

# Managing Active Learning-Intensive Courses

Seminar leaders:  
Jill Leonard, Matt Smock

## 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
  - Educator? Paperwork? Copies of assignments? Emails?
  - 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

Why might group work be advisable?

What are potential problems with groups?

## 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!