

Nick Mattos - Notes from 4/2/09 Student Perspectives on Effective Teaching

Relationships and Communication

Students value the personal relationships with faculty, staff, and other students in the LMU community. They recognize a difference between LMU and other universities, and appreciate faculty who know them by name and seem genuinely interested in their success. They suggest taking some time at the beginning of the course to break the ice, something like a five minute activity for both teacher and students to get to know one another can really make things easier when they have questions or problems later in the semester. Circulating an email list among students also helps them to network, create study groups, and keep up with course work if they miss class.

LMU professors seem different - teaching is more than a job at LMU. Students attributed this to a shared mission and shared ideals such as *cura personalis* and *magis*. Students appreciate faculty involvement in campus activities and service to the community, and enjoy building relationships outside of the classroom for professional networking opportunities.

Students maintain busy schedules including research, service, working 1 – 2 jobs, Greek organizations, sports, and more. Many graduate students work full time and attend school, so they can be tired and sometimes distracted in class. Students recognize that professors have busy schedules as well, including teaching, research, and service. Be honest with your students if you are having a particularly busy week/month so that they know you will be less available to them. Students suggested setting boundaries and being clear about what is expected from them and from you as the professor.

Stick to your syllabus, but allow some flexibility to add or delete material when necessary. If you say that something will be posted online, make sure that it is there. If you say that your primary contact is by email; respond in a timely fashion.

One student suggested providing a cost analysis of what each class costs to keep students from missing classes.

Allow food and drink or a break in longer class periods to keep students' attention.

Approaches to Teaching and Assignments

Everyone is a teacher and a learner. Teach how to think not what to think.

Students recognize when a professor is excited and enthusiastic about a subject. This leads to a shared enthusiasm which is motivating, inspiring, and transitional for the students. In this way students begin to recognize what they are passionate about, and what they are interested in studying.

Students acknowledged that learning takes place outside of the classroom and are in favor of service or community based learning courses. They enjoy sharing these lived experiences with faculty. Students also appreciate case studies or real world examples that personalize the material in a meaningful way.

Students like group work, but do not like to be graded only as a group. Some suggestions were to give both a group presentation grade and a grade on individual work turned in by the student. Peer evaluations were also suggested as an opportunity to give feedback on other students in the group. Group discussions are seen as a positive activity if facilitated properly. Students recognize when a discussion goes off track and they appreciate when a professor is aware of this, and can bring it back to topic.

Students learn in different ways. Some recognize how they learn but some need help teasing out their learning style. One student suggested using the Socratic method of questioning; others appreciate visual aids to help them learn.

A student explained that failure can be a good way to learn. Having to repeat an assignment in hopes of achieving desired results allowed a second chance to learn something new about the material or experiment. Frustration is motivational. There were suggestions for creating assignments where you must repeat the experiment, read something again, write another draft, condense 4 pages to 1. One student explained that every opportunity is a teaching opportunity. They appreciate the chance to make up a missed assignment and show that they have learned the material. Grade inflation is a recognized problem across the country, and students are upset that professors feel pressure to grade on a curve.

Design assignments to involve all students. Competition drives preparedness. An example was provided of a reading assignment and in class quiz where students are not sure who will have to respond to a set of questions about the reading; students come prepared. Students also see value in student centered learning where they need to create assignments, or questions for the class. A good way to understand the material can be to teach what you need to learn.

Students appreciate cross disciplinary learning opportunities. They also see value in bringing in outside experts in the discipline.

With the cost of some books, students appreciate when professors make full use of the materials. Some mentioned that a book was rarely used or that some professors seemed unfamiliar with the material in their own textbooks. This is frustrating to students.

Students suggested giving out mid-semester course evaluations as a way to assess where the class is, and what could be improved moving forward. These could be informal, or like the standard course evals given to students at the end of the semester.

Technology

Students suggested that faculty embrace technology, but not go overboard. For example, inviting students to be a friend on facebook, or requiring them to create a twitter/facebook/myspace account was seen as too much. Make sure that it serves a purpose in the course.

Students like clickers (PRS systems) because they allow for anonymity. Shy students are more likely to participate if they do not have to raise a hand or speak in front of class.

Students enjoy PowerPoint presentations and appreciate faculty who post slides so that notes can be taken directly on the handout. The panel indicated that this will help stronger students, and those who wish to be lazy will find an opportunity anyway. Students caution that it is not necessary to include an entire lecture on the PowerPoint slides. They find this distracting, especially if the professor reads directly from the slides. Outlines are best so that they can supplement the material on the slides with notes from class.

Some students enjoyed using Google sites/docs because they felt this was a very organized way to present material and encourage participation. They realize that this takes some time and experience to set up.

Students suggested that YouTube videos can help visual learners understand difficult concepts. Short clips can provide a lot of additional information.