



Teaching Classes That Meet in Blocks

By Mary Clement, Berry College, GA
mclement@berry.edu

In order to meet the needs of today's students, colleges and universities are offering more courses in block time formats. These courses meet once a week for three hours, extended hours over fewer weeks, or on weekends. Typically, the students who take these courses are working full time, are interested in career advancement, and want classes that keep them engaged. As one student explained, "I want my degree, but I won't sit through boring classes to get it. I work all day and then come to class at night. I attend the first session, evaluate the instructor, and then decide if I will even take the class." How do we meet the needs of these students and maintain academic quality?

I have taught three-hour evening classes for graduate students in teacher education for the past 11 years. I'd like to share the four-part plan I've developed that keeps students engaged while providing a robust intellectual experience.

Get them in, get them focused—My first goal is to get students thinking about the class, not about their bad day at work or what their children are doing at home. When setting up the room before class starts, I post a list of everything we will be doing during the next three hours so that students know what we have to accomplish, and late arrivals or those who leave early know what they missed. I always post a tough thought question on the screen. Some of these questions end up on our exams, some review reading material, and all of them are important and guide the rest of the session. The students start

class by answering the question. They may write or think the answer, but either way, I begin with their answers.

Present/ lecture/explain new material—After the opening discussion, I present the new material for that session. Most weeks, my students are assigned two or three chapters or articles to read before class. I tell them to bring the readings; in class we "bring them to life." When I can, I project the author's picture on the screen or show a video clip of the author discussing his/her work. Many authors now have these clips on their websites.

After a video clip, I project my notes on the screen, stating that the class doesn't have to wonder what I wanted them to get out of the reading, as I will tell them. However, my notes are frequently questions or redirects back to the reading: "Go to the third paragraph on page 317, reread it, and explain the author's opinion in your own words." I also challenge students to question a writer's research or background: "Having read this seminal work by author X, list three critiques of his/her research." They often discuss their answers with a partner, which helps to break up the time. Some report on these exchanges in the whole-class discussion that follows, thereby giving me an opportunity to elaborate or add points they may have missed.

Apply the new material—Students need to thoroughly understand new material before they are asked to apply it. Generally, those applications occur in small groups. After having read about high school curricula, groups are asked to design a curricular change in their schools. They find directions and relevant

questions on the screen. Authentic tasks work best. If the groups are doing something members see themselves doing in the future, they tackle the exercises with a lot more enthusiasm. I don't grade this group work, but instead use it as a springboard for discussion and as a means to promote collegiality and brainstorming. An activity like this might occur just before students write a paper about the same or a related topic.

Review, conclude, and assess—To end class, I might do something like put up large posters around the room, each with the name of a theorist whom we have studied recently. I ask students to go to two of the boards and write down their most vivid memories of that theorist. They cannot repeat what others have written. As they write, I walk around the room and talk with them, providing individual attention and answering questions.

I may use a short reading that summa-

PAGE 7

In This Issue

Striving for Academic Excellence	2
Poorly Designed Group Work	3
20 Questions about Writing Assignments	4
Still More on Developing Reading Skills	5
Student Success Is in the Cards ... Or Is It?	6
Traffic Lights and Participation	7
Statement of Purpose Assignment	8
Announcing The McGraw-Hill and The Teaching Professor Scholarly Work on Teaching and Learning Award	8



**Editor**

Maryellen Weimer, Ph.D.
E-mail: grg@psu.edu

Magna Editor

Rob Kelly
robkelly@magnapubs.com

President

William Haight
whaight@magnapubs.com

Publisher

David Burns
dburns@magnapubs.com

Creative Services Manager

Mark Manghera

Art Director

Deb Lovelien

Customer Service Manager

Mark Beyer

For subscription information, contact:

Customer Service: 800-433-0499
E-mail: custserv@magnapubs.com
Website: www.magnapubs.com

