

First year teaching seminar

November 15, 2004

1. What students care about

- That you are organized
- That you respect them
- That you care about them and their learning

2. Preparing the class

The single most important thing you can do: Create a complete syllabus and *stick to it*. You can make your life easier the whole semester long if you put careful thought into your syllabus.

How to create a syllabus

1. What topics do you want to cover?

- If it is an existing course at Berkeley, start with the existing syllabus
- Get syllabi of comparable classes from colleagues at other schools
- Consider what is covered in textbooks
- Play to your own strengths

2. What readings or cases do you want for each day?

Readings:

- Textbook, other books, journals, popular press, etc.
- Don't assign things you don't really want them to read

Cases:

- Not all cases are created equal!
- Find out cases others have used
- Download samples and teaching notes
- HBS "Bestsellers"

3. What do you want the assignments to be? I.e., what do you want the grades to be based on?

- Common elements of grade
 - Exams
 - Case write-ups
 - Semester project or research paper

- Problem sets, homework
 - Class participation
 - Others?
 - Considerations
 - Individual vs. group work in determining grades
 - Group member “free-riding”
 - Assignment that is a large share of the grade
 - Grading burden
 - Crediting class participation
4. Decide on all the deadlines for the course (exams, homework, projects, etc.), put them in the syllabus, and stick to them!
 5. Specify other policies
 - Collaborative work and academic integrity
 - Attendance policy and absences
 - How to contact you
 - Others?
 6. You may want to add an introduction, what the class is about, what you are expecting they will take away, what your approach is, etc.

Hiring a GSI

Berkeley has a formal application process. You must hire from those who have officially applied, although you may encourage people to apply. GSI can either be MBAs or PhD students, and need not be from Haas.

- Finding a good GSI
- What GSI's can do
- Directing a GSI

3. Teaching in class

Motivation

MBA students are willing to learn almost anything if you explain to them why it is important, valuable, or useful

- Use motivating examples absolutely everywhere you can
- Remind them along the way why you are going what you are doing

- Watch out if you are trying to teach them something that you can't explain the value of ("Neat" and "elegant" are not sufficient criteria!)

Cases

Why do we teach using cases?

- Students are motivated by examples
- Learning-by-doing
- Sometimes what is difficult is not the concept itself but the application

Cases are good student learning tools, but they are difficult to do well. . The problem is that while the students will learn by themselves the more of the analysis and discovery they do by themselves, in practice this does not usually occur without some guidance and direction. The tension between staying focused and seeming scripted.

How do you teach a case?

1. The single most important thing in teach a case is that you have a clear idea of what it is you want the students to learn from it.
2. Then figure out how you are going to get the students to have that insight or learn that lesson or make that realization.
 - 5 or 6 big questions
 - "Pastures"
 - Know what the facts or conclusions you need out of each pasture are
3. Try to imagine the how the discussion might unfold. The better you have anticipated, the better you will do on your feet.
4. In each of the major areas, think up some smaller questions you can use to direct (or re-direct), focus, or jumpstart the conversation if it lags.
5. Give the students case prep questions (3-5) to direct their preparation
6. Things to watch out for
 - Ask good questions. (Think, if you were the students, would you know how to answer?)
 - Don't make it a game of "guess what the professor is thinking"
 - Let them lead themselves into blind alleys and mistakes. Don't guide too much.
 - Start early! It takes a long time for a case to come together (for your to figure out what you want to get out of it and how to get there).
 - Review the case, especially the critical facts, just before you go in to teach

You may want to sit in on some people teaching cases before you do it, especially if you have never seen a case taught before.

Lectures

What is the purpose of a lecture?

- Not to fill 90 minutes
- Not to move through a particular amount of material
- Not to walk through bullet points
- As with a case, you should have a clear idea of the several big points you want them to take away, and then build the lecture to tell that story

Tips for good lectures

- Motivate everything, use examples and applications everywhere you can
- Build things into your lecture that will get students to realize their questions and ask them
 - Mini-examples and mini-applications
 - Asking them “So how would I...” “So if you wanted to...” “So what would it mean if...” “So if you were...” gives them a chance to ask you questions back
 - Build in holes or pauses; can’t just ask “Any questions?”
- In-class exercises that allow them to work with each other
 - Short article with questions
 - Made up situation
 - Numerical example

Media use

- Whiteboards
- Overheads/PowerPoint
 - distributing slides
- Other media (videos, etc.)
 - using the podium
- Gimmicks

Managing the classroom environment

This is the hardest thing to explain to someone else how to do. It comes, in part, with experience. The most important thing to know here is that you have a lot of control over what the norms of the class are. The following are a list of specific things you can do that will help set a

norm that is good for your students learning, is good for everyone's enjoyment, and ultimately makes teaching easier for you.

1. Treat teaching like you would other professional interactions

- Start and end on time
- Be responsive to their emails and reasonably available to them to speak to
- Do what you say you will do when you say it (don't do things at the last minute)

2. In class dynamics

- Learn their names (Really.)
- Present yourself the way you want to be treated (don't be arrogant, but don't be too self-deprecating)
- Manage the discussion
 - Set norms at the beginning (what is a good comment)
 - Cold calling
 - Air-time hogs
 - Tangents
 - Challenging vacuous, far-out, useless, or repetitive comments
 - Respect among students
- Don't embarrass students

3. Be enthusiastic about the material

4. Handling your (inevitable) mistakes

- If you mess up in class, say that you messed up, and fix it. All that matters in the students eyes is whether they understood at the end.
 - If you can do it in class, either explain your mistake, or go back and redo the part of the lecture.
 - If you get too confused to do it correctly in class, do it next time, or figure it out offline and explain it in an email or a document posted on the website
- If you make a mistake in something else
 - Admit your mistake and take responsibility
 - Do everything you reasonably can to make up for it
 - The way you fix a mistake can do a lot in terms of your relationship with the class and how they view you as a teacher.

4. Other good practices

- Post everything you can on the course website. (Simpler sites are better.)
- Start writing exams way in advance, work them out entirely the way you think the students will solve them, and have someone else who didn't write them work it (especially your GSI) or at least read it carefully (a colleague)

- Respond specifically to your midterm feedback. Announce specifically, in class or in a global email, what you are going to do to improve in light of the comments and then do it.
- Whenever you have something negative to convey to a student, tone it down one or two levels from your initial inclination. Be aware of your authority position. Start by giving the student the benefit of the doubt.
- Try to avoid using email for potentially negative interaction. It is too easy to fire off something you regret.
- Use your teaching mentor, me, or your colleagues to troubleshoot. It really helps to ask “How would you handle this...”