

Balancing your time: Some ideas to help you succeed

A Dozen Teaching Tips for Beginning Teachers at UVic

(NOTE: This document will also help guide you through the materials in the Teaching Section)

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1. Don't spend all your time on teaching!

Teaching is only part of your academic life, and you should be sensitive to the need to balance your teaching responsibilities with your other professional responsibilities. If you are not careful, in the desire to do a good job in teaching, class preparation can absorb as much time as you allow. You should aim to discipline yourself to set definite limits on the time you spend on teaching and to become efficient and cost-effective in fulfilling your teaching responsibilities.

2. Start as you mean to go on

Use the first class to set the tone, to communicate clear expectations, to establish rapport, and to model teaching and learning methods for the course. In your first meeting with students, they will be sizing you up and forming an attitude about you and your style that will affect their relationship with you throughout the course. First impressions are important and enduring, and the build-up of trust starts in the first class. Students will scrutinize your course outline not just for standard course information about requirements, scheduling, and grading, but also for clues about your attitudes towards students and the goals and expectations you have for yourself as well as for them. Therefore you should take care to provide a detailed, organized, and informative course syllabus (“outline”) that will help establish the relationship you want to have with your students. Faculty Consultation on Teaching (for an appointment contact lrc@uvic.ca or X8571) provides assistance with curriculum design. Setting the correct tone from the outset applies equally well to deterring plagiarism and modelling academic integrity for students (see “**Policies on Academic Integrity**” from the UVic Undergraduate and Graduate Calendars).

3. Over-emphasise course design and structure—get credit for your hard work

Students are sensitive to the degree of planning and attention that you have given to the course and its organization and respond badly to a haphazard and unstructured approach. Therefore you should make every attempt to convey the inherent coherence and organization of the course and its goals and rationale to the extent possible “**Syllabus Checklist**” and the “**Graphic syllabus**”. For example, a graphic syllabus discussed on the first day of class can be a great help in this regard. Students, particularly at the lower levels, come from a variety of backgrounds and educational experiences and could have different reasons for taking your course. Therefore you should be cognisant of the level of your course—its prerequisites and where it fits into a program or department—and operate accordingly. Focus on communicating structure and organisation at every level—for individual classes, for the course as a whole, and with respect to the role of the course in the academic program.

- For individual classes, try the one-page handout idea. Focus on three main concepts in 50 minutes “**Generating individual weekly/class outlines...**”.
- For the course as a whole, use your syllabus as a communication tool, and refer to it the first day and often thereafter.
- Within the department/division, be familiar with other relevant courses and how they connect to your own so that you can articulate these connections to your students. “**Revealing structure diagram**”.

4. Add value by modeling the academic processes in your discipline

When you design a course always begin with its goals, never with its content. Consider first what your students should learn, rather than what you want to teach. Let them into the secrets of your discipline (show them your brilliant planning, your logic, and rationale—otherwise they will suspect they do not exist!). Above all, mentor them in the academic processes of your discipline. What does it mean to think like an historian? What does it

mean to “read critically” in geography or philosophy or physics? Be sure to model this for them. Similarly, if you assign a textbook don’t deconstruct it too thoroughly, given that students have paid \$200 for it! Be very clear about why you are using it and the value it adds.

5. Don’t worry about *which* teaching style you choose, but be *effective* in the one you select

In lectures, while students are very tolerant of the diversity of teaching styles among faculty, they understandably react negatively to instructors who communicate poorly, are disorganized and rambling, and provide little or no added value to the students’ other efforts in learning the course material. Therefore prepare lectures that maximize clear communication with the students, that serve to motivate them to pursue the work in the course, and that enhance the overall coherence of the course material.

6. Teach for diversity

Consider the implications of student diversity for your course, and teach to a variety of learning styles (auditory, visual and kinaesthetic), since this will help a much greater range of students, including those with disabilities. Be sure to put an approachable Accessibility Statement in your syllabus “**Suggested Syllabus Statement.**” Be aware of the support services available to help you at UVic and always refer students when appropriate such as to the Resource Centre for Students with a Disability <http://rcsd.uvic.ca/>, Counselling Services <http://www.coun.uvic.ca/>, Academic Advising <http://web.uvic.ca/advising/>, Career Services <http://careerservices.uvic.ca/> and Health Services <http://www.stas.uvic.ca/health/>. Also, be cognisant of the broader changes in higher education that affect UVic (e.g. new high school curriculum, demographics, etc.).

