

How Can I Effectively Teach Unprepared Students?

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“Teaching Unprepared Students: Strategies That Work”

ONLINE RESOURCES

Active and Cooperative Learning

<http://www.calstatela.edu/dept/chem/chem2/Active/>

Adult Learning Activities

<http://www.cdiponline.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=stories&topicID=2>

Brigham Young University Center for Teaching and Learning

<http://ctl.byu.edu>

BYU Center for Teaching & Learning Channel (YouTube)

<http://www.youtube.com/user/BYUCTL#p/u/5/oWi5vy6TSso>

Cooperative Learning Group Activities for College Courses: A Guide for Instructors

http://www1.umn.edu/ohr/prod/groups/ohr/@pub/@ohr/documents/asset/ohr_89185.pdf

Cooperative Learning Center (University of Minnesota)

<http://www.co-operation.org/>

National Institute for Science Education Cooperative Learning Website

<http://www.wcer.wisc.edu/archive/cl1/cl/clhome.asp>

Texas Collaboration for Teaching Excellence Website

<http://www.texascollaborative.org/activelearning.htm>

Writing Across the Curriculum Website

<http://wac.colostate.edu/> and <http://wac.colostate.edu/intro/pop2d.cfm>

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A Practical Application Checklist

1. Write down the behaviors most indicative of unprepared students in your courses.
2. Think from their perspective as you list the possible reasons for their lack of preparation or drive to achieve in your course(s).
3. List the part of your course that is the most likely to engage the greatest percentage of your students during the first few weeks of class. Determine how you might help them take more responsibility for one or two learning activities using the SMART outline for student directed assignments (SMART = Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Rigorous, Timely).
4. Increase learner “buy-in” by letting them decide, under your direction, what the consequences should be for certain levels of non-completion of assignments.
5. Give incentives for students to work together and help each other stay current with assignments and test preparation.
6. Repeatedly ask your students to wrestle with the questions, “So what?” and “Who cares about what we are studying in this class?” As they consider the relevance of your course, they are more likely to see its value in their lives.
7. Do not just explain things so clearly that they understand – explain so clearly that they cannot misunderstand. Give enough examples and non-examples that your expectations are clear. Share information in more than one way (syllabus, email reminders, in-class announcements, etc.).

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Faculty Discussion Questions

- What are your greatest frustrations with the students?
- What part(s) of our curriculum could be appropriately adapted to give students more choice and responsibility?
- Consider the progression: (a) “Show them,” (b) “Help them,” (c) “Watch them,” and (d) “Let them.” How might this help us appropriately shift more of our course focus toward empowering students to be life-long learners?
- What are some examples in our department of fair and firm consequences for unprepared students? (These must “hurt” just enough to encourage and motivate students while not deflating or crushing them.)
- Beyond graduation credit, what difference do we really want our department’s classes to make in the lives of our students?
 - How can we better communicate this to our students so our subject matter becomes more relevant to them?
 - How can this help us increase student “buy-in” so we can get more engagement and ownership of learning from them?
- What do we already know about the parts of our courses that cause the most difficulty for our students? Which parts do they enjoy the most and find the most meaningful? Do we understand what factors lead to these differences? How can we increase the positive aspects and decrease the negative ones?