



# Redeeming the time in your Degree Completion Classroom



OR

## Striving for all 'A's



DCP Faculty Workshop Summer 04

[If you have any questions, comments, or suggestions about this workshop, please contact the DCP Office at [complete@lbc.edu](mailto:complete@lbc.edu), 1.866.4.LBC.DCP, or 560.8220.]

IF an accelerated degree completion class is only half the time of a traditional class,  
THEN there is no way an instructor can cover all the material for a three-credit course.  
What's a person to do? Strive for all 'A's!

This workshop will explore techniques DCP instructors should use to facilitate student outcomes that are similar to those achieved in traditional courses. Since adults are highly motivated and self-directed, a large portion of the learning will take place outside the classroom. Therefore, DCP instructors are able to utilize classroom time to: (1) Assign Homework, (2) Assess Comprehension, (3) Answer Questions, (4) Analyze Alternative Viewpoints, (5) Augment with Additional Activities and Resources, (6) Allow Adequate time for Student Input, and (7) Assimilate for Application.

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I was in my office yesterday with one of my colleagues who teaches in our college's traditional undergraduate program. I recently asked him if he would be interested in teaching in our accelerated degree completion program. We were revamping one of our existing five-week courses and turning it into a ten-week course instead. One of the major reasons for the change was to bring it more in-line with a similar two-semester course in our traditional day school program. And since this particular individual literally wrote the book (at least one of them) that is used in the traditional program and which we wanted to adopt as well, I thought he would be a good candidate for teaching the equivalent course in our program. One of the first questions out of his mouth was "how do I teach 80+ hours of material in just 40?" My answer? "You don't." We then proceeded through the basic principles of what I call "Redeeming the Time in your Accelerated Degree Completion Program (ADCP) Classroom." We started off with the following "if/then" critical thinking exercise. Try it yourself. You may have trouble following the train of thought on a few of them, but I believe you will be able to get the point on most.

Critical Thinking Exercise  
Redeeming the Time in my ADCP Course

IF . . . a 3-credit hour ADCP class is only 20 hours compared to 45 in the traditional program . . .

THEN ...I can't possibly

However . . .

IF . . . adults are actually self-directed and highly motivated when it comes to homework . . .

THEN ...I can expect

Therefore . . .

IF... ADCP students do their homework & comprehend it . . .

THEN . . .I don't need to

Of course . . .

IF . . .I'm not sure of the level of their comprehension . . .

THEN . . .I need to

IF . . .they are unclear on some issues . . .

THEN . . . I need to allow them

IF . . .the readings did not present all the possible viewpoints of an issue . . .

THEN . . .I need to

IF . . .the readings need support or further clarification . . .

THEN . . .I need to

IF . . .I truly want to have collaborative learning taking place in my classroom . . .

THEN . . . I need to allow

IF . . . adults seek relevant learning that can be used now . . .

THEN . . . I need to take class time to

Striving for All 'A's

IF . . . an ADCP class is only 20 hours compared to 45 in the traditional program . . . THEN ...I can't possibly cover all the same material in lecture.

IF an accelerated degree completion program (ADCP) class is only half the time of a traditional class, THEN there is no way an instructor can cover all the material for a three-credit course. What's a person to do? Strive for all 'A's!

This article will explore techniques ADCP instructors should use to facilitate student outcomes that are similar to those achieved in traditional courses. (Your program may not be seeking to achieve outcomes similar to those in a traditional course. Maybe your institution's ADCP does not have a counterpart in the traditional program. Or maybe the learning outcomes are purposefully different. It could be they have a more practical orientation for more immediate application. Nevertheless, most of what we are presenting in this article should still be of benefit to those teaching in an ADCP.) Since adults are highly motivated and self-directed (Houle, 1961; Brookfield, 1984; Caffarella & O'Donnell, 1989), a large portion of the learning for a particular course will take place outside the classroom. Therefore, ADCP instructors are able to teach less and facilitate more by utilizing classroom time to: (1) Assign Independent Work, (2) Assess Comprehension, (3) Answer Questions, (4) Analyze Alternative Viewpoints, (5) Augment with Additional Activities and Resources, (6) Allow Adequate time for Student Input, and (7) Assimilate for Application.

