

Welcome to Drexel University! The Drexel Center for Academic Excellence has prepared this guide to assist you in getting ready for the start of Fall Quarter. We hope that this guide will be useful for those who may have taught elsewhere or at Drexel as well as for those new to teaching.

**The Drexel Culture:****Quarter Terms:**

Drexel University is a unique institution for faculty and students. It is important to look at some of the core elements of that uniqueness in terms of the impacts they have on both teaching and learning and in some cases on family arrangements.

We are one of the few universities that use a Quarter system. That means that our calendar is different from those colleges and universities that are on either semesters or trimesters. There are certainly advantages to having time to travel in September when students and faculty elsewhere are back in the classroom. However, this also means that our academic calendar does not follow the patterns that those of you with children find corresponds to their vacations. This may also be true if you have spouses or partners with different academic calendars as well.

In terms of teaching, it is vital to plan course content and assignments within the quarter time frame. With the occasional exception, most of the quarters are 10 weeks plus an additional examination week. The majority of textbooks are designed for a longer term. When choosing books for your courses, you may find that you have to either eliminate some that appeal to you or be prepared to not assign all of the chapters. Please keep in mind that the majority of full-time Drexel students take 18-20 credits a quarter. For the typical 3 credit course, that means that the average student may have 6 to 7 courses per quarter. Mixing in 2 credit courses can raise that number just as taking some 4 credit courses may reduce it.

**STUDENTS WANT TO DO WELL.** So as you prepare your assignments, please factor in the heavy course load. For example, if every course a student is taking has a major project or paper due in the last week of classes, even well organized students are likely to find that it is hard to get them all completed with equal care. This is the point when some students seek incompletes. If you don't want to have work carrying over to later quarters, from their perspective and yours, having some papers due earlier may help.

From a faculty perspective, you may find it useful to create course timelines for every course you teach so that you don't have all your examinations or projects due in the same week. It is very difficult to give students the feedback they need when you are overwhelmed with reading their assignments. Some alternatives like group projects or oral presentations may be helpful but have their own teaching learning issues. Complicating this planning is the fact that Drexel students have until the end of the sixth

week to drop a class. Thus, it is expected that they will have enough graded items and feedback on their performance to make their decision in an informed way. If you wait to give them midterms in the fifth week, you will be doing major grading and are likely to feel pressured.

More importantly, you need to think about ways of giving assignments much earlier in the quarter that will assist students in understanding their strengths and weaknesses so that they and you can improve their learning. Even students who are passing may not have enough time to improve their work when the first graded assignment comes back to them in the sixth week. It will also make it difficult for you to teach later sections if you discover in the sixth week that material covered in earlier weeks was not well understood by some students.

### **CoOp and the Professional Orientation of Students:**

The CoOp program is why many students select Drexel University. It provides potentially wonderful opportunities to explore real work in the career areas they have chosen and can give them useful employment experience before graduation.

However, how might CoOp effect the teaching situation? If you are teaching courses primarily to majors, you should take advantage of linking what you are doing in the classroom or laboratory with what their work experiences may or have been. Asking them to give examples that make these connections is a good technique. If you are teaching courses to non-majors from a variety of disciplines, these connections may be more difficult. But anything you can do to indicate how the subject(s) you are teaching can help them succeed in the work world may increase their motivation to work hard in your course. That professional orientation held by so many Drexel students may mean that they work hardest when they see their future professional success enhanced by what they learn. You may want to contact the CoOp Office for examples of how your subject matter actually is useful in the work world.

In planning courses and in teaching, CoOp may also mean that students are away from campus for a substantial period of time. Six months in the work world may mean that when they return to classes they may have forgotten certain facts or skills they haven't been using. This is less likely in their majors but in non-major sequence courses, it is important to not make assumptions about the retention of previous learning. If you don't want to use class time to assess this, you may want to capitalize on the fact that most Drexel students are technologically sophisticated and put up an on-line review and/or quiz of prior knowledge. At the very least, it will let you know what information to ask them to review.