Submissions to *The Teaching Professor* are welcome. When submitting, please keep these guidelines in mind:

- We are interested in a wide range of teaching-learning topics.
- We are interested in innovative strategies, techniques, and approaches that facilitate learning and in reflective analyses of educational issues of concern.
- Write with the understanding that your audience includes faculty in a wide variety of disciplines and in a number of different institutional settings; i.e., what you describe must be relevant to a significant proportion of our audience.
- Write directly to the audience, remembering that this is a newsLETTER.
- Keep the article short; generally between 2 and 3 double-spaced pages.
- If you'd like some initial feedback on a topic you're considering, you're welcome to share it electronically with the editor.

The Teaching Professor (ISSN 0892-2209) is published 10 times per year by Magna Publications Inc., 2718 Dryden Drive, Madison, WI 53704. Phone 800-433-0499 or 608-246-3590. Email: custserv@magnapubs.com. Fax: 608-246-3597. Website: www.magnapubs.com. One-year subscription: \$89 (Multiple print subscriptions and Group Online Subscriptions are available.) Photocopying or other reproduction in whole or in part without written permission is prohibited. POSTMASTER: Send change of address to *The Teaching Professor*, 2718 Dryden Drive, Madison, WI 53704. Copyright ©2008, Magna Publications Inc.

To order back issues (\$20 each) or for more information about multiple print subscription discounts and Group Online Subscriptions, call Customer Service at 800-433-0499.

Authorization to photocopy items for internal or personal use of specific clients is granted by *The Teaching Professor* for users registered with the Copyright Clearance Center (CCC) Transactional Reporting Service, provided that \$1.00 per page is paid directly to CCC, 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA 01923; Phone 978-750-8400; www.copyright.com. For those organizations that have been granted a photocopy license by CCC, a separate system of payment has been arranged.

Striving for Academic Excellence

By *Keith Starcher*,
Indiana Wesleyan University
keith.starcher@indwes.edu

Like all academics, I worry about standards and whether mine have slipped. Actually, I worry more about my students and the number of them who no longer see academic excellence as a goal worth pursuing. Many more seem to feel, as one student told me recently, "If I work hard, I deserve an A."

I wondered if there was a way I could use the first class session to help my students and myself recalibrate our "excellence meters." Could I motivate them in a fun and engaging way to see excellence the way Rick Pitino, head basketball coach at the University of Louisville, sees excellence? "Excellence is the unlimited ability to improve the quality of what you have to offer," Pitino says.

Last semester I decided to try, and I used an activity pretty much outside the box for me. After the normal introductions in each of my courses, but before I even mentioned the syllabus, I asked for five volunteers to help in a group activity. Five students (the competitors) came forward. They were joined by 12 others: two cheerleaders per competitor, plus a line judge and a measurement judge.

I explained that we were going to participate in a standing broad-jump competition. After marking the starting position with a strip of masking tape, I told the competitors to prepare by consulting their cheerleaders for encouragement and discussing strategy. Some students took off their shoes, while others stretched. Then the competition began. Each student jumped with gusto and waited nervously as the distance jumped was marked and measured. Sports competition does amazing things to people. These students, strangers only 15 minutes before, now behaved like starstruck sports fans.

I looked at the patches of tape that marked each jump. But instead of announcing the obvious winner, I said, "Although some competitors jumped far-

ther than others, I believe that each one really did try to jump the farthest. No competitor demonstrated a lack of great effort. Thus, we will award a gold medal to each of them. What do you say?"

Students did not like this idea. In each class there had been one competitor who clearly outperformed the others by at least a foot. This led to a fruitful discussion about how excellence is defined in sports and whether excellence in the sports arena should carry over to the classroom. We talked about the importance of striving to produce excellent work rather than just excellent effort.