7. Use Instructional Technology (IT) appropriately

Use technology to enhance your teaching when it is appropriate for achieving your pedagogical goals. The campus currently uses Moodle as its main course management system <https://moodle.uvic.ca/>. Please email moodle@uvic.ca with any questions. AV and Media Services <http://web.uvic.ca/av/> (individual appointments regarding how to work the equipment in your classroom) are very helpful and have a super website where you can see your classroom and its equipment ahead of time. Note: UVic has faculty bring their own laptops to class and you will need to authenticate yours before you can use it, for example, to run PowerPoint, so a tutorial ahead of time is highly recommended.

8. Pay attention to grading and test construction

Relate tests and exams directly to your course goals and be very clear about your grading policies. Fairness is key. Students are very concerned about grading and are acutely sensitive to issues around the fairness of your grading scheme and its congruence with your teaching methods and goals. Therefore you should be transparent in your approach to grading and ensure that the grading methods are appropriate to the goals of the course and to its content. Always test in the way that you teach and be sure to model expectations in class (see excerpts from the “**UVic Undergraduate and Graduate Calendars**” regarding “**Evaluation and Grading**” of students, as well as the “**Help with grading...**” tip sheet). Note: there are often individual departmental grading policies to check as well.

9. Be available to students and offer multiple means of communication.

Students, from time to time, feel the need to have a one-on-one discussion with you about questions or problems they may be having with respect to the course material or their performance. They are characteristically intimidated and fearful of such encounters, which serve neither your teaching goals nor their own learning goals. Therefore you should attempt to be approachable to students with genuine needs and receptive to meeting with them individually during well-defined office hours or by appointment. See “**Supporting Student Success at UVic.**”

10. Pay particular attention to coordination if you are team teaching and use TAs wisely

If you are teaching the course with other staff, e.g. TAs or other faculty, the opportunities for misinformation, misunderstanding and lack of coordination increase. Therefore, as part of a teaching team, you should ensure

appropriate, frequent communication and coordination among all parties. Make a point to become acquainted with the union regulations that pertain to the hiring and work of TAs at UVic (CUPE 4163) and use any TAs assigned to you wisely since they are a very valuable resource. Think carefully about the allocation of TA duties as specified in your agreement with your TA(s) and communicate regularly with them so that any necessary adjustments can be made as the term progresses. Ask for guidance from your department/faculty and see the TA services at the Learning and Teaching Centre <http://ltc.uvic.ca/servicesprograms/taproduct/index.php>

11. Don't try to do everything yourself and seek help when necessary

Use the Learning and Teaching Centre and other campus partners to make your life easier as often as you can <http://www.ltc.uvic.ca/>

- UVic Libraries Gateway <http://gateway.uvic.ca/index.html>
- UVic Learning Commons <http://learningcommons.uvic.ca/>
- Computer Help Desk <http://helpdesk.uvic.ca/>
- Writing Centre <http://ltc.uvic.ca/servicesprograms/twc.php>

Normally teaching is an enjoyable and satisfying experience, even among those who are least experienced. It is an exciting opportunity to mediate effectively between your discipline and students who are approaching it. Therefore, you should be alert to any problems or difficulties you are having that might be interfering with the fun of teaching and seek help and advice from others, for example the Learning and Teaching Centre confidential faculty consultation on teaching.

12. Spend time on your own professional development—get rewarded for what you do.

Read the “**Faculty Framework Agreement (sections #13 and 14 on Evaluation)**” as it pertains to your position in general <http://www.uvic.ca/vpacademic/resources/framework/> as well as the individual faculty and librarian policies that pertain to your particular faculty/department http://web.uvic.ca/vpac/hrissues/relevant_policies.htm and start collecting data for your teaching dossier now! The dossier is the main method by which teaching is assessed at UVic and help with creating one is provided at regular workshops given by the Learning and Teaching Centre as well as individual consultations (see “**Developing Your Teaching Dossier**”). The University now has a common form used to evaluate teachers and courses (see Sample “**Course Experience Survey form**”). It also always helps to check in informally with students mid-way through the term (“**Designing a Feedback Form**”).

Think also about demonstrating evidence of your teaching excellence for example by applying for a Learning and Teaching Development Grant (“**LT Grants guidelines and application form**”) <http://ltc.uvic.ca/scholarships/ltgrants.php> or by attending one of the many Learning and Teaching Centre events and workshops <http://www.ltc.uvic.ca/>. Continuing Sessional Lecturers can apply for grants (“**Sessional ProD Grants Guidelines and Application form**”).

Beyond UVic, if you are a Assistant Teaching Professor or you are particularly interested in teaching in your discipline, why not get connected to a network of colleagues across Canada who enjoy discussing teaching and learning in their disciplines? See for example the national Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (STLHE) at <http://stlhesapes.wildapricot.org/>