbury Campus
(203) 236-9815

Teaching Students with Disabilities

The University of Connecticut is committed to achieving equal educational opportunity and full participation for persons with disabilities. It is the policy that no qualified person be excluded from participating in any University program or activity, be denied the benefits of any University program or activity or otherwise be subjected to discrimination with regard to any University program or activity. This policy derives from the commitment to non-discrimination for all persons in employment, academic programs, access to facilities, student programs, activities and services.

A person with a disability must be ensured the same access to programs, opportunities and activities at the University as all others. Existing barriers, whether physical, programmatic or attitudinal must be removed. Further, there must be ongoing vigilance to ensure that new barriers are not erected.

The University's effort to accommodate people with disabilities must be measured against the goal of full participation and integration. Services and programs to promote these benefits for people with disabilities shall complement and support, but not duplicate, the University's regular services and programs.

Achieving full participation and integration of people with disabilities requires the cooperative efforts of the

departments, offices and personnel. To this end, the University will continue to strive to achieve excellence in its services and to assure that its services are delivered equitably and efficiently to all of its members.

Assurance of equal educational opportunity rests upon legal foundations established by federal law, specifically the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 including Section 504 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. By federal law, a person with a disability is any person who: 1.) has a physical or mental impairment; 2.) has a record of such impairment; or 3.) is regarded as having such an impairment which substantially limits one or more major life activities such as self-care, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing or learning.

Philosophy and Mission Statement

Through the integration of teaching, research and service, it is the mission of the University of Connecticut to provide an outstanding educational experience for each student. The mission of the Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) is to enhance this experience for students with disabilities. Our goal is to ensure a comprehensively-accessible University experience where individuals with disabilities have the same access to programs, opportunities and activities as all others. The Center is also committed to promoting access and awareness as a resource to all members of the community.

While complying with the letter of the law, the CSD also embraces its spirit by providing services to all students with permanent or temporary disabilities to ensure that all University programs and activities are accessible. The Center can assist students to maximize their potential while helping them develop and maintain independence. Our philosophy is one that promotes self-awareness, self-determination and self-advocacy in a comprehensively accessible environment.

Important Considerations

1. Attendance and promptness: help students by being flexible in applying attendance and promptness rules to students who may face obstacles due to reliance upon wheelchairs or other devices or may have irregular difficulties related to medications.
2. Classroom adjustments: for many different disabilities, a teacher can help by making book lists available before the semester, by speaking directly toward the class and by writing key lecture points and assignments on the chalkboard.
3. Dividing responsibilities: reading and taking notes is the primary responsibility of the student; testing arrangements and use of department resources requires the cooperation of the teacher.
4. Faculty-student relationships: teachers should talk with disabled students early in the term and during the semester; it is okay to use terms such as "blind," "see," or "walk;" however, avoid generalizing a particular limitation to other aspects of the student's functioning (e.g., people in wheelchairs are often spoken to very loudly, as if they were deaf).
5. Functional problems: it is important to distinguish difficulties and interference's with the student's ability to perform (e.g., chronic weakness, fatigue, drowsiness, impairment of memory due to disabilities or medication) from apathetic behavior it may resemble.
6. Note-taking: students unable to take notes can be helped by the teacher allowing the student to tape record lectures, bring a note-taker to class, by making an outline of lecture materials available to them or by assisting them in borrowing classmates notes.
7. Testing and evaluation: some disabilities may require the oral examinations, use of readers, extension of test-taking time limits, modification of test format (e.g., taped exams, individually proctored exams in a separate room) or assignment of make-up or take-home exams; extension of out-of-class assignments may be justified. "The objective of such considerations should always be to accommodate the students learning differences, not to weaken scholastic requirements. The same standards for evaluation and grading should be applied to all students, regardless of disabilities."

For further information see the Center
for Students with Disabilities at:
<http://www.csd.uconn.edu>

Appendix A

To Evolve from the Nervous to the Natural

(Tony Jeary's 6 Secret Steps from "Presentations" September 1998)

1. Know what you are talking about. Thorough preparation equals total confidence. Prepare - then rehearse, rehearse, rehearse! Practice meaningfully, the way you'll actually deliver your presentation and understand that your audience really wants you to succeed.
2. Be yourself. Use your own natural speaking style. Don't try to be someone you're not.
3. Psyche yourself up. Use positive self-talk and visualize success; picture your audience applauding you at the end of your presentation, then work toward it.
4. Work with your body and its physical reaction to nervousness. Do stretching, isometrics or other exercise to relieve stress. Take deep breaths to control breathing. Remember to pause; proper pausing conveys relaxation and confidence.
5. Bond with your audience. Keep the audience on your side. Pick two or three friendly faces; speak to them in your opening and feed off their energy. In your opening, let them know they aren't wasting their time.
6. Get a good night's sleep before your presentation.

