

A newsletter for those
who teach at
Brigham Young University

From the BYU Faculty Center

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B Y U

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The First Day of Class: Starting Well

DELIVÉE L. WRIGHT

University of Nebraska Teaching and Learning Center

The importance of the first day of class is no longer debated by educational researchers; the discussion has shifted to ways to capitalize on the opportunity of this *most* important day of the semester—the first day of class.

Harnessing Energy

“The first class meeting,” observed educational psychologist Wilbert McKeachie, “[is] like any other situation in which you are meeting a group of strangers who will affect your well being. [It] is at the same time exciting and anxiety-producing for both students and teacher.”¹ Knefelkamp found there was a real desire on the part of both college students and teachers for connectedness, but neither group realized the other shared that desire.²

To reduce anxiety about this first meeting and harness energy, consider means that may not only diminish apprehension but can lead students to share in the exciting sense of purpose you hold for the class. Some faculty avoid “first-day anxiety” by handing out a syllabus, giving an assignment, and dismissing the class. This only postpones the inevitable. It also gives students a sense that this course and its class time are relatively unimportant. Instead, why not take this opportunity to direct the heightened anticipation students bring on the first day toward enthusiasm for the class?

What can you do to establish a positive beginning? What steps can you take to engender positive student attitudes—toward the course, the subject, their fellow students, and you—which establish an effective learning environment beginning on the first day of class?

Sharing and Creating Enthusiasm

For the first class period, consider exploring commonly held myths, introducing recent discoveries, or posing provocative questions from the field. Do you have slides, video clips, or PowerPoint® to enhance these ideas? How can you relate these concepts to students’ own experience? What can you do to engage students with each other *and* with interesting issues that introduce the subject?

Introducing Yourself

Who you are is of great interest to new students. Learning in the classroom results from the interrelationships of people; what students perceive about you facilitates that interaction. Sometimes students never have the sense that the professor is a “real person.” Sharing things about yourself can help initiate a productive relationship. Consider these questions: What is your relationship to

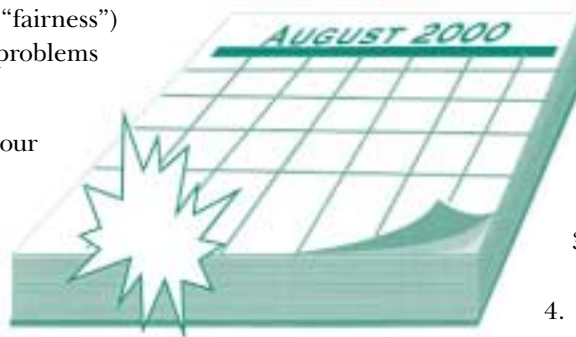
this subject and to the university? What are your beliefs about teaching and learning? What are your hopes for students when they have completed the course? What advice can you give about studying for this course? Who is responsible for what in this academic setting? Share what you expect from them as students and what you as a teacher will commit to them.

Be sure to put your name on the board so students know what it is and how to spell it. It is always surprising to find that many students don't know the names of their teachers—even at the end of a semester. (Put it on the board every class period during the first month!)

McKeachie suggests these teacher characteristics are most appreciated by students:

- Enthusiasm and willingness to work at making the course worthwhile
- Objectivity (the students will call it “fairness”)
- A sympathetic attitude toward the problems of students

Your attitudes in these areas convey your values. Caution: Do not focus on your own inadequacies. This only increases student insecurity, and it may lead to their blaming their own limitations on the inadequacies you have identified.



Course Expectations

The teacher should demonstrate that s/he is prepared to help students learn, while also encouraging their own sense of responsibility for achieving course goals. A well designed syllabus can go a long way toward clarifying expectations so students will have a sense of knowing what they are to do.

The syllabus should include, among other things:

- general management information (instructor, office hours, phone, etc.);
- goals for the course;
- structure and sequence of class activities, including major assignments/tests/projects and their due dates;
- text and other required reading material;
- grading procedures;
- and course policies (attendance, Honor Code, make-up assignments/exams, etc.).

Introducing the Textbook(s)

Tell students how to use the textbook(s) in their learning—what is useful. Do not criticize the text(s) or the author(s). This is not constructive and can undermine learning. If discrepancies occur between your views and the text, explain that rival interpretations exist and give reasons for your choice.

Student Questions

Provide an opportunity for students to ask questions about the class, you, the text, and other aspects of the course. It is important to establish a sense that you are willing to help clarify things they do not understand. Be accepting of questions and listen thoughtfully.

Student Feedback

Give students two minutes at the end of class to write their anonymous reactions to the first day. This way you get an accurate sense of the students' views—feedback on doubts or questions that they were afraid to raise. It also helps build an academic community in which students take responsibility for thinking about learning in the class.

