New GSI Training Workshop Lesson Plan

Jeffrey Kaplan
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Dear future GSI Workshop Leaders,

The folks at the UC Berkeley Center for Teaching & Learning Center tell me that this lesson plan will be made available as a resource for teaching new GSIs (i.e., teaching assistants) how to teach. This lesson plan is designed for a 3 hour & 45 minute workshop, including 30 minutes of break time. But the insights about teaching may be helpful to others.

Most of this workshop deals with difficult situations that may arise when teaching college courses (e.g., what to do if a student comes to complain about a grade, if a small number of students consistently dominate discussion, if a student comes to you to complain about the professor, is a student falls asleep in class, if a student asks you a question to which you do not know the answer, if a student seems to be in psychological distress, etc.). Some of the situations apply specifically to discussion-based courses. I offer my opinion as to how to handle each situation. To get to the helpful advice, skip to page 7.

If you have any comments, please feel free to contact me (jeffkaplan@berkeley.edu).

Best,

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Schedule

1)	Learn Their Names As They Enter	10 minutes
2)	Introduce Myself, And Overview of Workshop	15 minutes
3)	Discussion of Teaching Fears	20 minutes
4)	Questions & Answers	25 minutes
5)	Assessment: Index Card Feedback (before taking a break)	5 minutes
6)	Break #1	20 minutes
7)	Follow Up on Index Card (upon returning from break)	5 minutes
8)	Questions & Answers, continued...	45 minutes
9)	Break #2	10 minutes
10)	Any Other Questions From Participants	15 minutes
11)	Questions & Answers, continued again...	30 minutes
12)	Wisdom/Rants	15 minutes
13)	Workshop Evaluations and Concluding Remarks	10 minutes

1. Learn Their Names As They Enter

(10 minutes)

Arrive early. When the first student enters, ask them their name and introduce yourself. When the second person enters, ask them their name, introduce them — by name — to the first person and yourself. Continue this process so that by the time the 20th person enters the room, you have repeated the 1st person's name 19 times. Once everyone is there, ask if any of them want to try to say everyone's name.

➔ *Meta-teaching Comment*: "I do this on the first day of every semester in all my courses. You can do this or some similar activity. Learning all your students' names is helpful — it earns their respect and instills a small, healthy fear in them. You know who they are, so they are more inclined to try to impress you by working hard. Also, it is not as difficult to learn names as you might think. The key is to really make an effort. When a student tells you their name: think about what is distinctive about the name; think of words that it sounds like; look at their face and pick out the weirdest, most distinctive feature of their face; write their name across their forehead in your mind. This will work. The reason that I can't remember someone's name when they tell it to me at a cocktail party is that I am not really making an effort to learn their name. If you really try and make a mnemonic, you will be able to remember all their names."

2. Introduce Myself, And Overview of Workshop

(15 minutes)

Me

- My department
    - Philosophy
- My teaching experience
    - GSI for 10 courses at Berkeley
    - Primary Instructor for 1 course at Berkeley
    - Primary Instructor for 4 courses through PUP at San Quentin State Prison
- My dissertation research
    - Normativity of Law & Language
- Humanizing details

- I am a native of New Jersey.
- I have a 1.5 year old son who is obsessed with dump trucks. We recently went on a short trip to see a construction site, where I was told there would be several dump trucks.

➔ *Meta-teaching Comment*: "I just introduced myself. You can do something similar in your first class meeting."

This Workshop

Explain the purpose of the workshop and how it will be structured.

Most new teaching assistants or GSIs, hate attending training sessions of this kind. This is because they believe that the training will consist largely of clichés without any helpful, specific direction. Here are some of the clichés:

- "I learn just as much from my students as they learn from me."
  - This is a lovely sentiment, but if we take it seriously, then we should stop charging tuition.
- "I try to create a welcoming environment, where everyone feels comfortable sharing their perspective."
  - Duh. Everyone tries to do this. The question is: *how exactly* does one succeed in doing this?
- "I try to show the students that [insert topic] related to the real world."
  - Meh.
- "Don't just lecture."
  - Fair enough. But no one actually teaches teaching assistants or professors how to lead a discussion.

They may also hate training sessions of this kind because they tend to focus primarily on parts of teaching that, while important, are relatively easy. For example:

- What to do if the semester is approaching and the primary instructor hasn't contacted you?
- How many office hours should you hold?
- How should you format your section syllabus (if you have one)?
- How should you manage your time with all your GSI responsibilities?
- How does one grade papers?

