Teaching Tips: Student Involvement

When you take the time to create and shape an environment where everyone has an opportunity to contribute, it allows students with various learning styles and personalities to participate. Involving students in their own learning is a critical component of deeper understanding and encourages students to not only reflect on their own learning, but learn from one another. In addition, you gain insight into the level of student comprehension and can provide feedback on student progress.

1. Encourage Participation
   - Open the lecture with an observation, a story, a news item, or exercise to get students thinking about a major question to be answered during the lecture.
   - Provide time for deliberating and honoring differences of experience and opinion. Then jump into content and draw the relationship with the exercise.
   - Cold Call
     - Cold call more often and with more challenging questions.
     - Put the names of the students you are "cold-calling" on the board with the lecture outline for the day. That way they get some warning, and are very clear about the topic addressed. This relieves some anxiety, but still serves to ensure that students are prepared for class discussion.
   - Warm Call
     - Name the student who will open the discussion, but give that person time to collect his or her thoughts. “Good morning, all. Today I will ask Ingrid to open our discussion, but first I have a few comments to the questions raised in last week’s class”. You can also notify students when and how you plan to call on them further in advance, by email the night before.
     - Include warm calls often. When there is a free and open exchange of communication (ideas) - students will understand the importance of learning and active participation.
   - Ask students key questions about the lecture during or near the end of the lecture to be sure that the key points are getting across. Call on students randomly; do not rely solely on the feedback from those who eagerly volunteer.
   - Listen to others and build off their comments. It’s a conversation.
   - Ask, “What questions do you have for me?” or “What are you wondering about that I haven’t yet addressed?” “How can you use this tomorrow at work?”
   - Make sure you understand the student’s question before launching into a long explanation. Restate the question and let the student clarify, if necessary.
   - Repeat a student’s question in a large class so that all the students hear what question you’re answering.
   - Consider reserving two- to three-minute blocks for questions at transition points in your lecture. Let students have the full time to think, even if nobody asks a question. This reinforces your commitment to answering questions and will encourage students to review the material recently covered.
   - Show you value student contributions. Refer to the content of a good answer later in the class period, during a subsequent class, or in online exchanges. “Remember Paul’s point about…. It’s relevant here. Do you see the connection?” Do you point out why an answer is good? “Susan has just added something important to our discussion. Here’s why it’s important and why you probably ought to have in your notes.” Value comments by
writing them on the board or displaying them with the projector. Mention something you learned from a student contribution. “A couple of years ago a student in this course gave one of the best examples of this that I’ve ever heard.”

- Give students opportunities to apply the explorations they hear or read. By performing a task, solving a problem, or generating a self-explanation, students can extend and deepen their understanding.
- Organize an opening class alumni panel made up of three to four students who were in the course in previous years when trying to teach a class full of resistant students. These students should be the ones who were initially highly resistant and can share insights to the relevance and importance of course.
- Show previous student comments to ensure others have felt the same way with the course and then final comments to satisfy any student concerns.

2. **Manage Discussions**

- Manage classroom discussions more effectively to discourage “quantity over quality” participation.
- Teach students how to address one another “Sarah, I liked your idea and this is how I see it…” You can step back and let them discuss content directly with one another.
- Facilitate the discussion skillfully. Set ground rules. Discuss what makes a “good” answer. Don’t let a few students monopolize the discussion. Let students look at their notes or the text.
- Foster a classroom climate in which students feel free to contribute and debate ideas. One factor that will strongly influence student participation in class discussions is the classroom climate. Students will be more likely to participate in class activities if they perceive the classroom environment as friendly rather than evaluative, and suggest allowing time during the first class meeting for students to introduce themselves, their interests, and backgrounds.
- Pass out two or three poker chips to every student. As the discussion begins, the instructor asks each student to give him or her back a chip each time they answer a question. Rapidly the talking students use up their chips. Since they can no longer speak in the class, it leaves the non-talking students to answer the remaining questions.
- Manage compulsive communicators by employing strategies that are not rude or demeaning. Research suggests that students expect this. When teachers do not address the problem, research show that students rate them lower on credibility and affect liking. Doing nothing results in even more negative student perceptions than does addressing the issue.
- Give students time to share their thoughts with a partner before starting a group discussion.
- Prevent any one group of students from monopolizing the discussion from the start of the term. Solicit alternate viewpoints, and encourage students to listen to and value comments made from perspectives other than their own.
- Be ruthless about keeping the class focused on the topic at hand. Be sure there are times when students can ask open-ended questions, but if a specific question is posed to the class and a student redirects the conversation by asking a question that is not answering the question at hand, cut them off, remind people of the question at hand, and move to another student.
- Return the discussion to the key issues. Redirect the discussion that gets off track: “We seem to have lost sight of the original point. Let’s pick up the notion that…” or “This is
all very provocative, but we also need to talk about the government’s response before we end today.”

- Set expectations by creating ground rules for discussion participation.
- Balance openness and safety. Students need a balance of openness—the freedom to explore ideas that may be harsh or unpleasant—and safety, which calls for setting limits to prevent personal or disrespectful comments. Openness demands that points of views be aired, but safety requires interrupting offensive speech.

3. Engage Students in the Topic
   - Break up long classes with different activities **every 15 minutes**.
   - Create opportunities for students to learn in the context of real world challenges. Real-world challenges reflect how knowledge is obtained and applied in everyday situations—called situational learning. An example includes developing a marketing campaign for a nonprofit.
   - Engage students with brisk pacing and instructional variety, paired with a balance of higher order, student-centered activities and teacher-led activities effectively engage students in learning.
   - Do demonstrations in which class volunteers can participate.

4. Feedback
   - Remember that tests are important tools for learning and that discussion of a test is a worthwhile use of class time. You might begin by asking students what they learned from the test. You don’t need to discuss every question, but when there are common errors, try to find out why the error occurred and clarify. Students learn from their corrected papers—take time to reflect.
   - Be timely when returning exams. Attempt to return exams by the next session.
   - Make timely feedback a priority. It’s important in keeping our students motivated. It also reinforces the norms around strong work ethic here at Haas. That is, "we see faculty work as hard as the students do!"
   - Provide feedback that is constructive, non-controlling (e.g., avoid words like “should”), and informative, thus enhancing student desire to improve and to continue to learn.
   - Set the bar high and reinforce expected behaviors through feedback.
   - Set a time midway through the term when you can solicit from students their reactions to the course so far.
   - Give feedback to enhance student learning. A body of research has shown ways that instructors can make feedback more effective.
     - Focus on the task, not the learner.
     - Provide guidance in manageable chunks so as not to overwhelm students, giving only enough information to help them and no more.
     - Give comments in writing rather than in person.
     - Emphasize learning rather than performance by acknowledging the role mistakes play in the learning process.
     - Avoid normative comparisons with other students.
     - Give both immediate feedback (to fix errors in real time) and delayed feedback (to encourage transfer of learning).
   - Help students know if they are achieving the course goals through focused feedback. Helpful feedback is goal-referenced; tangible and transparent; actionable; user-friendly (specific and personalized); timely; ongoing; and consistent.
Feedback is always useful for the faculty member as well. Keep a journal and set goals for yourself and your teaching abilities. Always note your strengths and opportunities for growth.

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