Checklist for the First Day

1. Have I planned ways for the students to become acquainted with me and with each other?
2. Is the classroom arranged appropriately for the first day activities?
3. Is my name, course number, and title on the board?
4. Do I have a way to start learning names?
5. Do I have a way to gather information on student backgrounds, interests, and expectations for the course, questions, and concerns?
6. Is the syllabus complete and clear?
7. Have I outlined how students will be evaluated?
8. Have I planned a method of gathering student feedback?
9. When today's class is over, will students want to come back? Is this first session planned in such an engaging manner that even *I* will want to come back? ■

Notes

1. McKeachie, W. J. *Teaching Tips: Strategies, Research, and Theory for College and University Teachers*, 10th ed. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999.
2. Knefelkamp, L. In Rubin, S. “Professors, Students, and the Syllabus.” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, August 7, 1985.

Wright's article was adapted with permission from the University of Nebraska Teaching and Learning Center Teaching Tips Web site: www.unl.edu/teaching.

In addition Joyce Provac Lunde (also of the University of Nebraska) has distilled some of Wright's, McKeachie's, and others' pointers about the first few weeks of class into some viable suggestions for faculty in any discipline. Lunde's tips for the very first day of class are followed by more general recommendations, applicable during the first three weeks of the semester. (See “More on . . . *Starting Well*,” FOCUS p. 3). —Ed.

More on . . . Starting Well

The First Class Session

First Impressions

- Greet students pleasantly at the door when they enter the classroom.
- Start class on time.

Getting to Know Each Other

- Share with students your philosophy of teaching and learning.
- Introduce teaching assistants by slide, short presentation, or self-introduction.
- Learn names. Everyone (teacher and students) should make an effort to learn at least a few names.
- Form small groups for getting acquainted; mix and form new groups several times.
- Find out about students via questions on index cards.

Course Logistics

- Hit the ground running on the first day of class with substantial content and assignments.
- Take attendance (e.g., roll call, clipboard, sign-in, seating chart).
- Hand out an informative, user-friendly syllabus.
- Provide information on study aids: library use, study tips, supplemental readings, and exercises.
- Collect students' telephone numbers and addresses, and let them know that you may need to reach them.
- Set up a buddy system so students can contact each other about assignments and course work.

Encouragement

- Direct students to the BYU Reading and Writing Center for support. (See FOCUS p. 4.)
- Tell students what they need to do to learn and to earn an A in the course.
- Explain the difference between legitimate collaboration and academic dishonesty. Be clear when collaboration is desirable and effective and when it is forbidden.

Plan Ahead

- Give an assignment on the first day to be collected at the next class meeting.
- Start laboratory experiments and other exercises the first time the lab meets.
- Have students write questions on index cards to be collected and answered the next class period.

The First Few Weeks

Develop a Strong Teacher/Student Relationship

- Take pictures of students (e.g., mug shots, snapshots of small groups) and post in classroom, office, or lab.
- Make appointments with students (individually or in small groups) and/or arrange for one of the first assignments to be turned in at your office.
- Help students form study groups to operate outside the classroom to assist each other in learning and growing.
- Tell students about your current research interests and how you got there from your own beginnings in the discipline.

Assure Student Engagement

- Assign a team project early in the semester and provide class time to assemble the team and begin.
- Give a test early in the semester and return it graded at the next class meeting.
- Place a suggestion box in the rear of the classroom and encourage students to make written comments every time the class meets. 4

BYU Instructional Media Center

The Instructional Media Center (IMC) is a new consultation center and computer lab for faculty who want to incorporate electronic instructional content in their courses. The center provides personal consultation, assistance, and access to multimedia equipment for the following projects:

Web programming and design

CourseInfo®

Graphic design

Illustration

Flash® animation

Digital audio

Digital video editing and compression

PowerPoint® polishing

Side and flatbed scanning

. . . and all kinds of instructional technology projects

Located in 2218 HBLL, the center is open Monday–Friday 9 a.m.–6 p.m. Visit the IMC website at imc.byu.edu, or contact the center at 8-7948 or imc@byu.edu.

Campus Resources: The Reading Center

NANCY CHRISTIANSEN, Assistant Professor of English
Coordinator, BYU Reading Center

Why a Reading Center?

As you prepare your courses, classes, and syllabi for fall semester, one of the most valuable campus resources to keep in mind is the BYU Reading Center. Why?

Think of the abilities crucial for success in university studies—indeed, for success in life. Some of the most fundamental are critical analysis skills. Students need to know how to find multiple meanings communicated by text, how to determine authors' purposes and strategies, how to evaluate the quality of arguments, and how to decide whether to be persuaded by text. Students also need to accomplish their own purposes in writing and speaking.