These questions are not easy, but they are much, much easier than actually teaching first-time instructors how to actually lead a live in-class discussion—teaching them how to manage egos, keep the conversation going without being overbearing, and facilitate back-and-forth between students.

Why don't workshops of this kind show first-time instructors how to lead a discussion? Partly, it is because people think that leading a classroom discussion is a *mysterious* skill. The secrets of leading a classroom discussion are nebulous. It is impossible to *tell* someone how to do it.

The thesis of today's workshop—if today's workshop can be said to have a thesis—is that this is false. In fact, there are tractable skills that one can acquire for how to actually lead an in-class discussion, and these skills can be explained and discussed. The hope is that this workshop will win over those participants who are inclined to hate teaching workshops because today's workshop, unlike most teaching workshops, will provide *actual insight* into how to teach well. That's right. Not just mostly-useless administrative details and tired pedagogy clichés, but genuinely helpful teaching wisdom.

To this end, most of the workshop will focus on dealing with the common teaching difficulties. Here is how this will go:

- On your handouts you will find a question of the form "What do you do when x occurs?" with a large blank space underneath it. We will tackle one question at a time. Everyone will silently write down their own answer on their handout.
    - It is important that everyone tries to answer these questions themselves without the input of others. Actually writing down an answer forces your to realize that these questions are not trivial.
- Then I will use a random number generator on my phone to select one of you, who will read your answer exactly as you wrote it. You may not ad-lib or explain. Your written answer should be enough. Don't worry this is not a quiz.
    - This ensures that people take their questions seriously. A mild fear of embarrassment is healthy. We don't want anyone to be mortified, but everyone here is an adult. (You will find that this is true of your undergraduate students as well. If you do so properly, you will find that they don't mind being cold-called. They can take it.)
- Then we will have a discussion of the answer. People can offer their own answers and comment on the answers that others have given.
    - This will partly take advantage of the fact that some first-time instructors in this workshop are not really first-time instructors, so they may have accumulated some wisdom. Also, there are instructors of various disciplines here and those differences between disciplines may matter.
        - Pause the explanation of how things will go to take a quick poll of the room.
            - Who here has taught before?
            - (Don't ask everyone to say what discipline they are from. That will take too long if there are more than 20 people and their disciplines will come out in discussion anyway.)
- I will also participate in the discussion, and at the end I will share what I take to be the answer based on my own teaching experience and the thought that I have given to that particular question.
    - I am interested to hear what everyone has to say, but I won't pretend like all answers are equal or that I don't have views of what is the correct way to handle the situations that we will discuss. At least in some cases, I think I have actual wisdom to

share. I will be facilitating a discussion. But I won't *merely* be facilitating a discussion. I also have some insight to share.

Other Housekeeping item before we get started:

- I ask the workshop participants not to use any electronic devices during the workshop, even for the purposes of taking notes.
    - We will discuss the advantages and disadvantages of a similar policy in your classroom.

➔ *Meta-teaching Comment*: "I just began this workshop by introducing myself and explaining what they can expect from the workshop and what they will be expected to do. You can do the same thing at your first section. It puts everyone at ease to have some sense of what to expect."

3. Discussion of Teaching Fears

(20 minutes)

Hand out index cards and have everyone write on their index card either a question about teaching, or a fear that they have about teaching. (They label their card as a "question" or "fear".) Then collect all the cards, shuffle them, and hand them back out. Use a random number generator on your phone to select some students to read the question/fear that was handed to them. Then discuss. Repeat for as many questions/fears as we can within the 20 minutes allotted for this activity.[1]

4. Questions & Answers

(25 minutes - get through two or three questions and return to the rest later)

This is the main activity of the workshop that was outlined earlier. Below are questions. The numbers correspond to the same questions on the handout. Below each question are my notes in response to these questions, which do not appear on the handout. Start by going through only the first question or two. Then, after the break, return to the questions where you left off. Feel free to add in questions that arise from anything that the participants write on index cards.

[1] Remind GSIs that there are campus resources to assist them with their teaching and help them overcome their fears. For instance: GSI Teaching & Resource Center (online teaching guide, consultations, workshops); past and current GSIs; faculty; departmental pedagogy courses (375-level courses); online ethics course, etc.