### **Preliminaries—Getting Ready:**

There are a variety of issues that should be dealt with before classes start. These include familiarizing yourself with departmental procedures regarding book ordering, office hours, departmental and faculty websites, attendance at departmental meetings and what

items need to be kept on file in the department office. It is also wise to learn who the people who staff and run the department office are and what you can expect from them in terms of assistance and what processes you are expected to follow in requesting that assistance.

You also need to check any college or school guidelines, which may augment the departmental ones. Most importantly, you should access the Provost's Office website at [www.drexel.edu/provost/](http://www.drexel.edu/provost/) for Academic Policies and Processes and for regulations about final examinations, adding and dropping classes, faculty development opportunities, the academic calendar and other important academic information regarding grades. This website provides useful links to other areas. It is helpful to note the links at the end of this guide and learn the policies about disabilities, academic integrity, sexual harassment, conflict of interest, etc. The link to Drexel One helps you navigate the information on your courses, their enrollment, your students' information and will be where you assign your final grades

Once you have done this, you should pay particular attention to those resources that can enhance your teaching. IRT's website has a link to enable you to obtain class lists with photographs of your students. These can be very helpful in getting names and faces of students together as you take attendance. While you will want to have a copy for each class for the first day, students can add your course through the end of the second week of the term provided the class is not full, Thus you will want to print another copy after the end of the add period. Students who wish to add a closed class need to follow a process, which involved their advisor and your department. You should refer students who want your signature to add a closed class that this process exists and that they need to adhere to it. IRT also sponsors a number of workshops for faculty during the academic year that are helpful in maintaining the technological proficiency Drexel students have and expect of their professors.

The library at Drexel is an important resource for students and faculty. You should become familiar with its resources and its staff. It is advisable to walk through the library so that you know what is available and where.

If you have ordered books through the Drexel Bookstore, you may wish to check on their arrival and location before classes start. Please keep in mind that there are deadlines for book ordering which your department should send you. If you order books late, they may not be there when classes start and this can greatly complicate your students' learning and your ability to keep your assignment dates.

Finally, it is often beneficial to visit your assigned classrooms to see what the seating arrangements are and whether they are consistent with your style of teaching. Most classrooms are outfitted either with technological aids or in proximity to a location, which houses these aids. As soon as possible, you should notify the appropriate person in your department who places classroom requests of any special needs that are vital to your teaching. For example, if you intend to teach a course where students are expected to engage each other in discussions, you will want to have a seating structure that is flexible.

While not all requests can be made, those that come in early and are noted by your department as important to the conduct of the course will be likely to get some priority.

If you need assistance with audio-visuals and/or graphics, you can contact Instructional Media Services at [www.drexel.edu/ims/](http://www.drexel.edu/ims/). They can assist faculty with this and it is helpful for them to know what type of needs your students may have for borrowing and using equipment as well.

### **The Syllabus:**

This preliminary is so important that it requires a separate section. The first thing you need to do is to go to the following website, [www.drexel.edu/provost/course\\_syllabi.pdf](http://www.drexel.edu/provost/course_syllabi.pdf) and print out a copy of the syllabus guidelines available in either PDF or text versions. These guidelines are the starting place for all your syllabi. Please keep in mind that your syllabus is seen by students as a road map to what you expect of them and what they can expect of you. You need to be very clear about all of this and provide details where appropriate. This is the place to establish your attendance, lateness and other policies. It is also where you should think carefully about and explain your grading policy; this is especially vital with the new plus-minus grades. Just indicating how a number translates to a B+ rather than an A- is not as helpful to students as learning the basis for your evaluation of all graded assignments.

If you provide handouts, show films, or other audio visual materials, require field trips, the syllabus is one place where you may wish to indicate how these requirements fit into the overall context of the course content. It is wiser not to assume that students will just “figure it out.” For example if you use films you may want to give tips on what to look for in a film, whether to take notes during it, or do a summary shortly after. Students will also want to know whether material from the films will be on the exams, require a short paper, etc.

