

TNS 560: Teaching Undergraduates: An Introductory Course

COURSE PURPOSE/DESCRIPTION

This is a generically-tilted *theoretical* + *practical* hybrid course on pedagogy and classroom management that aims to address, *subtextually*, four main TA-related concerns in academe today: (a) the persistence, for all intents and purposes, of the age-old myth that subject-matter expertise ipso facto translates into effective pedagogy; (b) the acknowledged need among TAs for guidance with pedagogy and classroom management; (c) the fact that for most faculty the source of their current pedagogical approaches can be traced to their formative experiences as teaching assistants; and (d) the increasing retention-driven demand from universities for an improvement in the quality of undergraduate teaching (a concern that is also strongly shared by this department).¹

The topics to be covered will range from the latest findings in the neuroscience of learning to what research tells us about effective undergraduate teaching; from the deployment of AV technology in the classroom to a tangible articulation of a teaching philosophy; from the role of race and gender in student-teacher interactions to maintaining discipline in the classroom; and from the best practices in syllabus construction to developing a teaching portfolio for the job-hunt to come.

As you proceed through this course, you may want to reflect on four axioms the instructor has garnered from more than two decades of observations and practice of undergraduate teaching. (a) Teaching is marked by an inherent contradiction: as a profession, teaching by its very nature is an act of profound hubris; yet, from the perspective of practice, it is humility that will get you the best results you will seek as a teacher. (b) Contrary to what most teachers believe, years of experience in the classroom does not necessarily make one a good teacher; in fact, quite the opposite may often be the case. (c) Effective teaching does not just happen. It is a learned skill that is always—repeat, always—predicated on the expenditure of a great deal of creative effort in prior preparation *before each and every class*. (d) Classroom pedagogy is a constant work in progress.

¹ It is worthwhile to quote here from the external reviewers' report prepared at the behest of the College of Arts and Sciences shortly after the merger of various programs that now together constitute the Department of Transnational Studies in 2011:

To the extent that the Department puts graduate student instructors in undergraduate courses, it should offer a course in pedagogy for graduate students, or if not a full course a training program for new teaching assistants at the beginning of each semester. . . . Graduate students identified several programs for instructional support on campus, but these seemed oriented more toward faculty than graduate students. A more systematic approach to graduate student training for teaching needs to be developed. (p. 4. *Report to the Administration of the University of Buffalo Concerning the Transnational Studies Department, December 5, 2011*. Authored by Clara Sue Kidwell (Muskogee, Oklahoma), Rinaldo Walcott (University of Toronto), and Lovalerie King (Pennsylvania State University).

Note also that this University has made it mandatory for all departments that employ Teaching Assistants to have some form of formal training for their TAs. This course fulfills that requirement.

PEDAGOGY

(How I will Teach this Course)

This is *not* a primarily discussion (seminar) course. Rather, the approach will be to use a combination of lectures and discussions. The latter will involve participants being called upon randomly to first summarize assigned materials, and then initiate a discussion. (Note: In my classes I am always on the lookout for those who do not do their readings but instead rely on “bouncing” off the work of others during class discussions.)

Structurally, I have designed the course thusly: the introductory section covers course purpose by looking at the renewed concern in the academy for meaningful TA training. Sections one through three of Part One provide the theoretical background by exploring the neuroscientific foundations of teaching / learning processes; the psychology of learning; and the social context of teaching and learning (in United States). Part Two, labeled “Praxis—The Nuts and Bolts of Teaching,” comprises four sections: teacher professionalism and the ethics of teaching; preplanning (before the first day); the pedagogic toolbox; and classroom management/student resistance. The course concludes with considerations of student evaluations and the development of a teaching portfolio for the job-hunt.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

COURSE TEXTBOOK(S)

Required: *The Professor's Guide to Teaching: Psychological Principles and Practices* (by Donelson R. Forsyth). **NOTE:** This book appears to be out of print, however, a copy is on course reserve in Lockwood, and you may be able to purchase it used via the internet.

Recommended: *First Day to Final Grade: A Graduate Student's Guide to Teaching* (by Anne Curzan and Lisa Damour) Third Edition.

COURSE READINGS

In addition to the readings from the textbook, which is on reserve in Lockwood Library, other course readings are available online via this site www.elegantbrain.com When you arrive at the site, navigate to: Online Course Materials → This Semester's Online Course Materials → Copyright Notice → Part A → TNS 560 Readings

BASIC COURSE REQUIREMENTS (subject to change, at my discretion, but *with* prior notice)

- (a) Class attendance and participation, *which at the very minimum must reflect completion of assigned readings*, worth 20% of the course grade.
- (b) Term paper, worth 20% of the course grade.