1. What do you do when a student comes to complain about a grade that they got? What is your goal for this meeting? Under what conditions, if any, do your change their grade?
    - My goal for this sort of encounter is for the student to really *see* what was wrong with their paper. They need to genuinely persuaded that they do not deserve a higher grade. They should not be taking it on your authority that their paper is not brilliant. You need to actually convince them that it is not brilliant. If they leave thinking, "That GSI won't increase my grade! What's their problem?!", then I have failed. I want them to leave thinking, "Wow, I really handed in a crap paper. My thesis wasn't clear at all. I am really lucky that my GSI didn't give me a D!"
    - The way I achieve this is just by going through the paper and clearly — not cruelly — pointing out the problems. You can't just *say* that the thesis isn't clear or that the whole third paragraph is irrelevant. You have to *show* that the thesis isn't clear and that the whole third paragraph is irrelevant.
    - The tone here is important. The criticisms should be significant, but they should be delivered in a way that communicates that not all hope is lost.
2. What do you do when two or three of the smartest students are having a productive back-and-forth discussion on the topic but no one else is getting involved?
    - The common responses are to (a) let the exchange continue, (b) stop the exchange and ask "What does everyone else think?", or (c) cold-call a student who is not participating.
    - Each of these has problems. Option (a) doesn't get anyone else involved, (b) is often met with silence, and (c) can backfire if the student has nothing to say, creating an antagonistic environment.
    - Instead, I do the following. I pause the debate and bring everyone up to speed, "Sarah argued for position x. Then Jose described scenario y, which is a counterexample to x…" This allows students who were not following the discussion to get caught up. They are then much more likely to volunteer a thought. But the summary also makes cold-calling a good option. I never cold-call a student and bluntly ask them what they think. First, I say the student's name. This gets their attention. Then I summarize the discussion, giving them something to work with even if they haven't been following so far. Then when I ask them what they think, they always have something to say. And moreover, after being called on in this way, even students who are silent for the first several weeks of the semester, begin to speak up voluntarily.
3. What do you do when a student expresses a relevant interesting thought but expresses it very poorly?
    - The classic philosopher's move is to offer the student a crystal-clear re-statement of their point and ask, "Is that what you had in mind?" This impresses everyone and has the pedagogical value of modeling how to speak clearly. I do use this method.

But, when appropriate, there is a better way: make the student rephrase their own point. I do not *mereely* say, "I think I see what you are saying, but it wasn't clear. Can you re-state it?" Rather, when I ask a student to re-state their own point I give them two pieces of information. First, I remind them what type of comment they are making, "Okay, so you are offering a revised version of theory x that avoids problem y." Second, I say what needs to be different for the point to be well-put, "Can you say more clearly which part of the old theory needs to go and what exactly you are replacing it with?" This method is less thrilling than re-stating their points for them, but it is a more efficient way for students to learn how to express themselves clearly.

4. What do you do when a student says something clearly mistaken or otherwise reveals that they misunderstand something?
    - The first thing to say here is simply that it should be made clear to the students that the answer was wrong. Part of your job is to clearly communicate the material.
    - It is very tempting to do something like the following, which I have been told by many colleagues that they do: say something like, "Hmm, interesting. Does that seem right to everyone else?" and try to get other students to give the correct answer. Or say, "Well, let's look at the text" and then direct everyone toward the passage that will show that the student is wrong. I used this method for many years, but I have not come to believe that it is not a good approach for the following reason: it makes a big deal out of the fact that the student made a mistake. You don't want to launch a 20-minute investigation aimed to ultimately show that the student was mistaken.
    - My prefered method is to very clearly, in one or two sentences, say that they are wrong and move on. If a student says that the first thing that Rene Descartes attempts to prove in his Meditations on First Philosophy is the existence of God, I respond with something like, "No. That is the second thing that he attempts to prove. There is something else that he attempts to prove first, and it is important that God's existence comes second. I know we are reaching back to something we read all they way at the beginning of the semester, but does anyone remember what Descartes proves first?" I don't dwell on the mistake. You want to both (a) give them the correct answer so that they learn, but (b) not let reticence about yourself being the one to tell a student that they are mistaken lead to a whole damn production about the fact that they got something wrong.
5. What do you do when you are having a discussion, and there is a view that needs to be represented, but no students are taking that side in the discussion?
    - If you can assign them sides or ask any of the students if they would like to defend that position, that is good. But sometimes you will have to play devil's advocate, taking up the undefended position and arguing with your students.
    - But when doing this — playing devil's advocate in this way — I make sure to do two things:

    - Make it clear that I am playing devil's advocate. I don't want them to assume that that is my position. I don't make a huge deal out of it, but I say something like, "Well, a moral realist might by saying…"
    - The absolutely most crucial thing to do when playing devil's advocate and arguing with your students is this: don't give your best arguments. You are a trained professional. They are amateurs. If you try your hardest you will crush them and this will shut down discussion. You should try to give them a target that is just barely within reach. As Tim Scanlon said in his advice on teaching philosophy sections, "Don't allow yourself just to refute their suggestions or objections, like a tennis instructor who slams the ball back at a beginning player. This not only discourages them, but sets a bad example."
6. What do you do when a student dozes off in class?
    - You have to wake them up. Having someone sleep in class is hugely distracting. It zaps the energy out of the room. It undermines your authority as an instructor and sets a terrible precedent. Many instructors are resticent to do this, so they will bend over backward looking for some spurious justification for not waking the student up. But don't kid yourself, you have to wake them up.
    - Here is how I typically wake them up (though this needs to be modified depending on the student). I say their name (one more reason to know all their names) and make a comment. Something like, "So-and-so is really struggling to stay awake." Everything about how to do this—the warm smile, the tone of my voice, my body language—makes it clear that I am not attacking them. The goal is to wake them up in a quick but pleasant way. It is fine to jokingly and *lightly* embarrass them, but they must not be mortified. Everyone has stuff going on in their lives. Maybe they have a newborn baby at home keeping them up all night. Maybe they just stayed out drinking all night. I don't know. Either way, it's rude to fall asleep in class. I often tell them — not obnoxiously or passive-aggressively — that they can step out to go buy a coffee if they need to.
7. What do you do on the first day of section if the primary instructor has not covered much material yet in lecture?
    - I do three things:
        - I learn all their names in exactly the way that I learned everyone's name at the beginning of this workshop
        - I go over the section syllabus
        - I explain to them propositions, arguments, premises, conclusions, truth/falsity of propositions, validity/invalidity of arguments, and soundness/unsoundness of arguments.
        - You could also bring in a passage of text and have one student read it outloud while others follow along and then discuss it.

8. Should you grade papers anonymously? Why?
    - I am strongly in favor of anonymous grading. Here is the explanation that I put on all of my syllabi: "Everyone is subject to unconscious biases, including me. But grading anonymously not only benefits the students who the grader might be biased against, it also benefits those who might benefit from the grader's biases. Perhaps, for example, you are a likeable person. You may never know how bad your writing really is. Anonymous grading is the solution to this problem."
9. What do you do when it is obvious that most students in your section have not come prepared to class (e.g., not done the reading, not completed prerequisite tasks)? Specifically, how do you salvage the session? And how do you encourage students to read in the future?
    - I don't really have an established method for salvaging the session. This is something that I am still working on and I am interested to hear what other people have to say in answer to this question. Here is what I do *not* do: reprimand the students. That is because I think there are much more effective ways of getting the students to do the reading in the future (see next bullet point). Here are the two strategies that I tend to use to salvage the session, though I don't love them:
        - Give them a mini-lecture with enough material so that they can have a discussion.
        - Have them take out the text and read a passage together and discuss.
    - However, when it comes to getting the students to do the reading in the future, I have several specific methods that I employ. Not all of these can be used in the limited role of a GSI who cannot pick the readings for the course. But some of them can. How, then, do I get students to do the reading?
        - First, I pick readings that are not torturous and I provide reading guides, written by me. The guides say things like, "In this paragraph, Putnam states his opponent's theory. What is his opponent's theory?" In my experience, these reading guides are important for students in introductory courses at both UC Berkeley and San Quentin State Prison. The truth is that if readings feel futile, then students will not do them. The readings guides are designed to point students in the right direction without explaining the material to them.
        - Second, I discuss every part of every reading. This is not for the benefit of the weakest students, but rather the strongest ones. The strongest students do the reading. They struggle through the difficult passages. The reward that they deserve for this effort is the chance to discuss that material. But when their efforts go unrewarded, they learn not to do the reading.
        - Third, the most powerful tool for getting students to do the reading is a moderate and healthy fear of embarrassment. I cold-call students—that is, I call on students who have not raised their hand. But cold-calling needs to be

done in a very specific way. You can't just say, "So-and-so, we haven't heard from you. What do you think?" That very rarely goes well in my experience. When I cold-call, I do it in the following way, typically when the more outspoken students are dominating discussion. First, I call on one of the other students by name. This wakes them up. But I do not just ask them a question and hang them out to dry. Rather, I summarize what just happened: "We just heard Carlos argue for position *p*. But Sandra objected by offering example *e*." This little summary gets everyone caught up, prevents students from getting left behind, and gives the cold-called student something to work with. Then, when I ask them what they think, they always have something to say. I have found that even students who do not speak for the first several weeks of the semester, after being called on, begin to speak up voluntarily.