In each class, I let the students convince me that we had but one standing broad-jump gold medalist in our midst. After a rousing round of congratulations, we began discussing the upcoming assignments and assessments laid out in the syllabus. For each assignment, I referred students to the blackboard, on which I had placed examples of "good work." I then encouraged them to consider what it would take to go beyond "good" results and produce "excellent" results.

We closed the class with a discussion about their willingness to trust me to fairly and objectively evaluate their work. Would they agree that, since I had seen the results of hundreds of students' labor (e.g., written business plans), I should be capable of recognizing excellent work when I see it? Would they trust my feedback, even when that feedback was constructively critical?

I believe that this first-day broad-jump competition set the tone for subsequent discussions of academic excellence. A few students even encouraged me to uphold high standards and push them to higher levels of performance. One comment from a student on a final exam illustrates what I hope all my students will come to understand: "I learned that I should settle for no less than excellence. Although there are times my work might not be excellent, I should always try to produce excellence."

Poorly Designed Group Work

A student posted a rant about group work on my blog (<http://teachingprofessor.blogspot.com>). If you haven't joined the blog, please feel welcome to. It's free and, with the subscriber base growing, the posts are generating some interesting commentary). What the student says in the rant is not surprising. Most of us already know this—a lot of students really hate group work. Some of that is because not all learners find the group setting conducive to learning. But some is the result of poorly designed group activities and projects. Here are some common design flaws that compromise group functioning and thereby the learning potential of those in the group.

No individual accountability—The idea of individual accountability comes from work on cooperative learning that takes a strong position against group grades. Cooperative learning advocates believe that the group supports individual efforts and that assessments should be based on individual work. Many faculty find a place between grading based on the group product as a whole and grading based on individual contributions. The absence of individual accountability encourages students to free ride. Because peer acceptance is still very important to younger students, groups are often reluctant to take individual members to task. The rest of the group takes up the slack, but when individual members have to do that, it generates a lot of hostility toward the group process.

Divide and conquer tasks—When students don't know each other well, aren't used to working in groups, and think they don't like groups, they look for ways not to have to work as a group. They can avoid spending time together if the task can be divided into equal parts and assigned individually. Tasks that involve preparation of a report with specified sections or a presentation in which everybody has to speak lend themselves to this divide-and-conquer approach. When students don't work

together, the group never gains an identity and members feel no responsibility toward the group. This makes it easier for individuals to let the group down, and groups that haven't gelled have fewer mechanisms for dealing with members who fail to deliver or perform. Tasks need to be designed so that they are difficult to divide and reassemble without time spent working on them as a group.

Inauthentic tasks—Some tasks don't generate much enthusiasm in learners. This is not to say that all learning must be fun, but if a teacher wants a group to really sink its teeth into a task, that will happen more regularly when some authenticity surrounds the task. For example, groups can be assigned to generate a collection of interview questions, but if the task also includes the opportunity to use those questions—say, by interviewing potential candidates (even though those may be fellow classmates) and making a decision about who they would hire—that task feels more real. If groups do projects, such as conducting a survey or designing a marketing campaign for real organizations, or if they design a study or experiment that they then conduct, those tasks can generate lots of enthusiasm and effort.

Powerless groups—Students need to be equipped with the knowledge and power to make their groups work. They may not always use what they know or have, but groups (especially groups of college students) frequently fail when they feel that individual members can sabotage group efforts. Groups need to understand the power of norms and how they can collectively put a lot of pressure on individual members. Beyond that, groups should have legitimate power they can exert if the need arises. That power may derive from teacher feedback on the contributions of others and the knowledge that those assessments count. It may be provided by mechanisms that allow groups to sanction members, even to the point of “firing” them or voting them out of the group.

Obviously, instructors need to oversee these processes, but the lessons learned when groups fix their own problems are much more powerful than those learned when the instructor intervenes and fixes problems for the group.

