

First Day of Class: The Research

Why is the first day of class important?

In the first week of a semester, students are taking stock of their course loads, program requirements, learning needs, and school-work-life balance. The first day of class is your opportunity to help students answer the following questions about how your course fits into their student experience:

- Why should I take this course?
- What is expected of me in this course?
- How can I be successful in this course?
- What classroom experiences can I expect to have in this course?

Introduce Yourself and Your Passion for the Course Topic

Introduce yourself to your students and share some of your professional background (Penman & McCann, 1999). Let your excitement for your subject matter shine through. Discuss why you enjoy teaching and what you find the most rewarding about teaching your particular subject.

Explain to Students What the Course Involves and How They Can Be Successful

Use your syllabus as a guide to walk through the logistics of the course, the skills and knowledge students will be gaining in the course, and what activities and tools you will use to assess those skills and knowledge (Penman & McCann, 1999). Explain to students what actions and behaviors they can take to be successful and what actions you will take to assist them in that success (Anderson, Mcguire & Cory, 2011).

Allow Students to Interact with One Another

Using icebreakers simply as a social activity is not widely recommended, but using interactive activities or discussions that directly relates to course content or logistics is a great way to help students meet their fellow students and begin to feel a sense of community (Anderson et al., 2011; Lang, 2008; Penman & McCann, 1999). Break students into pairs or small groups to discuss an introductory question, the syllabus, or a current event related to the course material. Ask students to introduce themselves to one another as part of the activity. Engage the entire class in a discussion related to the course content, the syllabus, or successful student behaviors.

Assess Students Prior Knowledge and Experience with the Subject Matter

Ask questions that get students thinking about their beliefs, assumptions, prior knowledge, and personal experience with the subject matter. Use a pretest or ask students to fill out a survey asking them about their experiences or understanding of the topic.

Engage Students with the Content at a High Level

Engaging the students with the content on the first day conveys a message that you are excited about your subject matter and value the limited time that you have with students to explore the course topics. The engagement should

should be at a high level and get students thinking about the topic in relation to their lives, current events, or other subjects or courses they may have taken (Penman & McCann, 1999). Higgins (2001) suggests saving the discussion of the course syllabus until the second day of class if more time is needed to engage students with the content.

Demonstrate What a Typical Class Session is Like

As closely as possible, model how you expect a typical class session to run and what classroom behaviors are valued (Anderson et al., 2011). If you use a lot of class discussions, make sure students are discussing on day one. If you plan to give in-class quizzes or assessments as you go through materials, work one in on the first day on the syllabus or other introductory topics.

References

- Anderson, D.M., Mcguire, F.A., and Cory, L. (2011). The first day: it happens only once. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 16(3), 293-303.
- Higgins, P. (2001). Excitement on the first day? *College Teaching*, 49, 2.
- Lang, J. M. (2008). *On course: A week-by-week guide to your first semester of college teaching*. Harvard University Press.
- Penman, B. & McCann, L. I. (1999). Student perspectives on the first day of class. *Teaching of Psychology*, 26(4), 277-279.