

# COLLEGE OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

## Teaching Best Practices

### Preparing for classes and the Syllabus

- Begin your course design by writing down your learning objectives. Once you have the learning objectives laid out, you can determine in a general sense, how much time you want to dedicate to each objective. Your learning objectives can assist you in determining which resources to assign and what assignments to develop for each course section.
- Next, determine how you might assess the students according to each objective. This might include exams, quizzes, presentations, papers, etc. Provide a variety of each type and assign a weight to each assessment according to the amount of time that you expect a student to prepare. Some faculty use the 3x time multiple meaning if a student expects to get an “A”, they must spend 3x hours per credit per week in preparation or 9 hours per week for a 3-credit class.
- Formally link all assignments to the student learning objectives developed for the course. This helps students understand the “why” of the assignment.
- Next, create a spreadsheet “calendar” and determine what topics you will cover each class period along with assignments, tests, etc. Make certain to lay out university holidays so that you can determine logical breaks. To the extent possible, avoid having major assessments due immediately following scheduled university breaks.
- Finally include each of the above items into your syllabus and once the semester starts, stick to the plan! While an occasional adjustment may be required, students become confused when you interject too much uncertainty.

### Setting Class Expectations

- At a basic level, students need to know three things:
  - What are the rules?
  - Why do you have those rules?
  - How are you going to enforce them?

State your expectations clearly in your syllabus. The syllabus becomes a useful document for both faculty and students to refer to. Some things to think about: Are you going to allow students to use cell phones, laptops and other technology in your classroom? If not, what are the consequences of doing so? How are you going to handle attendance? What is your policy on late assignments, missed quizzes/exams, regrade of exams, academic dishonesty, etc. Make sure that your grading policies are transparent. Cover these the first day of class. Make notes in your own copy of the syllabus of what works and what doesn't so that you can make changes for the next semester.

- A great way to begin setting expectations is through sharing your teaching philosophy and/or the identification of core values as an instructor. Let your students know what you expect from your students, but also what they, in turn, can expect from you.

- Choose your guiding principles and class expectations carefully but once you have done so, stick to them and constantly reinforce them throughout the semester.
- That said, be compassionate, understanding and most importantly, listen to your students

### **Developing Meaningful Class/Slides Content**

- Put effort into your slides. They need to be as professional as possible. Make these available to the students before class. Ask yourself, whether you want to sit through your presentation.
- Try to limit the number of your slides into meaningful chunks. Consider interspersing material on slides interspersed with in class exercises to apply the concepts and thus pace your slides with 3 to 4 for each 10-15 minutes of class time.
- Consider using your slides to reinforce key points from any related reading materials but supplement the content with your own experiences and insights.
- Highlight in different color key concepts from each chapter/topic. If you decide to upload slides on D2l at the beginning of the semester, make those slides incomplete (e.g., missing key elements) – those elements could be filled in during class which enhances student attention and retention.

### **Creating and Managing In-Class Student Engagement**

- Provide a written agenda for each class and email it to students 24-48 hours prior to the class. This practice helps to maintain focus throughout the class. In addition, it reminds students of work that needs to be completed in preparation for class, and it establishes a class routine.
- Try to switch gears every 10 or 15 minutes by using videos, in class exercises, or class discussions. With in-class discussions, try both open ended, calling on a specific student, or having students discuss in small groups, both assigned and unassigned.
- Get to know each of your students on a personal level. Try to learn your students' names within the first few weeks of the semester.
- Talk with the students and NOT AT them.
- In order to encourage in-class participation, you can give students time to think and prepare first or have them pair up to discuss questions prior to calling on them. Establishing an open, inviting classroom on the first day will make participation easier for the rest of the semester.
- Always be respectful of students. If a student isn't understanding a concept, make sure you don't make the student look bad in front of their peers but that you don't let an incorrect concept or definition go unaddressed. You can always talk with the student one-on-one outside of class but try to find ways to bring out the correct concept or definition within that day's class without disrespecting the student.
- Instead of calling on students, ask them to write down their responses to a question first and then ask them to share.

- Don't be afraid of confusion. Confusion is part of learning and teaching. It can take time for both students and teachers to fully understand some concepts. If you don't know an answer to a student's question immediately, tell the student clearly when you will have an answer.
- How to effectively teach a concept you understand well can also take time. Learning is part of teaching.
- Use humor. This can be tricky as not everyone has the same sense of humor...and one needs to be careful to not offend anyone. Remember that international students may not always get cultural references. Self-deprecating humor can sometimes work best.