- Fourth, in a recent introductory ethics course, I began each lecture with an electronic reading quiz. The students answer questions on electronic devices and the anonymized results are displayed immediately. By seeing their answers at the beginning of lecture, I am able to focus the lecture on the parts of the reading that require it.
- Fifth, assign reading responses and grade them. This is a classic strategy, and most people are familiar with it. The main drawbacks are that (a) it demands a lot of time from the instructor to grade, and that (b), unlike the electronic reading quizzes that are graded immediately in front of the whole class, any student misunderstandings are not revealed by the reading responses until after class.
- Sixth, and finally, a day or two in advance have the students submit very short (strictly 100 words) question/little argument/mini-reponse. Then create a handout for class that compiles these questions and responses, edits them a little, and structures them so that the handout can be used to guide discussion. The students tend to appreciate having their thoughts guide class, but also also appreciate having some quality control. Also, you will almost certainly be able to use this method to hit all the points you wanted to hit anyway. If the class is small enough, all, or almost all, of the student responses can be used. Handouts in general are less ideal in large lecture classes, so I am hesitant to recommend this method for those classes, but it can still work so long as a small selection of the questions/responses are used.

- Okay, but what do you do if you are the GSI, but the primary instructor has assigned way too much reading, which, of course, they never talk about in lecture, so none of the students are doing virtually any of the reading and now you have to lead a discussion section?

    - You can create a mini-course within the course. Send your students an email several days before section saying something like, "In section on Thursday we will focus our discussion mostly on just chapter 2 of the reading." If the course syllabus says that they have to read 4 chapters, and you specify just one, then the students will read the one chapter you tell them to, and then you will be able to have a good discussion.

10. What do you do when a student asks you a question and you do not know the answer?
    - Admit that you don't know.
    - You can pose the question to the whole class, but don't do this as a way of hiding that you don't know. That's cowardly and pathetic!
    - Say that you will get back to them, and then actually get back to them.
    - Most importantly: guide them through some of the key steps you would follow to answer the question. You might not know the answer, but you do know how to determine the answer. They are undergraduates, so they don't even know how to do that. Teach them that!
11. Should you allow students to use electronic devices in section/class? Why?
    - I do not let them use any electronic devices. Don't be afraid to set down some rules, and then to enforce them later on.
    - Here is a quick story about that. For the last five years I have been a primary instructor for introduction to philosophy courses at San Quentin State Prison taught through the Prison University Project. These are accredited college courses, taught on a volunteer basis. Anyway, to ensure that they did the readings, I assigned reading summaries. These were due at the beginning of class. All of their assignments were handwritten or typed on typewriters (most students did not have access to computers in the prison), and the paper copies were handed in to me, on my desk, at the beginning of class. The point of this assignment was to force them to struggle with the reading on their own and not to just wait for me to explain it. But students would try to submit the summaries the middle or at the end of class after hearing me explain the reading and them quickly writing it up. I was just starting out as a primary instructor and I let this slide. I didn't want to police them. I figured everyone in their lives is policing them and I didn't want to be part of that. At the end of one of the semesters one of the students came up to me and said that this was unfair. I should enforce the rule and not accept reading summaries unless they were handed in at the beginning of class. I agreed, but in responding to this student I began to make excuses for my behavior. He pointed out that what these guys in prison needed was rules enforced in their lives. They don't have too many rules imposed on them. What they have are rules that are imposed inconsistently and maliciously. If imposed consistently and imposed out of love, then, he suggested, it is a source of reliability in their lives. Part of the problem, he claimed, is that these guys didn't have enough fair

constraints. This really had an impact on me. From them on I imposed the rule and explained why it was in their benefit to do so, and why it was fair. They believed me and respected it, even the ones who were not being allowed to turn in assignments.