Even if you add the proviso that you can change assignments and dates when items are due, please recognize that your students are planning for all their courses so major changes at the last minute will make it more difficult even for the most organized and motivated students to perform as well as they expect. In that case, it is likely that they could complain to your department head. Many departments and faculty post their syllabi on line in advance of the start of each quarter. While some students will have read these, others will not. In a later section, we will be talking about the important First day of Class and reviewing key elements is a part of that day. You may wish to bring hard copies of your syllabi with you or use power point, overheads or another visual technique so that you can do this review. It is also important for you to remember that some students may add your course in the first two weeks, possibly at the very end of the drop-add period. They will need a reference to help them “Catch Up.” (for sample syllabi please make sure to click on the “Syllabi Guidelines” section.)

## **Instructional Philosophy and Methodology:**

This is another preliminary activity that should probably be done well in advance of the start of classes. It involves you in really thinking about your perspectives on teaching and learning, how these can be most effectively used in your discipline and especially how you can adapt them to specific courses and to the learning of a diverse group of students. In addition, while there may be some consistent elements that exist in all the courses you teach, there may also be some variations linked to the level of the course, course content, course level, size of class, that will lead to differences both in instructional design and delivery.

In thinking about and developing, a philosophy of teaching tied to promoting student learning you will be preparing what we can call teaching strategies. This will help you move from the general to the particular and facilitate the establishment of specific goals and objectives for each course you teach. If you spend time developing clear learning objectives and communication modalities, it will be much easier to prepare assignments that are designed to measure the successful acquisition by your students of the goals and objectives of each course. This is possible whether you are teaching a highly specialized upper level course or a section of an introductory course. What you cover and how well students learn it can be successful with a number of delivery styles. In multi sectioned courses you will need to recognize that there may be standardized examinations given at special times to all students from all sections. In these circumstances you have little choice over the type of tests used but you can work with colleagues to increase the likelihood that the tests actually measure what students expect will be measured AND that this in turn fits with the stated goals and objectives of the course.

The decisions to lecture, to use guided discussions, to assign individual or group projects are very individualized choices. You will base these choices on the strategies that have emerged from your teaching philosophy. Indeed, it is quite possible to use different techniques of conveying information and assessing learning outcomes in the same course. It is critical that you be comfortable with whatever teaching strategy or strategies you select and even more critical that the selection is rooted in terms of increasing student learning of and mastery over material.

There are varieties of issues that are likely to surface. Most faculty will have students who ask questions about the material being covered. Answering questions effectively involves certain factors. You need to be honest in your answers, if you don't know the answer, say so, and indicate that you will try to find the answer by the next class. Alternatively, you might involve the class in seeking information to answer questions, theirs and others. They can then share both the process of information gathering and the information.

Be careful not to dismiss any question as if it was unimportant or silly, it may be, but you want to create an atmosphere where students feel comfortable approaching you. If a

question seems idiosyncratic or likely to require a large amount of class time, set up an appointment for the student to meet with you in your office.

Connected to feeling comfortable in asking questions, is the level of comfort that is necessary for students to participate in discussions when these are expected and in fact, such participation is graded. The purposes and objectives of discussions should be clear. It is also useful for students to know what is being evaluated in any discussion and how it is being evaluated.

It is often helpful to have questions and/or specific issues around which to focus any discussion and some time constraints. These provide the faculty member with control over the direction of the discussion and connect it to the learning objectives of the class.

Some students are uncomfortable speaking in class. Small group preparation prior to broader class discussions may be helpful in increasing students' comfort levels. Each group can have a recorder who then summarizes and presents to the wider group. Over time, this may make it easier for everyone to feel less anxious. If a student has a disability that makes it difficult for them to speak in public, you need to be responsive to this after verification.

Even if you do not feel that you can use class time for discussion, you can still encourage on-line formats. This may be useful in very large classes where the size of the class precludes discussion.

There is little doubt that large classes have their own dynamic and are different in terms of both teaching strategies and student response. In these classes faculty are more likely to use the lecture method and it is more difficult to maintain personalization. In a general way, large classes are not as effective in developing critical thinking or in the retention of knowledge. You can try to have some in class exercises that break the class into temporary small groups. Using the photo class list and alphabetic seating can enable you to respond to students by name and somewhat reduce the sense of anonymity.