### **Enabling Active/Experiential Learning**

- Learning is not simply the acquisition of information. Learning requires the student to integrate new information with their existing knowledge and experiences. An instructor who simply delivers information by itself does not help students develop their own understanding of the material. To get the most out of a course, students should take an active role in the learning process. It is important that classroom instruction be supplemented with case studies, discussions, group exercises, simulations as well as guest speakers to synthesize real world situations with textbook concepts. To that end, instead of having students gain their first exposure to concepts in class, through lecture, they should have their first exposure prior to class. Often this involves reading material.
- When using small group work as part of the class, have each group meet during the initial class to develop group ground rules regarding expectations of how work will be completed. Then, make group evaluation part of the grade with the ground rules serving as the group's rubric. This practice lays the groundwork for how the group will operate prior to potential problems developing within the group. Then, if problems do develop, the established ground rules may be called upon by group members.
- Try to use examples to explain concepts and keep examples current and those that are likely to be familiar to students.

### **Providing Meaningful Feedback to Students**

- Provide constant and regular feedback.
- Be timely. Feedback is most meaningful when it is given as quickly as possible. Try to return grades and/or feedback within a week of the test/ assignment/ paper. Try to return feedback on presentations within a day or two.
- Create a variety of different opportunities to provide feedback.
- Emphasize both positive and negative feedback. While it is always important to point out poor work or the misuse of concepts, it is also important to highlight positive work.

- Set a standard for the quality of work you expect – provide sample answers to assignments (an A-grade answer, AB-grade answer, etc.). Provide an opportunity for feedback early in the semester. This allows students to more fully understand your expectations early on, particularly on written assignments.

### **Class/Course Wrap-Up**

- Engage students in an informal class discussion about how to improve the course, your teaching, and managing student expectations.
  - If you were teaching this class, what are the three most important things you would change and why would you change them?
  - If you were teaching this class, what are the three most important things you would NOT change and why would you NOT change them?
  - If you were to give three recommendations to students who were going to take this class, what would those recommendations be?
- Consider also using some class time at the end of the semester to have students identify and share what they learned during the course.

### **Using Desire2Learn (D2L)**

- Use D2L for all electronic files, i.e., syllabus, slides, etc.
- Post all grading rubrics for assignments in D2L. For all written assignments, have students use just their Student ID number on the paper and not their names when turning in. This eliminates favorable bias to those who scored well on tests or are good participants.
- If participation/attendance is part of the grade, enter it in D2L and give a grade halfway through the course.
- Use D2L's ability to provide written feedback particularly on written assignments. D2L allows you to write feedback out as you read a student's assignment.
- Consider setting up the D2L content site by week, allowing students to know what is required each session throughout the course.
- Add due dates for assignments (under restrictions) for any D2L quizzes and dropbox items.
- Utilize the course home page 'news feed' to keep students informed over the course of the semester.

## **Best Teaching Practices from Our Best Teachers**

**David S. Krause, Finance ( Award Winner, 2018)**  
**Teaching Practices**

- Care about teaching – show authentic enthusiasm and passion for the subject matter
- Take time and care with class preparation material (ratio of 3 hours prep to 1 hour of classroom time is my rule of thumb)
- Stay current with advancements in teaching practices and seek out innovative methods to help students learn (i.e. utilize social media to connect with students and maximize the power within D2L and other learning management systems)
- Encourage class discussions (seek out and praise the ‘why’ rather than ‘how’ questions from students)
- Try to get students to think rather than just memorize
- Begin class meetings by discussing something that is relevant in the news to the current subject matter
- Attempt to show how theory and concepts are pertinent and essential to real-world application
- Trust students and seek feedback – while at times class discussions can seem to veer off course, in my experience students are generally successful in working back to the core topic.
- During discussion try to be more of a facilitator (guiding discussions) rather than the all-knowing ‘sage on the stage.’
- Experiment with flipping the classroom – using a combination of videos, vlogs, lectures, discussion, guest speakers, co-teachers, student presentations, etc.
- Stay relevant - this generation of young adult learners requires a more immediate connection between the course material and how it relates to the modern world – and I constantly seek to employ innovative methods and techniques to accomplish the goal of improved student learning outcomes (don’t be afraid to try Twitter, Instagram, blog postings, etc.)

**Cindy Melis, Accounting (Award Winner, 2016)**  
**Teaching Philosophy**

Why do I teach? Over the past seventeen years of teaching at Marquette University, my reasons for teaching have changed and evolved. Definitely, why I started teaching is not why I teach today. And perhaps, the reason I teach today will not be the reason I teach next year or five or ten years from now. In explaining my philosophy, I will have to share some of my personal story. Who I am and what I strive to build with my students is a direct result of where I've been and what I've experienced to this point in my life and in my role as a teacher.

I didn't always want to be a teacher. When I graduated college and became a CPA in a top firm, my goal was to build a successful career and make a lot of money. I was well on my way down that path when I had a change of heart for many reasons. The primary reason for this change took root while I watched my late husband, Robert, in his career as a professor, absolutely loving what he did. As he would share with me all the reasons he loved his job, I realized that I couldn't say the same about my own. I wanted what he had. He was the key driver behind me becoming a teacher; not a CPA, not an accountant, not a tax expert, but a teacher.