12. What do you do if a student complains about the professor?
    - I have heard lots of specific advice about what to do in situations like this, but most of the advice avoids the inevitable: you have to make an assessment of the complaint. Don't launch a full-blown investigation, but determine how serious it is and whether it is *prima facie* apt.
    - If it is apt, I would talk to the professor, say that a student raised this issue, and encourage the professor to reform their behavior. If I was the professor, I would certainly want to know this kind of information. It's very helpful for an educator.
    - If the complaint is misguided, then you should be sure to hear the student out, but don't be afraid to explain any details that the student may have missed that would justify the behavior of the professor or the class policy about which the student is complaining.
    - Either way, you can sympathize with the student's complaint, but do not trash the professor.
    - Also, if the complaint is about something serious, such as sexual harassment, you should go to the proper campus authorities immediately.
13. You are worried that one of your students might be in distress: their assignments have suddenly declined in quality, they are no longer participating in class discussions, and when they do speak with you, they are tearful and emotional. How do you respond?
    - Share your concerns with the Instructor of Record
    - Talk with the student during office hours and try to learn what is wrong by listening sensitively and carefully
    - Use the "Gold Folder" Protocol found here: https://uhs.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/ucb_goldfolder.pdf
    - After going through the "Gold Folder" protocol, request a consultation through Counseling and Psychological Services if appropriate.
    - After going through the "Gold Folder" protocol, submit a CARE report to the Students of Concern Committee if appropriate.
    - Check the Mental Health Handbook for guidance on how to approach the situation: https://uhs.berkeley.edu/counseling/prevention-education-outreach/mental-health-handbook

5. Assessment: Index Card Feedback

(5 minutes)

Before taking the first break, pass out another round of index cards and ask each participant to write down one question that they have. Collect the index cards and read them over the break. Make sure to provide a long enough break so that you can both (a) read the cards and (b) take a break for yourself. I would give them a 20 minute break now and a 10 minute break later.

➔ *Meta-teaching Comment*: "This type of index card schtick is a decent way to hear from shy students."

6. Break

(20 minutes)

Be Specific About What Time They Must Be Back

7. Follow Up on Index Card

(5 minutes)

Welcome the participants back form the break. Discuss some of the questions from the index cards.

8. Questions & Answers, continued...

(45 minutes)

More Questions and Answers and pick up where we left off.

9. Break

(10 minutes)

Take another break. Don't bother with index cards this time. **Be Specific About What Time They Must Be Back**

10. Any Other Questions From Participants

(15 minutes)

Ask if there are any other questions that have occurred to this since before the first break when they filled-in those index cards.

11. Questions & Answers, continued again...

(30 minutes)

More Questions and Answers, pick up we left off, and ideally finish the list. Don't forget to include any additional questions that came from index cards or that were raised in person by workshop participants.

11. Wisdom/Rants

(15 minutes)

Here are some pieces of wisdom which didn't fit into the question-and-answer format, but which I think are worth passing along.

- As a GSI or teaching assistant, when you are sitting in lecture, take good notes.
    - As a graduate student in your field, you are probably capable of sitting through an undergraduate lecture and absorbing all of the material well enough to lead discussion section without taking any notes. But if you are wise, you will take notes anyway, so that you have those notes to look back on when you have to teach this course as a primary instructor. I wish I had taken better notes in the first few courses for which I was a GSI.
- I am strongly opposed to handouts.

    - First, education research has shown that people retain information best when they take handwritten notes.[2] Handouts almost always contain lots of information, giving the students the sense that they don't have to take notes.
    - Also — and this is an unscientific claim, but I think it is surely true — it is impossible to simultaneously read and listen when the words spoken are the words written are not 100% identical. If someone lowers her head for six seconds to read a sentence on the handout, then she is not going to hear whatever is said during those six seconds. This is an absurd way to listed to a lecture or presentation. It does not work.
    - If I can speculate as to why handouts are so popular, they are proof that the presenter is minimally prepared. But the preparation required to make a handout does not result in a teacher or presenter who can clearly present the material. And it is often used as a substitute for clear, engaging presentation.
- Tell them not to pack up early, but let them go on time.
    - Like everyone else, I hate it when students start packing-up 5 minutes before class is over. You can hear every chair start to shift and the papers rustle. I ask them not to do it, and if they do it, I point out that they are doing it and ask them to stop. But if you ask this, then you have to stop on time. It is disrespectful of their time to run over. Also, if you run over they aren't listening, so you are not really covering that material.
- If, at some point, you are going to be the primary instructor for a course (or if, as a GSI, you have some influence over the assigned readings), you must choose the readings very carefully. Poorly chosen readings will teach the students not to do the reading. If this is early in their college career, then this can disastrously lead to them not doing the readings for all of their college courses.
    - The point of a reading assignment is for the students to read it. It's purpose is not to be an *homage* to your dissertation advisor's reading assignment at Oxford in the late 70s. It's purpose is not make the instructor feel tough for assigning all of Hume's Treatise in one week, which the students will not read and which the instructor certainly will not re-read before lecturing on it. Most of the time the decision to