### **The First day of Class:**

Having taken care of all of the preliminaries, you are now ready to start the term and meet your students. Even experienced teachers often have "opening night jitters" and just as theater audiences, your students also have some expectations about you and the course. This first class essentially sets the stage for the rest of the term so you want to be the one to direct, control, and shape what should be a valuable and hopefully enjoyable experience for most if not all of the participants. You will be setting the tone and ought to be conveying to your students that you are enthusiastic about your discipline, enjoy transmitting knowledge and really care about them and their successful learning. There are a number of ways of doing this and you will find some references at the end of this guide that can be useful. It is advisable to be in the classroom before your students arrive. That way you can lay out materials, set up any audio-visual aids, put your name on

the board and be there to greet the students as they walk in. Once everyone is seated, you can greet them and welcome them.

Faculty who have been at Drexel for a while have a reputation. New faculty are starting with a “clean slate.” You may want to take a few minutes just to tell them a bit about yourself in terms of where you got your degree, taught prior to coming to Drexel, what drew you to your field and why you feel they can benefit from the course. Telling them a bit about your research interests and publications, helps establish your expertise. As interested as students may be in this, they are apt to be more concerned with finding out what you expect of them, whether you will treat them fairly and provide appropriate feedback to help them to learn and do well in the course.

Next, you should start to get to know them. Depending on the size of the class you can decide whether you want to have the students sit in assigned seats perhaps alphabetically or let them sit wherever they wish. Over the years, I have noticed that students tend to be highly territorial. They tend to select the same seats every class. Therefore, if you want to assign seats then do it the first day. In larger classes assigning seats by the alphabet may help you tie names and faces together. In smaller classes, you may be able to simply use the photo class lists. This is also a good time to reiterate your attendance policy. It is also a good time to try to find out a few things about your students that will personalize who they are. One technique is to hand out 3 X 5 cards and have them put their name, major, year, why they are taking this course, other related courses they may have had as well as indicating the three most important things they want to learn in the course. If you want to go beyond this information, you may want to ask them to tell you their favorite movie, animal, music or anything that will help you recall link a name with a person.

By now, you have spent 10-20 minutes depending on class size. At this point, you will want to review those parts of the syllabus that you feel require highlighting. Just keep in mind that most students want to know how to succeed in your course, they may translate this into getting a certain grade—using the syllabus you can show them what they need to learn to do this. You should also point to those policies about attendance, lateness, make-up exams that could affect their grades. You don’t have to go over everything but leave some time for questions. The students are likely to focus on what the workload will be, not only what you expect of them but also what resources from you or others are available to help them do well.

If you tell them that coming to class prepared with the week’s reading completed is expected, you should indicate how you would know that they have done this. Will you hold brief discussions; require a written summary, a list of generated questions, a five minute highlight paper? If you don’t connect your expectation with some feedback students with competing demands may be tempted to let your reading slide and deal with expectations more closely monitored.

If you are using materials like films or handouts or any items not in the textbooks, how are they expected to use these materials? You will need to provide some guidance and again, some mechanisms that discourage procrastination. What you select is up to you.

However, making sure that your students understand up front what they need to do with these materials makes it more likely that all the assignments will be completed.

By now, unless your class is longer than 50 minutes, you have about 5-10 minutes left. You may want to end the first class with something relevant to the course. In a course on Physical Anthropology, you might ask them to do a mini-assignment for the next class by looking up a current debate about a “newly discovered fossil.” Just be sure that whatever you do for this type of endnote is used in the next class as a talking point. In a longer class, you may have a brief video, a short lecture about a central topic, or simply decide to spend some time talking about what central focus of the course really excites you.

Finally, end your class on time. Your students may need to get to a class in a building some distance from the one you are in and some other faculty member is waiting to meet her/his first class.

### **Classroom Assessment Techniques:**

We all like to think that our students, or at least the majority of them, are absorbing and assimilating the information we are transmitting. However, good communication involves continual processes of assessing that what we have said and asked them to read and what they have understood are in accord. Thus, a key question in any course should be: What is working and how do we know? Monitoring learning outcomes needs to be embedded in a continual feedback process.

This requires both graded and non-graded methods. From the faculty perspective the frequent assessment enables the faculty member to recognize which concepts or facts need to be reinforced, and to plan for the next set of materials: for students it helps them pinpoint their strengths and weaknesses so that they can study more effectively.

