Managing Active Learning-Intensive Courses

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Session Objectives

• Recognize student concerns about the active learning model and set appropriate expectations.
• Manage timing of active class sessions.
• Describe techniques for forming groups and incorporating and facilitating group activities.
Students and Expectations

- New type of experience for the student
  - Come in expecting traditional class experience
    - TROUBLE if not addressed
  - Explain WHY you are doing this method
    - BUT not that this is an experiment…
  - Work load expectations may be very different, especially in timing
- Students will have expectations of it being different, once you have set that up (i.e. it better be different)
- Need consistency and reiteration

Student Comments…

- “This room would work well with a computer class, but for a Biology class is should be mainly lecture and powerpoints. I think this was overkill”
- “I was basically learning from a book, from my peers (who have limited knowledge) and from quick Google searches. I don’t think this was worth my tuition. I prefer traditional classroom styles where I learn from lecture and a professor who can clearly explain the material”
- “This class was way too much work. It was not fair to lose points on homework every day”
- “The activities in class had nothing to do with the exams and so were a waste of my time”
What is your first day explanation?

• As a group, develop a list (on the whiteboard) of the pieces to a first day explanation to your students for why you will be teaching your class using active learning (include what you mean by that)

  ▪ What do you need to include?
  ▪ What style of explanation would you recommend

• Be ready to report out to the larger group

Class Organization

• Modules
  ▪ Start and end of modules
• Structure of daily activities (pre-work, activity, postwork)
• How will you actually manage the modules
  ▪ Handling materials
• Knowing your students
  – Nametags
  – Icebreakers
A Day in the Course

• Start of session
  ▪ Prep work accountability
  ▪ Other beginning information
• Intro to activity
  ▪ Mini-lecture?
  ▪ Instructions
• Student work on activity
• Wrap-up
  ▪ Report outs
  ▪ Check for misconceptions and clear understandings
  ▪ This cycle of intro, activity, wrap-up can take the whole class or can be repeated for smaller activities within a class

Time Management During a Class Session

• Estimate how long it would take YOU to do activity…THEN DOUBLE IT!
• Have some strategies in mind for going short or long
  ▪ If short
    □ little add-ons
  ▪ If long
    □ places to stop early;
    □ alternative mechanisms for covering “content” (homework?, extend to next session?)
    □ IMPORTANT to avoid skipping wrap-up period
• Strategies for identified misunderstandings
  ▪ Mini-lecture
  ▪ Revisit during next session
  ▪ Special homework
Group Work

What are potential problems with groups?

Why might group work be advisable?

Setting up Groups

- Groups vs individual students
  - Students need to NEED to be in a group (need each other)
- Group size
  - Odds vs evens
  - Numbers
  - Groups in groups
- Group membership
  - Self-selected vs instructor selected
  - Random, permanent
  - Random, shifting (daily, weekly, by module, etc.)
  - Instructor selected – structured groups
    - GPA/grade/pre-test, diversity(?), major, class standing, gender
    - Permanent vs temporary...
Managing and Assessing Groups

- Group structuring
  - Formalized (recorder, reporter, advocate, accuracy checker, Devil’s advocate, organizer, etc)
  - Shifting roles and responsibility
  - Groups gone bad
    - Tossing students out, contracts, peer evaluation/grading
- Be mindful of in-class group work vs out-of-class group work
- Grading of groups
  - Overall vs individual pieces etc.
  - Materials management (folders, Educat groups, etc.)

Groups – Take Home Messages

- Be thoughtful about your strategy and consider pros/cons
  - What you do in one class may not be the best fit for another
- Be consistent with whatever you choose, but it is possible to shift gears
- Students need to understand what is going on with groups
  - Have purpose!
  - Communicate!
Grading and Assessments

• Formative vs Summative assessment
  ▪ Formative – students (and you) find out what they are learning
  ▪ Summative – instructor evaluates student learning
• “grading” of formative materials
  ▪ Grade all vs grade some (why are you grading this?)
  ▪ How to choose what not to grade?
• Flexibility in grading
  ▪ All points known at beginning of semester vs ability to add/subtract assignments on the fly…
• Matching assessments
  ▪ Formative to summative
  ▪ Activity to summative

Sum Up!

• Student expectations
  ▪ Manage them!!! Communicate!!!
• Class organization
  ▪ Plan ahead!
• Time management
  ▪ Have alternative strategies
• Groups
  ▪ Plan them!
• Grading and assessments
  ▪ Yes grade! But maybe not everything!