[2] Pam A. Mueller and Daniel M. Oppenheimer, "The Pen Is Mightier Than the Keyboard," Psychological Science, Vol 25, Issue 6, pp. 1159 - 1168. First published date: April-23-2014.
http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0956797614524581
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https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/SingleStudyReviews/wwc_carter_022217.pdf.

assign a ton of reading is not malicious. The instructor thinks "oh, they might be interested in this" or "oh, they will benefit from this reading as well!" But one cannot be so cavalier about assigning reading. It can lead to disaster for a course.

- Doing the readings should be *rewarding*.
  - It should be *intellectually rewarding* in the sense that the students should be rewarded for their effort with interesting content that they can grasp. Struggling through impossible reading only to still be unable to understand it is a profoundly unrewarding experience. It thereby teaches students not to do the reading. (Notice that this is important not because of how it affects the worst students, but how it affects the best students. It is the best students who are going to struggle through the impossible readings only to be disappointed. So the best, most-dedicated students are the ones who are being taught not to do the reading.)
  - It should be *rewarded in class*. There is nothing more frustrating than struggling through a reading — perhaps understanding some of it, but having many questions — only to arrive to class and have that reading barely mentioned or not mentioned at all. It teaches the students not to do the reading. (And just as above, this applies more so to the best students, not the worst ones.) So the instructor should discuss every component of every reading that is assigned, even if this means halting a productive line of in-class discussion.
  - It should be *rewarding in that it helps them follow lecture and discussion*. The reading should be comprehensible enough that having done the reading they come to class with background understanding that aids them in class and that will not simply be spoon-fed to the students who don't do the reading. Readings and lecture must not bear the following relationship to one another: the readings are near impenetrable when the students sit down to read them on their own, but in the lecture all is revealed, everything being made clear and it being apparent from the lecture which parts of the reading are relevant and which can be ignored. Why? Because this makes the effort of sitting down and struggling with the reading before class totally unrewarding. If they struggle, get virtually nothing out of it, and then go to lecture and have everything perfectly explained, then they will quickly stop doing the reading. (This is not to say that lecture should not further explain the material, or that it should not explain parts that they likely didn't completely grasp. That is a big part of the role of lecture. This is just to say that the readings must be understandable enough that they get something out of doing it on their own before lecture.) And again, this applies more so to the best students, not the worst ones. The best students are the ones who struggle through difficult readings.

    - Don't assign new reading when a paper is due. They won't read it.
    - If students do not need to do the reading, but the instructor desperately wants to include it on the reading list, it should be clearly marked as "optional."
    - If a section of a reading is not relevant and will not be discussed in class, then that section should not be assigned.
    - Some instructors simply assume that the students don't do the reading and they take not doing all the reading as a kind of unspoken norm. The problem with unspoken norms of this kind is that they severely disadvantage non-typical college students. If a first-generation college student finds all the listed readings impossible, then she will often conclude that everyone else is doing all this reading and that she is simply not capable enough.
- Despite appearances, they know how to write grammatical sentences.
    - When students write papers full of ungrammatical sentences, it is tempting to think that they don't know how to write grammatical sentences. I have had many colleagues bemoan the fact that students lack understanding of basic English sentence structure. These colleagues are tempted to teach students how to diagram a sentence. This is a mistake. The students know how to write grammatical sentences.
    - We can see that they know how to write grammatical sentences by looking at the parts of their papers where they are not dealing with foreign words or concepts. For example, philosophy papers often include a few sentences laying out an example — e.g. "Consider the case of Tom. Tom is a doctor who must decide what to do with his patients who need organ transplants." In these cases, the writing is clear and grammatical. So they know how to write grammatical sentences.
    - What is happening is that when the students have to address ideas that they don't really understand, the grammar module of their brain that operates in the background gets scrambled or something. A similar problem arises when people use terms they don't understand. Students say "This counterargument includes the theory utilitarianism" for the same reason that my father says "text me a twitter email" He is an old man and he doesn't have facility with those words or concepts.
- Group work; it's not as good as you think
    - As a student I never liked group work. But everyone who gives advice about teaching says that group work is great and we should do lots of it. Is it any good? Why do they seem to think it is so great?
    - I think that there are major problems with doing in-class group work. First, it sucks up an enormous amount of class time with stuff that does not at all enhance the classroom experience (e.g., moving chairs, assigning groups, moving the chairs back into formation, etc.). Second, it often results in students not really working all that productively. Not only do many students end up talking about things having little to do with the material, but even when everyone is on topic, some groups always finish