Lack of task clarity—If the task isn't clear, groups can waste enormous amounts of energy arguing about what they are supposed to be doing. Sometimes tasks don't seem clear to students because teachers try to give students choices or want groups to define the task in ways that make sense to the group. Those goals for groups may be legitimate, but communication about what students should be deciding ought to be explicit. Moreover, teachers should recognize that when a group hasn't worked together very long or when students don't have a lot of experience working in a group, that kind of peer decision making can be very challenging. In the beginning, it is probably better to err on the side of clarity and explicitness so that students can accomplish the task and then build on that successful experience.

Many of the problems students experience in groups are replicated when groups are used in professional settings. Are faculty committees always exemplars of productive small-group dynamics? College classrooms can provide students with the opportunity to learn how to function effectively in groups. Students will learn positive lessons if the tasks they are assigned are well designed. 🍀

20 Questions about Writing Assignments

By E. Shelley Reid, George Mason University, VA – ereid@gmu.edu

At the end of English composition, I ask students how what they've just learned in my class might be useful in their other classes. They're often bemused and surprised to learn that professors in other courses care about their writing. To encourage them to take responsibility for succeeding in their future writing assignments, I hand out a list of 20 questions that they might ask to better understand "what the professor wants," and thus continue to apply what we've been practicing.

I'm sharing this list in the hopes that it will help you help students transfer good writing skills from English composition to your class. By answering these questions about your own writing assignments, you may cue students to write better by building on some learning principles common to first-year composition classes.

Questions students could ask a professor about getting started with a writing assignment:

1. If I have my own idea for a *topic or angle* that's interesting to me, can I use it, or do I need to complete the assignment exactly the way it is described?
2. Is there an *assignment model*, a sample essay, or a kind of published writing that I could look at to help me better see how to do this assignment?
3. If I write an *essay draft* early, can I come see you to talk about it or email you to ask a few questions?

Questions about the assignment's main purpose:

4. Why do people in this field write or read a text like this? What's the *main goal* for this kind of writing?
5. Should I mostly *review* the similarities, differences, events, theories, or key features? Or should I *make arguments*, draw conclusions, or give my interpretations about these ideas? Do I need to answer the question "So what?"

6. Should I broadly *survey* the field or issue, or should I narrow my focus and "go deep" with my analysis?

Questions about the assignment's target audience:

7. Should I write for a *knowledgeable audience* that has read what I have read or do I need to give additional background or summary?
8. Should I try to write for a *resistant audience* that will need a lot of evidence or should I write for an audience that generally agrees with my point? Should I address and refute counterarguments?
9. What kind of *evidence* will be most convincing in this field (or to this audience): numbers, descriptions, direct quotations, logical reasoning, examples, case studies, expert testimony?
10. Will I need to consult *outside sources*, and if I do, what kinds of sources are appropriate for this field, audience, or genre?

Questions about style and format that differ among disciplines:

11. Is it preferred that I use the *scholarly language or format* of this discipline or genre or should I use standard paragraphs and plain, direct language accessible to a range of readers?
12. Are lively, graceful introductions and extended *paragraphs* expected by readers in this field (or for this assignment) or will short, informative paragraphs be sufficient?
13. Is it important to readers in this field that I write smooth, *stylistic sentences* or is a straightforward "just the facts, ma'am" style enough?
14. What *citation format* should I use for outside sources?

Questions about style and format that differ based on the assignment, context, or professorial preference:

15. Is it okay to use *first person* ("I") or *second person* ("you")? Is it okay to use specific, relevant examples from my own life or experiences?

16. Should I try to avoid *passive voice*? Does it matter whether I use present tense or past tense verbs?
17. Is the *page-length* specification an absolute requirement or is it more of a guide to how much information I should plan to include in order to satisfy the audience's needs?
18. Can I include relevant *visual or other nontext information* or should I include only text?

Questions to gauge individual professors' goals and concerns:

19. What is the *most difficult part* of this assignment? What are the most common mistakes students make with this assignment?
20. What is the *most important aspect* of this assignment? What should I spend most of my time and energy on as I write and edit?

