

2015

Common teaching challenges and solutions – for new tutors in the Faculty of Arts and Education

This teaching support document aims to provide new tutors with some descriptions of the 'everyday' teaching moments that challenged all of us as new tutors.



Faculty Pro Vice Chancellor



Dear Colleagues,

I offer you all a sincere welcome to this very important project in the Faculty. The Faculty of Arts and Education is extremely proud of our focus on and achievement in teaching. For this Faculty, perhaps more so than others, excellent teaching and the best possible learning outcomes for students, is very personal. I commend this project to you and hope you will be able to engage with this work. The Faculty acknowledges the outstanding commitment to teaching from our casual, sessional and part-time colleagues. We recognize that you bring the richness of recent professional experience as well as strong commitment to teaching for learning in each of your disciplines. We have few opportunities to value these strengths and this initiative is designed to be both respectful and developmental. Teaching in a University sector requires special professional knowledge and not every expert professional is automatically an expert University educator in that profession. With all these factors in mind, I encourage you all to embrace this opportunity to increase your knowledge, skills and understanding in this wonderful profession. Above all, I wish loads of fun and enjoyment in your own learning.

Brenda Cherednichenko
Pro Vice-Chancellor, Arts and Education

Faculty General Manager



Welcome to the Faculty and I look forward to meeting you in the near future. As Faculty General Manager (FGM), it is my role to ensure the administration of the Faculty is running smoothly to ensure the teaching and research in the Faculty can be undertaken. There are approximately 65 professional staff (also known as general staff) within the central Faculty who are there to support you as well as staff in the School Office who will be your main point of contact. There are seven functional areas that make up the administrative structure as follows:

- Student Services
- Finance
- Research
- International and Partnerships
- Resources (including IT, Space and OH&S)
- Administration Services
- Education Services (including Cloud/D2L and Curriculum development)

If you are unsure at any time where to obtain the help you need, please email: fgm-artsed@deakin.edu.au.

Introduction

Teaching can be a rather daunting experience and there are challenges to be an effective communicator to a class that has students with a diverse knowledge background. This document will hopefully give you some tips for some difficult situations and some answers to help make your teaching experience a really rewarding one. This document is set out in an easy access format of question and answer. Please remember that these are suggestions only, and you might already be experienced, or, you might find your own solutions to your situation.

In this document you will:

- Learn about common teaching moments that you might want to prepare for
- Reflect on the solutions offered and evaluate them from your perspective

Class Learning Management

The following problems and solutions are not meant as a 'teaching guide' as such. But it is probably worth noting what the common problems are so you don't feel these situations just 'happen' to you without warning.

Problem: *You realize that some students don't say anything in class but some seem to dominate the class.*

Solution: Many students lack confidence to express anything in class for quite some time, especially in first year. You need to create a comfortable environment so students feel it is ok to say I don't understand.

- Be explicit about your class being 'user-friendly for learners'.
- Encourage a pair/share discussion before asking for an individual response from members of the class (rehearsal technique)
- Model not being sure 'Help me here with my thinking....'
- Tell the students there is no such thing as a silly question
- To encourage quiet students to answer your questions direct your question to a particular area of the class. If others go to answer, hold up your hand to indicate 'stop' and then continue.

Video Clip focus:

There could be a **learning style** issue going on with students who say too little or too much. This video might give you another perspective on student response (and how you can manage that).

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oNxCporOofo>

Problem: A student asks a knowledge question but you don't know the answer. Do you try to bluff an answer and say 'I know the answer but I want you to find the answer', or, admit you don't know?

Solution: Be honest. Don't be embarrassed by it. Say 'really good question' and explain how you would find the answer as the 'methodology of how to find the answer is very important to know'. Invite other student to add to the discussion. Students don't expect you will know everything but they resent it if you don't admit it. This is a diverse student cohort that works together to learn (and will value the message that learning is best done collaboratively)

Problem: A student asks too many questions/asks for too much assistance during the activity

Solution: This is only a problem if you 'over-answer' and end up answering the activity questions for the students.

You should:

- Make sure you state the rationale for the activity and why they are doing the exercise so they know what the expectations are
- Keep your answers short in the first instance, or, answer a question with a question. The student will ask more questions if they need more detail.
- Short answers are also more likely to be understood (so if student is confused stop talking, and ask for more detail of the problem)
- Encourage the students to rely first on each other. This tends to lead to problem-solving.

Problem: A student is disruptive

Solution: This is rare but in the event that a student is disrupting the learning, adopt an 'early intervention' approach. You should:

- Remind student of the expectations of working in seminar, including the point that students need to participate productively.
- If the disruption is occurring while you are talking, stop and wait for quiet while looking directly at the disruptive student. When eye contact happens, ask if you can help with the student's issue.
- Tell the Unit Chair if the student continues to be disruptive

Problem: A student wants advice on personal problems

Solution: It is important that the advice you give is helpful in general so advise the student to contact the Unit Chair. The Unit Chair is then able to consider what will best assist the student.

Communication Style

Problem: *You receive an email from a student asking for individual attention. You know the student is asking because it is easier than reading or seeking own information first. Offer solutions that require active problem-solving on the part of the student.*

Solution: You can:

- Acknowledge the problem is difficult and tell the student that to answer the question he/she will need to understand the 'following key concepts' that can be found in(Readings)
- Point student to CloudDeakin website
- Advise student to collaborate with his/her seminar team
- If appropriate advise student to speak to 'Ask and See' staff

Advise the student to try these strategies first and to email again to report to you what he/she did. It is fine to meet individually with students but more important to establish good work/problem-solving practices with students in the first instance. Maintain a helpful tone at all times as students ask questions for all sorts of reasons and may in fact be at a loss on where to start.