first and then end up chatting, sitting silently, or scrolling on their phones while others finish up.

- Why, then, does everyone seem to think that group work is so amazing? I suspect that it is because it is a way of getting lots of students talking without having to actually lead a productive discussion. When students are working in groups the room is abuzz with activity — the opposite of an instructor-led lecture where they are sitting silently — and one feels that the students are *really getting involved*! I agree that often this is better than a straight lecture (although it is rarely better than a lecture that is actually well prepared and engaging). But what is far better than group work, is a full class discussion that is active and well-led, that gets most of the students involved, and that is focused and on-topic. I suggest, therefore, that one focus on learning how to lead a discussion of 20 or 30 students, rather than falling back on group work.

12. Workshop Evaluations and Concluding Remarks

(10 minutes)

➔ Meta-teaching Comment: "We are about to conclude the workshop by filling out evaluations. You will have to do similar evaluations at the end of the semester."

Explain the purpose of the evaluations. For today's purposes, the GSI Teaching & Resource Center uses the evaluations to improve the workshop, so feedback and constructive comments are important. Center staff read every evaluation and all comments are noted.

Ask for a volunteer participant to collect the evaluations and drop them off at the conference administration desk in DWINELLE HALL. The reason that a participant collects the evaluations is to make sure that the workshop leader does not tamper with them.

Thank them for their participation, patience, and attention. Encourage them to enjoy the rest of the conference.

Hand out evaluation forms & leave the room.

Discipline Cluster Workshop for Humanities

Handout

Friday, August 18, 2017

Workshop Leader:
Jeffrey Kaplan

American Studies; Art Practice; Asian Studies; Buddhist Studies; Classics; English; Film & Media Studies; History; History of Art; Information School; Media Studies; Music; Near Eastern Studies; Philosophy; Religious Studies; Rhetoric; South & Southeast Asian Studies; Theater, Dance, & Performance Studies

Questions

1. What do you do when a student comes to complain about a grade that they got? What is your goal for this meeting? Under what conditions, if any, do your change their grade?

2. What do you do when two or three of the smartest students are having a productive back-and-forth discussion on the topic but noone else is getting involved?

3. What do you do when a student expresses a relevant and interesting thought but expresses it very poorly?

4. What do you do when a student says something clearly mistaken or otherwise reveals that they misunderstand something?

5. What do you do when you are having a discussion, and there is a view that needs to be represented, but no students are taking that side in the discussion?

6. What do you do when a student dozes off in class?

7. What do you do on the first day of section if the primary instructor has not covered much material yet in lecture?

8. Should you grade papers anonymously? Why?

9. What do you do when it is obvious that most students in your section have not come prepared to class (e.g., not done the reading, not completed prerequisite tasks)? Specifically, how do you salvage the session? And how do you encourage students to read in the future?

10. What do you do when a student asks you a question and you do not know the answer?

11. Should you allow students to use electronic devices in section/class? Why?

12. What do you do if a student complains about the professor?

13. You are worried that one of your students might be in distress: their assignments have suddenly declined in quality, they are no longer participating in class discussions, and when they do speak with you, they are tearful and emotional. How do you respond?

    - Share your concerns with the Instructor of Record
    - Talk with the student during office hours and try to learn what is wrong by listening sensitively and carefully
    - Use the "Gold Folder" Protocol found here: https://uhs.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/ucb_goldfolder.pdf
    - After going through the "Gold Folder" protocol, request a consultation through Counseling and Psychological Services if appropriate.
    - After going through the "Gold Folder" protocol, submit a CARE report to the Students of Concern Committee if appropriate.
    - Check the Mental Health Handbook for guidance on how to approach the situation: https://uhs.berkeley.edu/counseling/prevention-education-outreach/mental-health-handbook