Causes of Public Speaking Stress

Dr. Morton C. Orman's 11 hidden causes of public speaking stress from "Presentations" September 1998

1. Thinking that public speaking is inherently stressful (it's not).
2. Thinking you need to be brilliant or perfect to succeed (you don't).
3. Trying to impart too much information or cover too many points in a short presentation.
4. Having the wrong purpose in mind (to get rather than to give/contribute).
5. Trying to please everyone (this is unrealistic).
6. Trying to emulate other speakers (very difficult), rather than simply being yourself (very easy).
7. Failing to be personally revealing and humble.
8. Being fearful of potential negative outcomes (they almost never occur and even when they do, you can use them to your advantage and learn from them).
9. Trying to control the wrong things (e.g., the behavior of the audience).
10. Spending too much time preparing (instead of developing confidence and trust in your natural ability to succeed).

11. Thinking your audience will be critical of your performance as you might be (they won't).

Szarlan Offers Tips to Boost Students' Study Skills

John Szarlan has a message he hopes faculty will deliver to students, especially those who are still new to UConn - DO sweat the small things.

"What worked for these students in high school is not going to work here," Szarlan said during a recent seminar sponsored by the Institute for Teaching and Learning. "Getting over that is one of the biggest adjustments these kids have to make."

Szarlan, a counseling generalist in UConn's Department of Counseling Services, said faculty can help by demonstrating some of the different kinds of things that need to be done to learn effectively in college. "But you don't have to do it all semester. If you show them once or twice, that should be helpful for the majority," he said. After that, "they need to start doing it themselves."

Szarlan, who estimates he has worked with more than 5,000 students since he came to UConn eight years ago, walked the group through a series of different methods that can be used to improve study efficiency, from the Cornell note-taking method to a trick he pulls out of a journalist's notebook - the five Ws.

"When students are studying, they shouldn't just read and reread the material. To really understand it, they

should ask themselves some basic questions about the material: who, what, where, when and why. And they should cover their notes as they answer the questions," Szarlan said. The process helps students not only grasp a concept and the major details, which are about as far as they had to go in high school, but also remember some of the minor details involved - the stuff that matters to college professors.

Szarlan said students have to become selective, learning to focus on the major and minor items from the subjects being taught, not just highlight everything they read. They also must learn to take better - and more - notes.

To illustrate the point, Szarlan recounted how he used a videotape of a class taught by animal sciences professor Michael Darre to teach an introductory class. Szarlan and two faculty members took notes and then compared them with the students'.

"Most of the students had about three pages of notes. Some had one. The most anyone had was five," he said. "The professors and I had eight each."

"The students were stunned," he said. Szarlan went on to show them in the video that Darre had given obvious clues regarding things they should focus on. "At one point, he said "This is important material." At another point, he referred them to the page number in the text where key information was located. But very few of the students had noted either."

Szarlan said he encourages professors - and students - to look for reasons why students don't succeed. "If students don't know what's wrong, it's going to be very hard for them to improve," he said. "If they do poorly on an exam, encourage them to analyze what they did. Did they miss a major point? The minor points? If so, where did they get their information? Notes? The text? Did they have the right answers in their notes? Did they know these were important points?"

"Be open to having your students share their notes with you so you can see whether they're getting the key information you've delivered," he added. It will help them be more effective in class.

Other tips include:

- **Review:** Studies show people retain 80 percent of the information they receive during the first few hours, but the number drops to 20 percent within a day or two. Putting key points on index cards and reviewing the material immediately while waiting for a shuttle bus, standing in line at the bank or any other time they have a few spare moments - flattens the curve;
- **Distribute the work** over a period of time, rather than studying for longer on just one or two nights. "Relate it to food," Szarlan said. "If you take a week's worth of breakfasts, lunches and dinners and eat it all in one six-hour period, how's your stomach going to feel?"

That's what you do to your brain when you cram;"

- **Don't worry about jargon** or specifics right away. First, learn the material and put it in a form you can understand. Once you know the concepts, plug in the multi-syllabic words;
- In most quantitative courses, people **learn best by doing**. Szarlan suggested faculty encourage students to spend an extra five or ten minutes after class working on problems;
- **Join study groups.** Numerous studies and anecdotal evidence indicate they work;
- **Be strategic.** If facing a multiple choice test, focus on facts, major points. If it's an essay test, an understanding of how all the pieces - the small items - fit into the whole will be more important;
- **Be open to change.** If one form of study isn't producing the desired results, try another. Above all, don't try to get by using the same methods that worked in high school.

"The idea is for the students to get involved in their learning. To see what they did and what they can do differently. Change must be embraced," he said - even if it means actually sweating the small stuff.