One final, crucial thing you can do that will help students draw on what they've learned in classes like mine is to get them working on the assignment before it's due. Require them to write *something*—a proposal, a thesis statement, an introductory paragraph, a rant, an outline, a bibliography—at least a week or two before the due date. Even if you provide no in-depth feedback at that point, you've indicated that you know the fundamental principle of good writing in English courses and beyond: it requires good revising, and thus takes more time and attention than we initially think.

If you'd like to duplicate this set of questions and share them with your students, you're welcome to do so. This way we work together to send the message that the good writing skills learned in English apply in every course.

Editor's note: The author's permission covers copying for individual use. Republication of the questions requires permission of the copyright holder. ♥

Still More on Developing Reading Skills

If you regularly read this newsletter, you will know that in recent issues we've published a number of articles on students and college-level reading skills—more specifically, how we get students to devote the time and energy required to read college-level materials. Here's more on the topic from an excellent article that does a particularly good job of framing the issues. It also offers an assignment that develops reading skills (and some evidence that it works).

Start with the problem:

When given an assignment, some students feel they have met their obligation if they have forced their eyes to 'touch' (in appropriate sequence) each word on the pages assigned. How can we entice students to read the material we assign, and how do we help them develop strategies for deep comprehension and retention of the material? Are there subtle ways we can prod them to read and help them develop literary skills—without spending our own precious time explicitly teaching 'reading?' (p. 125-126)

The problem originates in high school or sometimes even before that, when students are encouraged to read for factual information that can then be regurgitated. They develop "surface learning" strategies that do not lend themselves to college-level reading, which requires engagement and analysis. "A good reader forms visual images to represent the content being read, connects to emotions, recalls settings and events that are similar to those presented in the reading, predicts what will happen next, asks questions, and thinks about the use of language." (p. 126)

Generally, these skills are not explicitly taught at any level of education. Sophisticated learners (like faculty) discover them through a trial-and-error process, but most students in college courses today are not developing these reading comprehension skills. The article

attributes the problem to a confluence of factors, including the anti-intellectualism that pervades our culture. "The important point here is that it is unproductive to blame either students or public schools ... We in academia have done our share to contribute to this stress on getting the best grade with the least understanding of the larger meaning." (p. 129)

The authors are especially critical of quizzes over assigned readings. "They encourage surface learning based on episodic memory—short-term memorization for a day or two—rather than deep learning that is transformative of one's perspective and involves long-term comprehension." (p. 127)

If quizzes aren't the answer, then how do instructors "make reading experiences meaningful so that students will want to learn via the written word and will develop an appreciation for the various strategies good readers utilize?" (p. 127)

The authors have developed an assignment that certainly appears to move students in the right direction. Students complete reading responses for each reading assignment. Actually, there are 29 dates when reading responses are due; students are required to submit 25 of them so that if they have an emergency or a lot of work due in other classes, they can opt not to complete a reading response. Reading responses may take one of five forms and students are encouraged to try a variety of these options.

- **Connecting to the text**—This involves underlining key ideas and making marks and comments in the margins. Students then go back through the reading and write five "big" questions on key concepts in the chapter. They answer two of those questions or write a commentary on why they think these are the core issues in the reading.
- **Summarizing the readings and visualizing the key ideas**—Students make a visual or graphic organizer for content in the reading. (There are several examples in the article's appendices.) They

can also make a chart or several lists that organize and categorize ideas.

- **Reading response journal**—Here each portion of the reading assignment is responded to with a question or comment.
- **Studying as a group**—Two or three students can convene as a study group. They discuss the readings, focusing on key concepts. Ideas are recorded and then written up.
- **Create a song or a rap**—Students create a song or rap about the assignment, which they then record and submit.

The instructors use a simple grading scheme for the assignment. Minimal efforts garner three points, solid summaries and connections are worth four points, and extraordinary responses merit five points. In the beginning, they provide students with feedback designed to help them improve. Subsequently, students get the score only.