It is useful when planning to include some methods that are non-threatening to students, in other words that are not graded. These non-graded assessments provide information that help students learn so that they can have more successful control over course material. These methods can be weekly, or even at the end of each class session with faculty response/ feedback at the start of the next session. The feedback should be timely. In practical terms, timely means often enough so that students can assess what they need to know to improve and expand their mastery of topics and so you can ascertain if there are generalized “gaps” so that interventions can be made before grades fall disastrously. These non-graded assessments indicate to students that you are concerned with the process of learning and not just the product, e.g. the grade.

There is an excellent book by Angelo and Cross referenced below that covers a variety of Classroom Assessment Techniques and the circumstances in which they can be used. One of these CATs applicable to both large and small classes with the additional advantage of not using a great deal of time is the One-Minute Paper. In actuality, this may take 3-5 minutes of class time. The paper can involve your asking students to write

down the answers to two simple questions. The first could be, “What was the most important point made in class today, this week?” The second could ask. “What unanswered question do you have?” or, “What is the ‘muddiest point?’”

This technique meets a core criterion for effective communication by enabling faculty to verify that what was taught was actually understood. In addition, this type of non-threatening learning assessment when responded to and clearly taken seriously by the professor demonstrates to students that they and their learning are important which promotes their own development of positive attitudes. You do not have to respond to individuals as such. It can be just as useful to look at patterns and to address these. You can then state that those students who are still uncertain about some material should see you, or a tutor, or a TA should you have one.

These one -minute papers can be signed or unsigned. However, in large classes, if students are expected to put their names on the papers, a fringe benefit is that they serve as an attendance check. While this does reduce anonymity, you can counter this by providing some minimal credit for high participation rates. One or two point added at the end of the term for doing all or nearly all the papers can make a difference to a student’s final grade given the plus and minus system.

### **The Bottom Line:**

For many students, the bottom line is not necessarily what they have learned, nor how wonderfully you have presented material, but their final grade in your course. Moreover, over the years, grades that we might have found to be above average like Bs are now perceived by some students as the equivalent to the old C. So if you want to avoid long lines of students after every graded assignment you will need to be very explicit about how you grade and what aspects of performance become factors in the assignment of specific grades. That clarity about your grading policies and standards, frequent feedback all throughout the course along with opportunities for students to improve their performance will be seen as fair.

All assignments whether written or oral, tests, papers or projects should be explained, preferably in writing and you should provide details on what these assignments are designed to measure. Thus if you are focusing on their knowledge of specific facts you are likely to choose a different type of test than if you are expecting analysis, synthesis and/or critical thinking. Students study differently for different expectations so let them know what you are looking for.

All assignments should fit what is being covered in the course and its required materials! Please recognize that what is obvious to you may not be to your students, especially if they are new to the university or to your discipline. It is helpful to students to have faculty provide some study tips and to give them organizational and writing guidelines for papers and projects. Written ones give reference points when they are working at 3 A.M. There may be a few students who will ignore your advice but if you have given it, they will know where the responsibility for their less than stellar performance resides.

On your syllabus and perhaps in the guidelines you present to students for specific assignments it is useful to be explicit as to your expectations for specific grades. This is more obvious with objective tests that receive numerical grades that have absolute equivalencies to the letter grades that are required when final grades are being issued.

Essay examinations, papers, projects and oral presentations will require more clarification. What is it that you feel differentiates a paper that receives an A rather than an A-, or a B- instead of a C+? Your students will want to know this and it is easier to be clear about this at the beginning of the term than when you have assigned grades and the students are coming to you for ex post facto explanations. It will provide reference points for your students as they are actually doing their work. Further, defining the factors that you are seeking will help you control subjectivity.

Just as you have a teaching philosophy that informs your transmission of material, you may want to have a grading philosophy and to convey both to your students. One or both of these may also vary with the different types of courses you teach and with the different levels of students.

**Useful References Available in the Center:**

McKeachie, W.J. (2002) Teaching Tips: Strategies, Research and Theory for College and University Teachers (10<sup>th</sup> Edition), Houghton Mifflin

Angelo, T.A. and Cross, K.P. (1993) Classroom Assessment Techniques (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition) , Jossey-Bass