CENTER FOR EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING AND LEARNING (CETL)

CETL TIPS: The Active Lecture

In everyday communication, listening takes up half of our time–in and outside of the classroom (Newton, 1990). Lecturing can be a very effective means of providing a lot of information to students in a relatively short time period. By incorporating active learning and learn through inquiry principles into a lecture, students will likely leave a lecture even more informed, and with a greater comprehension for the content of the course and skills needed to succeed within the field. This month, we are offering tips on:

The Active Lecture

Structure

Prep time: a good lecture takes a while to craft. Allow time before the class to create a new lecture, or review past lecture notes–as well as noting what worked and didn't after giving a lecture.

Use the board: we all need time to process information. Take time to write important concepts and definitions on the board. This gives students time to reflect on the material, and to make sure their notes are in order.

Arrange lecture for ease of note review: include headings and important concepts in your lecture and on the board. Students often are unsure of what material is important and how to arrange their notes. This could be remedied by giving them a copy of what good notes look like during the first class (either dummy notes, or sample notes from a previous student).

Give breaks: the average attention span for listening is about 10-15 minutes. One way to provide breaks is by periodically having students take a few minutes to work with material in a meaningful way–either by writing or discussing the material with a partner. Another option is to split the class time (not the people) up into thirds or quarters, and have some sections more interactive and other more informative.

Skills and Content

A well-designed lecture encourages students to: Develop strategies needed to learn material outside of class Participate in inquiry-based group projects Teach themselves how to learn

These skills can be achieved by allowing opportunities to maximize understanding and retention. For example:

Headlines: offer students keywords, verbal subheadings, or memory aids related to specific material. Better yet, have them generate these aids together.

Examples and analogies: relate the material to real life, and have students generate examples of how concepts relate to their own lives.

Technology

Videos: use videos to engage students in the material, then have them work in groups to answer a few key discussion questions.

Build interest: lead a lecture off with a story or interesting visual. You can use an overhead to present an initial case problem or test question that you prepare to motivate them to listen.

Real-time Feedback

Real-time feedback offers tools for engagement and testing comprehension. Some examples:

Mazur's (1997) peer instruction: give students a break from the lecture to think about the material and learn from each other. For example, students may be asked to convince a partner of a particular concept, which helps them think about the material reflectively and put those thoughts into words. Another example is to provide a ConcepTest, short conceptual questions on the topic of discussion. Students are given time to come up with an answer, and then asked to discuss the answers with each other.

Involve students in lecture: offer short illuminating exercises that require students to apply concepts covered in the lecture.

Reinforce the lecture: use an application problem or have students review the lecture.

Think-pair-share: pose a probing question that cannot be answered based on rote memorization, or even in only one way. Students are given 30 seconds-1 minute to think of an answer, then pair with another student to discuss their responses, and then students are invited to share their responses with the class.

Lectures can be demanding and capture the attention of students if they are prepared, and allow for students to digest the material.

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