Seventy-eight percent of the students reported that they read 75 percent or more of the assignments. Students also saw a definite connection between having done the readings and being able to participate at a higher level in class. Sixty-eight percent indicated that by doing the responses they did learn something about themselves as readers.

The authors note in their conclusion that if faculty want students to read deeply, they must work to develop assignments that encourage students to make sense of what they read. Because students use different methods to gain understanding, it makes sense to give them different options.

Reference: Roberts, J. C., and Roberts, K. A. (2008). Deep reading, cost/benefit, and the construction of meaning: Enhancing reading comprehension and deep learning in sociology courses. *Teaching Sociology* 36, 125-140. 🍓

Student Success Is in the Cards ... Or Is It?

By Karen Lightstone, Saint Mary's University, Halifax, Nova Scotia
karen.lightstone@smu.ca

I set out this academic year to try and make introductory managerial accounting a more effective learning experience for students. The course is typically taken in a student's first or second year. The range of experiences students bring to the course can be quite diverse. Some may have never been employed, still live at home, and have parents who work in white-collar jobs. Others may have worked and lived on their own, and have family who may own or run a store or work in factories. This diversity means that some students have no mental picture of how goods are manufactured, while others understand the process required to get a product to the customer.

Familiarizing students with basic terms such as "fixed" and "variable costs," or "product" and "period costs," can be challenging. The textbook my institution uses is well organized. It starts with the basics and eventually progresses to the complex process of making business decisions. However, my students work on learning the material chapter by chapter. When they must analyze in-depth questions, they have difficulty knowing which tools to use and why, even though these tools have already been covered in the text. To help with this problem, this year I recommended that students prepare a reference sheet containing the concepts, how to use them, and what information they revealed. Not a single student took my advice.

I needed a way to help students take the concepts out of the chapters so that they could be applied to subsequent material. I attended a leadership workshop at the 2007 Canadian Academic Accounting Association Conference. The workshop leader passed out index cards and asked participants to write ideas on the cards. She explained that in a class setting she would collect the cards and use them to see where her students were weak and strong, so that she could tailor her next

class to their level of understanding.

I adapted this approach. For each new concept the students get a card, I write the basic concept on the board and how it behaves or what it is, and then I provide an example. For instance, for break-even analysis, the students write down the formulas, how to calculate the individual components of the formula, how to achieve the sales dollars given the units and vice versa, and what "break even" means. Students keep these cards; they may refer to them when I offer illustrations from the chapter and use them for study outside of class.

Students end up with eight to 10 cards by the end of the course. The cards divorce the ideas from the individual chapters and thereby enable students to apply the concepts to more complex business decisions. For example, when deciding if the company should discontinue a seemingly unprofitable segment, students can look at the cards from the early chapters in which basic concepts like fixed costs are defined and explained, and use this knowledge to decide which costs should be considered in making this particular decision.

I'm enjoying teaching the course more because during the later half of the course, the students' knowledge is much stronger. They analyze the choices involved in a particular business decision faster and they start to ask questions about issues beyond the basic course content. This tells me they comprehend the decision and are beginning to see it in a larger context.

Are my students' grades higher? Do I have fewer students failing the course? The first time I tried the approach, grades in the course pretty much stayed the same. However, fewer students failed the course. Normally that percentage ran between 10 and 12. When I used the index cards, only two of the 55 students enrolled in the course failed. The second time, my class average grade rose to an incredible 82 percent and no one failed the course.

Am I doing too much to help them

learn? Was the last class just more intelligent than previous ones? I'll have to do further research to answer that question definitively, but for the time being I'm going to carry on. Any technique that helps students apply concepts beyond the chapter in which they're presented seems like an approach worth continuing. ♥

McGraw-Hill
FROM PAGE 8

We also hope that the author (or authors, if the article has multiple) will be able to participate in some discussion of the work, both online and at the conference.