- (c) Construction of a full syllabus for a course that would be appropriate for this department, worth 30% of the course grade.
- (d) Written articulation of a personal statement on a teaching philosophy, worth 10% of the course grade.
- (e) Final exam, worth 20% of the course grade.

SUPPLEMENTARY COURSE REQUIREMENTS (may have an impact on your final course grade)

- (a) If I sense that you are not doing your assigned readings, you may also, at my discretion, be subjected to “pop quizzes” from time to time. (By definition, a pop quiz cannot be made up if you miss one.)
- (b) You are not permitted to use any electronic devices of any kind while class is in session—this includes portable computers and cell phones.

EXTRA CREDIT

Those who may wish to avail themselves of an extra credit assignment, this is your assignment: Keep a journal of *all* **class proceedings**. However, your journal must be in the following format:

- (a) Journal entries must be in a *separate* “single-subject” spiral lined notebook. (Absolutely no other kind of notebook is acceptable. If you can’t afford one I will buy one for you—let me know.)
- (b) All entries must begin on a separate page for *each* class session.
- (c) If you are absent on a particular day leave that page blank (and mark it with the word “absent”).
- (d) All entries must be legibly and *neatly* written.
- (e) All entries must be clearly dated.
- (f) Any other notes you take for this course outside class must be written in the back of the notebook.
- (g) Notes for other courses you are taking should not be in this notebook.
- (h) Write your full name, as it appears in school records, on the first page at the top or somewhere on the front or back cover.

NOTE: Failure to meet any ONE or more of these requirements will **completely** nullify this assignment as extra-credit (you will *not* even earn partial credit)—reminder: extra-credit means extra work for me. ←Read this sentence again.

ABOUT THE INSTRUCTOR

The instructor holds degrees from universities in four different countries across three different continents and brings to this course an expertise that not only rests on a graduate degree (among his several graduate degrees) in education, but also years of teaching experience at almost all levels of the educational system: high school, evening adult education classes, two-year community college, a four-year college, and graduate and undergraduate level teaching in a research university. For a description of his research interests see the faculty listing at the Department of Transnational Studies website.

CLASS PROCEEDINGS SCHEDULE

Course Structure	Topics/Subtopics	Class no.	Readings (must be completed by the date specified in the date column)
Introduction			
Course Overview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course purpose, course requirements, topics, etc. • Teaching as a life-changing enterprise. • Passion: the life-blood of teaching 	Class no. 1 Wed Aug 31	
PART ONE: Theoretical Background			
A Renewed Concern for Appropriate TA Training	<p>0(a) <i>Teaching in a Research University: The Boyer Commission Report:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • continued relevance of the Report; • the research university—compared to other institutions of higher education; • on the pitfalls of undergraduate education; • the lazy tenured drone/ the untrained TA; • an academic bill of rights; • educating graduate students as apprentice teachers. <p>0(b) <i>The TA's Perspective: Teaching as Seen from the Point of View of the TA:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • significance of the job; 	Class no. 2 Wed Sep 7	Online course readings: *1, *2, *3, *4, and *5; PLUS *28(a), 28(b), *28(c), and 28(d); <i>PLUS</i> 29(a), 29(b), and *29(c).

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • intellectual competence versus pedagogic competence; • asking for help. <p>0(c) <i>A Faculty Perspective on the TA in a Large Class:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • training; • communication; • motivating; • delegating authority. <p>0(d) <i>The Special Circumstance of the Foreign TA:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • issues of culture, • language and communication; • training. <p>0(e) <i>The problem of falling academic standards (the erosion of academic rigor):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SSRC-CLA longitudinal project; • findings; • policy recommendations 		
<p>Section One: The Neuro- scientific Foundations of Teaching /</p>	<p>1(a) <i>The Brain:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • development; • anatomical structure; • the miracle of the dynamic neural network; • synapses and neurotransmitters; • assaulting the brain—drugs, malnutrition, and stress; 	<p>Class no. 3 Wed Sep 14</p>	<p>Online course readings: *6, and *7(a)</p>

Learning Processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• memory;• cognitive development;• brain plasticity;• caring for the brain—nutrition, sleep, physical exercise, mental exercise, spirituality, passion for life.		
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The rest of this topics/readings schedule will be made available shortly