Problem: *You receive a nasty email from a student complaining that you are 'picking on her' in a seminar. You are surprised by the email and feel the student is being unfair.*

Solution: Wait a day before replying to the email. Use a calm, positive tone when you do respond. Take control of the next action. *For example:* "Dear Julia. I am sorry to hear you are unhappy in our seminar. My purpose in a seminar is to help students to articulate ideas as described in your handbook. However, we don't want you to feel pressured to answer questions. If you like, I will avoid asking you directly for a response in the seminar. Or, you could work in a pair before answering if that would help. We will chat in person after the next class to see if that approach helped".

Problem: *You have heard some students are not happy with your 'manner' in seminars. Perhaps they think that questions are not welcome. This often is about students' personal feelings. You would like to have a better relationship with students.*

Solution: Think about the kinds of ways students interpret what you say and how you say it. Remember the work you are teaching may be very familiar to you but it might be the first time the students have heard this. It is mysterious, but people can interpret what we say and how we say it in an extraordinary number of different ways. In a learning situation the potential for this is high.

For example:

"You should know this....." Some students will just agree with you as they think you mean 'this is essential knowledge thus you will need to learn it'. Other students will interpret this differently – they will be offended as it sounds like you are passing a negative judgment on their performance and they will feel belittled. You might like to phrase differently. For example: "this is essential info. If you learn it now it will help you in the future".

Another example: It is easy to sound or look a little impatient at times in a busy seminar. You might not actually be impatient but it might be interpreted that way. Many students won't see all the issues you are dealing with – they will only see how you respond to them. If the same question is arising it is a good idea to stop the experiment and explain to the whole class. This is a much better use of time.

Another example: We need to correct students at times to get them on the right track but always start with a positive comment, or, acknowledge it is a difficult concept that for many students. Look for opportunities to praise what is going well – both the whole group and individuals within the seminar group. This positive language then becomes the overall impression students have of you – that you think well of them and that you encourage them.

Another example: You might love your discipline and enjoy teaching but if you don't show your enthusiasm, your attitude might be misinterpreted. Students value evidence of your enthusiasm – here are some typical ways students identify enthusiastic tutors

- Seem happy to be in there (body language)
- Can 'chat' with students in a supportive way
- Are interested in what your students do
- Say they want to be a good tutor and value student feedback
- Tell them about your own experiences trying to learn new concepts
- Avoid being a 'know-all'

Assessment

Problem: *A student questions her assessment task results. She thinks she did as good a job as another student but has received a lesser grade.*

Solution: This is not an unusual or unreasonable opinion for a student to have. When you think about it, it is surprising it doesn't happen more often. But if you are the assessor, it can be quite worrying, personally. You aim to be consistent. Ask your Unit Chair if there is a pre-marking meeting to be informed about how to mark to a standard or marking guide. Alternatively, there might be a post-marking moderation process. Your individual best strategy is to be thorough in your 'before assessment' teaching practice. *For example:*

- Prior to the assessment task explain how you will be assessing and giving feedback. Importantly go through the assessment criteria with the students in class. In particular, focus on what the students will have to do to achieve a strong mark.
- Ask the Unit Chair if there are exemplars for the assessment task you can show/give students
- Explain to students how a re-mark is approved (this process is explained in the unit guide).
- Always ask students to check the marks. It is their responsibility and they are encouraged to ask questions about their assessment marks
- It is ok to acknowledge you might have been a little tough in marking. Listen to the student's explanation. They might have misunderstood the question.

When marking:

Be fair and consistent, with clear, constructive suggestions that can be aligned clearly with the assessment rubric or marking guide.

Further Deakin Development Resources

CloudDeakin support

CloudDeakin support for staff, from the Faculty's Education Services team email:
artsed-clouddeakin-support@deakin.edu.au

Student support for CloudDeakin is provided by eSolutions:
<http://www.deakin.edu.au/about-deakin/administrative-divisions/esolutions>

Online University wide CloudDeakin support for both staff and students:
<http://www.deakin.edu.au/learning/clouddeakin/help-with-clouddeakin>

Faculty of Arts and Education Online Teaching and Learning Hub:
<https://d2l.deakin.edu.au/d2l/home/93075>

Teaching and Learning for sessional staff (Deakin Online Course):
https://www.deakin.edu.au/learning-futures/ers/event.php?event_id=869

Teaching Development opportunities
<http://www.deakin.edu.au/learning-futures/introduction-to-building-capacity>

IT support Arts and Education

IT and resources assistant
Phone: 5227 1473
Arts Ed Resource services
<https://wiki.deakin.edu.au/display/artsedresources/Resource+Services>

IT support University wide

eSolutions
<http://www.deakin.edu.au/about-deakin/administrative-divisions/esolutions/it-help>

General information for arts and education staff

For general information on Faculty staff matters, please see the Faculty of Arts and Education Staff Only Pages. Navigate to Deakin Intranets/Faculties/Arts and Education:
<https://staff.deakin.edu.au/>

Payroll email address for casuals and sessional
HRSD payroll team: hrrsd-payroll@deakin.edu.au

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