The reward and recognition of teaching has been an issue for years. We are delighted that we can make a small but significant contribution to remedy that omission. We invite your participation. We'll keep you posted of deadlines and submission details on *The Teaching Professor* website (www.teachingprofessor.com/award), in the newsletter, and on *The Teaching Professor* blog. In the meantime, keep your eyes open for good articles, and submit any and all for this award consideration. For years, faculty have been sharing their experience, expertise, insight, and understanding of the classroom. Generally, they have done so without reward or recognition. Here's a chance to showcase this valuable and viable form of scholarship. ♥

Traffic Lights and Participation

Virtually all of us who work to promote interaction and dialogue in the classroom are interested in strategies that help us facilitate these exchanges. Here's an intriguing set.

Reginald Litz, who teaches business administration courses, positions participation within a set of related activities. First off, students read a case study (the focus of discussion in class) and several supplementary readings. Before class, they write a one-page essay in which they answer one of three study questions about the readings. These essays must be submitted at least 90 minutes before class begins. During those 90 minutes, Litz reviews those essays, looking for insightful and provocative comments that he then uses to start and stimulate discussion in class. Unless the author writes "do not quote," Litz is free to use material from these essays. He acknowledges the author by name unless the student requests on the essay that his or her name not be mentioned.

Before the discussion starts in class, Litz has students convene in groups to share their initial reactions to the case. This helps students "warm up" for the whole class discussion. Litz uses a unique system to let students control how they participate in the class discussion. At the beginning of the course, he gives each student three name cards: one red, one yellow,

and one green. Students write their names on all three. In any given class session, students select one of the three colors. If they put up the red card, that indicates that they do not wish to be called on. A yellow card means they are willing to contribute but they do not welcome in-depth interrogation by the instructor. Green cards invite "unrestricted in-depth interrogation by the instructor." (p. 368) There are grade implications that accompany each color choice: two points for green cards, one point for yellow, and no points for red. Class begins with Litz quoting from one of the student essays and asking the author to elaborate further on that quote. Others are then invited to join the discussion.

Finally, in this system students prepare a single-page, post-class essay in which they reflect on the class discussion. These essays encourage students (even those not actively participating) to listen to the discussion of the case. Like the other essays, these are due 90 minutes before the next class session, and Litz may read well-written ones at the beginning of the next class.

The obvious liability with a system like this is the work involved in reviewing and grading all the essays. Litz makes this manageable in two ways. First, he uses a pass/fail system on the essays. If the effort is superficial, the student fails. Second, students complete no more than one pre-

or post-essay per week. Keeping track of who is responding with what color card also makes more work. Litz expedites this process by soliciting a student volunteer who records the color selected and number of contributions on a seating chart. He also involves students in a determination of the extent of their participation at the end of the course.

For Litz, the goal of these techniques is to "create as positive a learning experience as possible. To that end, I seek to encourage students to reflect upon the material studied and then contribute to the class discussion when *they* feel ready." (p. 372)

Reference: Litz, R. A. (2003). Red light, green light and other ideas for class participation-intensive courses: Method and implications for business ethics education. *Teaching Business Ethics*, 7 (4), 365-378. 🍀

MEET IN BLOCKS

FROM PAGE 1

rizes, adds to, or is related to the lecture. Students read this handout and then tell me why I chose that reading for my conclusion. I am most pleased when a student observes, "This says it all. Why didn't we start here?" My response is, "You wouldn't have known that if we hadn't studied it all during the last three hours!"

A few other keys to success. . .

1. Explain when the breaks are—and you must have breaks!
2. Students need drinks and food. Since I do not teach in a lab, I encourage students to bring drinks, snacks, and even a lunch that they can eat during the break and finish as we are working.
3. Start and end on time. I find it helps to keep the list of what we must accomplish visible throughout the session. Students can see how much we've done and what still remains.

