

## The First Day of Class: People Before Paper

The first day of class is arguably the most important day of the school term, since this is when impressions are made, trust starts, and relationships either begin or are dashed. As teachers, we must think about how our students feel when entering a room full of strangers. Do you remember how you felt on your first day on campus as a new teacher? Perhaps you were excited with a tinge of anxiety? On the other hand, maybe you experienced symptoms of full-blown fear and wanted to run away!

For our students, the first day is extremely critical. For first-generation students especially, it could mean the difference between them coming back on day two or leaving the campus forever. Consider this mantra for day #1: People Before Paper! Establish a human connection before plopping down your tome (AKA: syllabus). More specifically, consider the following:

- **Initial Greeting.** How will you greet your students before the “formal” introductions (see below)? Where and when will you do this?
- **Introductions.** What will you ask your students to share about themselves with the class? Will you ask them to share anything? Why or why not? How will you guide them and make them feel at ease? How will you introduce yourself? Will you simply be the disembodied “Professor So-n-So”? Will you share something “human” about your life and your journey to the classroom? If you could only share three things with your students about who you are, what would those three nuggets be? Why did you choose to share these three things? How self-revelatory will you be? What is appropriate? Inappropriate?
- **Timeliness.** Will you be in class early, right on time, or whenever the mood hits you? Will you require punctuality from your students? If so, how will you explain this to them?
- **Technology.** When will you check out the technology available in the classroom? Are you in the class before the start time of day one so that the technology is up and running when your students arrive, or will you use (and lose) the first few minutes of class managing the technology while the students are getting settled?
- **Trust.** What will you do on this first day to begin the process of building trust in the classroom? What will you do to begin the process of demonstrating that your classroom is a safe place to express views and opinions? Do you want your students to express their views and opinions?
- **Icebreaker and Community Building.** What initial activities will you do on the first day to begin the

process of building a community for teaching and learning? Do you believe building a classroom community is important? Why or why not?

- **Baggage.** How will you convey to your students that your classroom is their time to explore, be curious, learn, and focus on their growth? What will you do to encourage them to check their personal baggage at the door each day? How will you check your own baggage each day before class?
- **Passion.** What will you do to demonstrate your authentic enthusiasm and excitement for the class and course material? How will you show authentic excitement for your students’ presence?
- **Names.** How will you remember your students’ names? Will you use photographs of students to help you remember names? How will you encourage your students to learn their classmates’ names? Why would you even want to do this?
- **Seating.** Will you require students to sit in assigned seats? If they can choose their seats, do they have to sit in the same one all semester? Can they sit in any seat at any time during the term?
- **Goal.** What is one overriding and specific goal you have for the first day of class?
- **Honest Feedback.** How will you get honest feedback from your students about their first day in class? Will you ask general questions during a class discussion, or ask for anonymous written responses before they leave class? Or, will you assume that if there are no questions, everything must be okay?
- **Announcements.** What announcements will you make before dismissing the class on the first day? What will your parting words for the day be to your students? How do you want them to remember you and your class?
- **Civility.** What will you do to encourage civility in your classroom? How will you respond to acts of incivility?
- **Gratitude.** How will you show gratitude to your students? How will you encourage them to show gratitude to the class and to their fellow students?
- **Syllabus.** Do you plan to distribute the syllabus on the first day of class? If so, will you read it to the class? Why or why not? What will you do with the syllabus once it’s distributed to your students?
- **Social Media.** Will you use social media for class communication and lessons? Will you accept “friend” requests on social media?
- **Boundaries and Limits.** What boundaries will you emphasize on the first day? What limits will you express to your students?
- **Class Rules.** What are your major rules for the class? Are there any rules for the class?

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- Attire. What will you wear? Why? How will you know whether what you wear has the impact you think it will?
  - Relevance. What will you do to establish relevance between this course and your students' lives? How will you demonstrate this course has meaning to their dreams and aspirations?
  - Resources. Are there any campus, community, or career resources you want your students to be familiar with starting on day #1?
  - The old adage holds, "We never have a second chance to make a first impression." What will your students' first impression of you be when you welcome them into your classroom for the first time? Remember, what you choose to do and say sets the tone for the entire semester!

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