Good writers are good readers, and most writing problems stem from the inability to critically analyze texts. Because college courses generally focus on disciplinary subject matter, students usually must improve these analytical and interpretive skills through trial and error. Some students do well on their own; however, most benefit from direct instruction in the art. Although BYU students are very bright, most need further improvement in critical reading and writing skills.

Here is the good news. The Reading Center teaches these skills and offers instructional support for both students and faculty in all the disciplines.

What Is the BYU Reading Center?

The Reading Center's purpose is to enhance student achievement in college courses by providing instructional support in critical thinking, textual comprehension and analysis, argument evaluation, idea organization, stylistic awareness, research strategies, writing skills, grammar and usage, and speed-reading. These skills also lead to lifelong learning.

To achieve these purposes, the Reading Center maintains a library of resources, offers one-on-one instruction to students on a walk-in basis, teaches periodic miniclasses, and provides more than 90 complimentary handouts on various aspects of the reading and writing process.

Weekly miniclasses are taught on critical reading and speed-reading. Other miniclass topics and the titles of Reading Center handouts are available both on the Web at humanities.byu.edu/ReadingCtr and in the Reading Center at 1004 JKHB.

Reading Center tutors are graduate students and highly qualified upper-division undergraduates. These

tutors are trained to teach reading, writing, and thinking skills in an intensive, three-credit course. Admission to the course is by competitive application, and prerequisite to hiring, tutors must demonstrate proficiency in the above skills and in pedagogy.

How Can the Reading Center Help Make Your Job Easier?

You can call upon the Reading Center to help you teach students the reading and writing skills they need in order to succeed. The Reading Center can help students build skills to enhance learning in the following ways:

1. Encourage students to use Reading Center services.
 - Inform your students at the beginning of the semester that the Reading Center is a service available on a walk-in basis. They may come as they wish to any miniclass, and they may pick up handout they find useful.
 - As you become familiar with student needs, you may send students on an individual basis to the Reading Center for instruction on the topics or skills you think they need. You may also confer with the Reading Center Coordinator for help in diagnosing student needs.
 - Consider giving your students credit for attending a relevant miniclass at the center.
2. Arrange to have the Reading Center meet *specific* needs of *your* students, class(es), and curriculum.
 - Invite a Reading Center tutor to your regularly scheduled class(es) to teach a short lesson on a reading, thinking, or writing topic pertinent to your course. The tutor can use texts you have assigned.
 - Arrange a special lesson or discussion session designed specifically for *your* class to be held in the center. If your class is large, the session will be offered several times to accommodate all students.
 - Ask the Reading Center to offer miniclass(es) during the semester on topics relevant to assignments or units in your course.

How Can You Take Advantage of Reading Center Services?

To facilitate this support, contact the Reading Center coordinator at least two weeks in advance (8-8964 or nancy_christiansen@byu.edu). For general information about the center, call the main desk at 8-4306 (open Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.) and/or consult the Web site at humanities.byu.edu/ReadingCtr. 4

Copyrights, Fair Use, and You

This time of year professors are preparing fall semester syllabi, packets, Web sites, and other teacher-generated materials. It is sometimes tempting to photocopy or scan materials to share with students rather than creating a similar piece oneself or seeking permissions. Unfortunately, thoughtless copying raises important ethical—and even legal—issues.

For advice on copyright questions, the BYU Copyright Management Office is a valuable resource. Consult www.lib.byu.edu/copyright/uco.html or contact the office at copyinfo@byu.edu or 8-3821 to discuss specific issues. For copyright matters related specifically to student packets, contact the BYU Packet and Copyright Clearance Center at www.bookstore.byu.edu/packets (8-5738).

Below are some frequently asked questions and answers about copying and copyrights (provided by the American Publishers Association).

1. I'm making copies of an article to distribute to my class. Do I need permission?

Educational use alone is insufficient to make a use in question a “fair” one. The copying will fall within certain “fair-use guidelines” if it meets agreed standards of spontaneity, brevity, and cumulative effect. A good example of legal copying could be if a professor reads an article in the morning newspaper and then wants to distribute it in class that afternoon. However, any *reuse* of the article in a subsequent semester without first obtaining permission would not be appropriate.

2. I know I shouldn't copy things from library materials to distribute in class, but can't I legally copy a work I bought without infringing on the copyright?

The purchaser of a work owns only that particular copy of the work. The purchaser does not own any rights in the copyright covering the contents of the purchased copy. A purchaser cannot copy the purchased work, in whole or in part, without the copyright owner's permission unless such copying constitutes “fair use.” (See www.iupui.edu/~copyinfo/home.html to obtain information on fair use and other copyright issues.)

3. Do I need permission if there's no copyright notice on the material?

The absence of a copyright notice does not mean that the work in question is not protected. Copyright protection begins at creation for “original works of authorship fixed in a tangible medium of expression.” The best method for determining copyright ownership is by contacting the publisher of the work you wish to copy.