4. Spend time letting students get acquainted during the first couple of classes. Building the class community will help throughout the semester.
5. Walk to the back of the room before class starts and see if you can easily read whatever you have posted.
6. There is no such thing as being over-prepared. My four-step plan takes time to prepare, but it benefits students in ways that make it worth the effort. 🍀

Statement of Purpose Assignment

Do you challenge students to think about why they're taking a course? Most faculty are discouraged by the very common "because it's required" response. Equally discouraging is what students hope to get out of a course. Sometimes they seem perplexed by the question! The answer is so obvious—they want an A.

Bob Trudeau, a faculty member in political science at Providence College in Rhode Island, has developed an intriguing assignment that gets students beyond those easy answers. It's an assignment that encourages students to think and write about why they are in a course. Here's how his syllabus sets them up for the assignment:

Education is about personal change, or should be. This suggests that it is important to know where you are, where you hope to go, and how your education can fit into those larger plans. The value of one's education depends on conscious and reflective participation in the process. To put that differently, although you will get something out of the course even if you don't think much about why you're taking up a seat, the experience

will be much more valuable for you if you reflect consciously on your educational goals and objectives and on ways this course can help you.

Students post their statements of purpose to a discussion forum, but these statements are a private communication between the student and the instructor. The statements include discussion of overall educational and professional plans—to the extent students know them—how this course might fit into those plans; educational strengths and weaknesses, and how they might impact performance in this particular course; and, based on all of that, what the student hopes to get out of the course.

Trudeau does grade the assignment, but very loosely. He's moved to a pass/fail system because the content is personal, which makes it hard to assess. However, he creates a "cost" if students fail to complete the assignment or dash off something just before the deadline. Here's the description from his syllabus:

If you pass, great. If you fail—difficult, but possible—you lose five points on the participation grade for

the first half of the semester. Not doing the assignment will cost you a full letter grade on the participation grade for the first half of the semester.

When the students are freshmen, Trudeau combines the statement of purpose assignment with another one called "Visit BT" (Bob Trudeau). Students must find and visit Trudeau during office hours. He wants students to "get actively involved in the out of class/face-to-face part of college." When students arrive for these visits, Trudeau mentions their statement of purpose. He may ask a follow-up question or make a comment about its contents.

Trudeau's approach sounds like a great way to launch a course, as well as a great way to make students more responsible for what they take away from the course. One student's testimony verifies these positive impacts: "I think all professors should start off their class with a similar assignment because it lets students know that this is not a lecture class that you can zone out in, but rather one that requires active mental participation and original thought." ♥

Announcing The McGraw-Hill and The Teaching Professor Scholarly Work on Teaching and Learning Award

We are pleased to announce that McGraw-Hill has joined *The Teaching Professor* to create an award for scholarly work on teaching and learning. An announcement about this new award was made at the 2008 *Teaching Professor* Conference in Orlando, Fla., and the first award will be given at the 2009 conference in Washington, D.C. Some details and specifics are still in the planning stages, but here's some general information.

The award will recognize an outstanding piece of scholarly writing on teaching and learning with a \$1,000 stipend provided by McGraw-Hill. To be considered, an

article must contain at least 1,500 words and have been published after 2006. The article may address any topic related to college-level teaching and learning, and it may be any type of article, including research studies (qualitative or quantitative); articles that report on development and implementation of a new teaching strategy, assignment, or approach; articles that offer advice on how to handle various aspects of instruction; work that integrates and applies research; inspirational essays; or articles that make a case for or against some instructional issue or practice. Articles may be nominated by others or by

the authors themselves.

A panel of experts—including authors, editors, and faculty familiar with the pedagogical literature—will review submissions and select the article with the greatest potential to impact instructional practice. Other criteria will also be used in a blind review process. Articles will be posted at this Web address: www.teachingprofessor.com/award.

We hope to be able to widely disseminate the winning article at future Teaching Professor conferences at other conferences.