During 2015, I had to decide if I would continue to teach while Robert's cancer journey was nearing the end. Nobody would have been surprised if I took a leave of absence. Robert and I talked at great length about what I should do. We decided that I should teach for several reasons. The main reason wasn't about me and wasn't about him; it was about my students. It wasn't because I thought that I was the only one who could impart accounting knowledge to my students. After all, debit has and will always mean left, and credit has and will always mean right. Who can't teach that? It was about much more. It was about my Teaching Philosophy. It was about my desire to make a difference in their lives. It was about wanting to be an inspiration to them. It was about wanting to touch their lives in a way that would extend beyond the classroom.

In my teaching, I strive to build relationships with my students. These relationships are built on mutual respect, trust, and my genuine concern for them. To achieve this outcome, I follow these principles: 1. I do not talk down to my students; 2. I do not talk *at* my students; 3. I listen attentively to each student as an individual; 4. I put myself in their shoes; 5. I encourage them and have confidence in them; and 6. I hold very high expectations of them (both in and outside of the classroom). These principles are derived from my first priority as a teacher: caring for my students. That they know I care is probably the second priority. I strongly believe what John C. Maxwell said, "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care!" I try to build this trust and concern, beginning before the first day of classes with a welcome email and continuing to daily post "thoughts of the day" to D2L. I think I get more effort and dedication out of my students because they know that I care about them.

Coming from a place of respect and concern, I endeavor to reinforce and to instill Christian values in my students. At least once each week, my thought of the day is from scripture. I carefully choose passages about wisdom, faith, hope, love, trials, and perseverance. Some students face significant personal and life challenges in addition to the pressures of classes. My goal in this area is to encourage them that "whatever lies ahead, God is already there." Going through the most difficult time of my life in front of my students gave me the opportunity to be a first-hand witness to some of the scripture I stand on and that I share with them. Some of these are: "Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken." Psalm 16:8; "You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You." Isaiah 26:3; and "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Hebrews 11:1.

Most of the students who take my courses are not accounting majors. Many come into the class with reservations, and even fear, about the subject matter and their potential to grasp it and succeed in the course. One of my greatest challenges is motivating them and convincing them that the topic is important and applicable regardless of their chosen majors. One of my goals is to challenge each student to fully utilize their intellectual gifts, whether they are the “best and the brightest” or struggling to “find their stride.” I believe it is a waste when a person fails to maximize their potential by underutilizing the natural skills and abilities provided to them. To meet this challenge, homework assignments are comprehensive and exams are demanding, yet fair. Opportunities are provided to develop problem-solving and critical-thinking skills, and my classroom approach is interactive and energetic. I often weave real-world scenarios and examples into my lectures. Although I don’t think I have a good sense of humor, my students find my stories and anecdotes entertaining and engaging. Our 50-minute class moves quickly and students often tell me that they have no time to be bored or to get distracted. I feel a deep sense of satisfaction when students thank me at the end of class or at the end of the semester. Many times they say such things as, “I couldn’t have done it without you.” or “You made accounting enjoyable.” Even students who earn Cs and Ds will thank me for the semester, which is a great encouragement to me.

I have yet to discuss my teaching pedagogy. I’m somewhat embarrassed to admit that I do not use technology in my classroom (unless you consider a calculator technology). I exclusively use the white board to develop and communicate the thought process from start to finish that goes into working through an accounting problem. In this era, I believe authentic forms of communication are being replaced by technology. My decision to take an old school teaching approach was derived from my desire to exemplify that face to face communication is still vital, and should be practiced to develop skills students will need in almost all future areas of life. Additionally, I encourage my students to take handwritten notes as I believe that there’s a greater learning connection when pencil is to paper rather than fingers are to keys. While this approach requires more energy and enthusiasm on my part, I believe the students reap the benefits. I need my students to be actively engaged in the learning process and find my chosen approach to be very effective for accounting and helps them develop a skill they can apply outside the classroom.

I come back to my initial contemplation: why would I choose to teach during the most difficult season of my life? The answer is the same for any semester. I want to make a difference in my students’ lives. I want to encourage them to be better people when they leave my course than when they began. I want to make accounting fun, understandable, and unthreatening. I know I’ve done these things well when: students stop by my office before graduation just to give me a hug and say good-bye; when they introduce me to their parents who say something like, “we’ve heard about you!”; when they excitedly share with me the good news of their job offers; when they thank me for being the person who influenced them to major in accounting; when they, years after graduation, invite me to coffee or to lunch or even to their weddings; when I’m among the first people they email to share the good news of a passed CPA exam; or when they call me for advice about future job opportunities or about attending PhD school.

I count it an absolute privilege to teach at Marquette University. I am beyond blessed to work with my students and have the opportunity to intersect their lives. I’m most grateful that my late husband influenced me down this path. After all Confucius said, “Choose a job you love, and you will never have to work a day in your life.” This statement sums up how I feel about my work as a teacher at Marquette.