4. I copied this material last semester with permission. Do I need permission again this semester?

Generally, yes. However, you should check to see if the publisher restricted or permitted, or put conditions on, reuse.

5. The book is out of print. Is permission to copy needed?

Just because the book is out of print does not mean that the work is no longer protected by copyright. It is best to contact the publisher's copyright permission department to determine whether the work is still under copyright or in the public domain.

6. When can copyrighted works be uploaded to or downloaded from the Internet?

Although some materials available on the Internet are not protected by copyright, there are also many copyrighted works such as Web pages and computer software that are protected just as much as works in other media such as books and CD-ROMs. Many copyright owners permit Internet users to make some use of the work, but the works are not in the public domain, even if they do not display a copyright notice. ■

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www.byu.edu/fc/pages/tchlrf.html

To request a brochure, contact 8-7419 or faculty_center@byu.edu.

To discuss the program, contact 8-7420 or lynn_sorenson@byu.edu.

Deadline for applications/proposals:
Friday, September 1, 2000 (limited enrollment).

Academic Discipleship

VAN C. GESSEL, Professor of Japanese
Dean, College of Humanities

My education, like the education most receive at secular institutions, focused exclusively on the academic “What?” of my discipline; it never touched on the spiritual “So What?” As C. S. Lewis might have phrased it, we spent a lot of time in the “cool evening of Higher Thought” but scrupulously avoided visiting the “tyrannous noon of revelation.” It was not the business of Columbia University to fiddle around in the field of spiritual contextualization of knowledge. The Columbia faculty was the vending machine that dispensed secular information when the appropriate coins (*lots of coins, I might note*) were inserted.

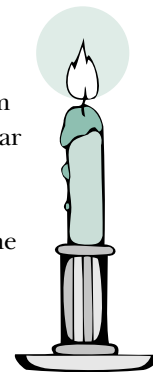
But at Brigham Young University it *is* our business to consider both the Whats and the So Whats in the process of educating our students. First, we begin by giving our students the best possible education in our various fields. I reiterate here my unwavering commitment to professionalism: We must be as good as faculty at any other university in our scholarly preparation to teach and research. But, as you know, our work is not complete once we have professed the facts and theories and ideas of our disciplines. Because this is BYU, and because the moral and spiritual implications of what we teach here are so critical to the development of strong, committed, sensitive citizens for the future of the world and of the Church, we cannot afford to declare our labors done and shoot out the door of the classroom. Once we’ve given our students the Whats of our disciplines, we then have to help them deal with the So Whats so they can place all they learn within the gospel context—and so they can “get wisdom” along with the getting of knowledge (see Proverbs 4:7).

I likewise believe that it is a part of our stewardship as teachers in Zion to make explicit the ways in which our disciplines

ultimately point to God. Yes, many students will see the connections themselves. But many others will benefit as we take steps to help them see how to build the bridge between their secular studies and their celestial aspirations.

Many will profit from an occasional discussion of how the laws of the Lord interact with the more fluid philosophies we teach. Many will benefit from a simple declaration of where we stand. We must let our lights so shine before our students that they may see our good works and thereby glorify our Father who is in heaven. We cannot allow the bright candles of who we are to be hidden beneath the bushels of what we teach; rather, our devotion must be set on a candlestick so that it will give light to all that are in the classroom and all that we teach.

Ultimately then, we do not teach less at BYU than at other academic institutions; we teach all that others do and more. What I am suggesting here is audacious, I think, because I am arguing that the role of a faculty member at BYU is more complex and more demanding than it is at other institutions. Let me state explicitly that I am not talking about reducing what we do academically in the classroom; I am talking about enhancing it. Asking you to do less academically than you are already doing would be tantamount to academic censorship. Asking you to do even more—and to link what you do to the building of the kingdom of God—is a call to academic discipleship. ■



Dean Gessel's thoughts (above) are excerpted from “The Second Step,” an address he delivered to the College of Humanities faculty in August 1999. To read the entire address in the Faculty Center’s “Education for Eternity” Collection, see www.byu.edu/fc/ee/w_vcg99.htm.

FOCUS invites your written responses or any short pieces on other topics of interest that will improve the university. Submissions (up to 500 words) should be sent no later than Friday, September 29, 2000, to Lynn Sorenson, *editor*, FOCUS ON FACULTY, 4450 WSC, faculty_center@byu.edu.

FOCUS ON FACULTY is an occasional newsletter published by the Faculty Center for the teachers at Brigham Young University (full- and part-time faculty, student instructors, and teaching assistants). Its purpose is to serve as a medium for exchanging ideas about teaching and scholarship and for sharing information about faculty development activities. Editor Lynn Sorenson welcomes your ideas, contributions, and comments.

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