*Richard Veilleux
Advance
January 29, 2001*

Appendix B

Student Information Sheet

Social/Physical/Emotional	<u>Referrals</u>	<u>Extensions</u>
Roommate/Friends/PeerIssues	Mediation - Student Affairs	486-3426
	Heart Program	486-5537
	Counseling & Mental Health	486-4705
	Residence Assistants	
Boyfriend/Girlfriend Issues	Mediation - Student Affairs	486-3426
	Counseling & Mental Health	486-4705
	Women's Center	486-4738
<u>Family Issues</u>	Counseling & Mental Health	486-4705
<u>Getting Involved on Campus</u>	SUBOG	486-3904
	Student Activities	486-3423
	Greek Life Office	486-4710
	Residence Hall Association	486-2926
	UCONN PIRG	486-5002
<u>Work Commitments</u>	Student Employment	486-3474
<u>Ethnic/Cultural Issues</u>	Cultural Centers:	
	African American Cultural Center	486-3433
	PRLACC	486-1135
	Asian American Cultural Center	486-0830
	International Center	486-2818
	Rainbow Center	486-5821
<u>Sexual/Sexuality Issues</u>	HOPE	486-0772
	Women's Center	486-4738
	Rainbow Center	486-5821
	Women's Clinic (Infirmary)	486-4837
	Assault Crisis Team	486-4700
	Sexual Assault Crisis Center Hotline	456-2789
	HIV Testing	486-2719
	Counseling & Mental Health	486-4705
<u>Harassment/Discrimination</u>	Dean of Students (student)	486-3426
	Diversity and Equity (faculty)	486-2943
<u>Financial Issues</u>	Financial Aid Office	486-2819
	Fee Adjustments	486-4830
	Emergency Loan Fund	486-3426
<u>Mental Health Issues</u>	Mental Health Services (Infirmary)	486-4705
<u>Physical Health Issues</u>	Center for Students with Disabilities	486-2020
	Health Fitness Center	486-2763
	Health Services (Infirmary)	486-4700
<u>Death/Dying/Bereavement Issues</u>	Office of Special Programs	
	Mental Health Services	486-4705
<u>Substance Abuse Prevention</u>	Heart Program	486-5537

Academic Information Sheet

<u>Academic Advising</u>	Liberal Arts Advisory Center	486-2713
	ACES	486-1788
	Business	486-2315
	Family Studies	486-4632
	Nursing	486-1968
<u>Deciding on a Major</u>	ACES	486-1788
<u>Career Planning</u>	Career Services	486-3013
<u>Initiating Professor Contact</u>	Intervention/Mid-Semester Report Form	
	Office Hours with the Professor	
<u>Library Usage</u>	Help Desk/Information Desk	486-2518/4636
<u>Procrastination</u>	Office of Special Programs	
	Counseling & Mental Health	486-4705
	Planner (Daily/Weekly Goals Sheet)	
<u>Motivation</u>	Office of Special Programs	
	Counseling & Mental Health	486-4705
<u>Organization</u>	Planner (Daily/Weekly Goals Sheet)	
<u>Time Management</u>	Counseling & Mental Health	486-4705
	Planner (Daily/Weekly Goals Sheet)	
<u>Reading/Writing</u>	Writing Center (JHA rm. 344)	486-4387
	Reading-Language Arts Center	486-4114
<u>Math/Science</u>	Math Center (MSB rm. 207)	486-3923
	Statistical Consulting (MSB)	486-3414
	Q-Center-Peer Tutoring	486-1961
<u>Study Skills</u>	Q-Center	486-1961
<u>Reading Comprehension</u>	Reading Center	486-4114
<u>Study Strategies</u>	Q-Center	486-1961
<u>Note-Taking</u>	Q-Center	486-1961
<u>Study Location</u>	Library/Dorm Lounge/Acad. Bldg.	
<u>Test Taking Skills</u>	Q-Center	486-1961
<u>Objective Test</u>	Q-Center	486-1961
<u>Essay Test</u>	Q-Center	486-1961
<u>Tutoring</u>	UCONN Connects "Find a Tutor"	
	Q-Center	486-1961
<u>Oral Presentation</u>	Q-Center	486-1961
<u>Learning Disabilities</u>	UPLD - School of Ed.	486-0178
	Center for Students with Disabilities	486-2020
<u>English as a Second Language</u>	International Affairs	486-3152
<u>Faculty/TA Language Issues</u>	ITAP	486-2945
<u>Faculty Issues</u>	Institute of Teaching & Learning	486-2686
<u>Tax Help</u>	School of Business	486-3018
<u>Student Legal Services</u>	Diversity and Equity	486-2943