Assign Independent Work

IF . . . adults are actually self-directed and highly motivated when it comes to homework . . . THEN ...I can expect them to complete the assignments and complete them well.

ADCPs are normally structured so that they are a combination of self-study and in-class contact. One way in which we compensate for the reduced time in classroom contact is through independent study time (a.k.a. homework). Most ADCPs require just 20 to 30 hours of classroom contact per course. Therefore, independent study time needs to equal between 12 and 20 hours per week to compensate for the reduced in-class contact time.

There are basically two approaches to assigning homework or independent study. Homework can be assigned as a review activity after the material has been taught in class, or it can be assigned as a learning exercise prior to classroom instruction.

Independent study as review is great for classes in which the content material requires some teacher hand-holding before the student can even understand the material enough to work with it. Math courses would be a prime example. You wouldn't normally expect a student to be able to work on complicated math problems without some input from the instructor. A science course might be another example. Homework is used as review in any course where the bulk of the material is too complicated and hard to understand through reading assignments alone. Even some ADCP courses might use homework as a review of the material covered in class.

On the other hand, there is homework or independent work that is assigned as a learning exercise. Most ADCP courses utilize independent work to introduce students to new content material. Assigned reading and written assignments can be completed before the class time that covers that material. This

allows the adult learner to do some self-directed learning prior to class time. This type of independent study is more effective with adult learners as studies have shown them to be more motivated than younger students. Instructors in our ADCP who also teach in our college's traditional undergraduate programs have made comments to me about how amazed they are that our adult students "actually do their homework assignments before coming to class."

Therefore . . .

IF... ADCP students do their homework & comprehend it . . .      THEN. . . I don't need to teach the textbook. Of course . . .

IF . . . I'm not sure of the level of their comprehension . . .      THEN. . . I need to assess their comprehension.

### Assess Comprehension

If our premise is that adult learners are able to learn from their independent study assignments, then our first task during class time (first in priority, if not chronologically) is to assess whether or not the students are comprehending what they are reading and studying. It is expected that most of the students will not understand everything they will be asked to read as independent study. But, if all the students do understand the bulk of the material, then there is no need to teach them something they have already learned on their own. By assessing what the students have already grasped on their own, you are able to save precious class time for only those areas that need clarifying.

How might we assess comprehension? There is a variety of teaching methods that would be suited for this task. Instructors in traditional courses often rely upon written quizzes and tests to assess comprehension. However, considering the limited time ADCP instructors have in class, we encourage them to use less time-consuming methods such as oral quizzing or asking students questions about the independent work to see that they are comprehending the material. Obviously, grading their written work is a primary way to assess their comprehension. However, the downside of that method is that, unless you have an opportunity to glance through their work sometime during the session, you are unable to detect areas of confusion until the following class session, i.e. far removed from the time in which you are discussing the topic. It may be possible to at least give a cursory glance at some of the written assignments during a break time or a small group activity to get a feel for the students' overall comprehension so that you can address any confusion later in that class session. (However, don't totally neglect the important task of monitoring a small group activity to do this type of assessment.)

Short role-plays or case studies are two alternative methods of assessing comprehension. Nevertheless, as with quizzes and tests, these can be time-consuming, but should not be automatically discounted, as they can still be very insightful. Also keep in mind that observing facial expressions and body language is another way to assess comprehension. Throughout the class session, look for those telltale signs of confusion, frustration, and/or misunderstanding.

While grading written work, role plays, case studies, and being sensitive to facial expressions and body language are all effective ways to assess comprehension, the quickest, easiest, and most straightforward method is to allow the students time to ask questions about their independent work.

## Answer Questions

IF . . .they are unclear on some issues . . . THEN . . . I need to allow them time in class to ask questions.

Obviously, the students will have some questions that have been raised during their independent study time. After all, we are asking them to process and digest new unfamiliar information with little prior exposure to the subject matter. Clarification of the material, especially the key concepts, is crucial. Therefore, a good portion of the class time should allow for the answering of the questions that the independent work has raised.

Start the course off right by making sure students understand they are expected to ask questions in class and that the only ‘dumb’ question is the unasked question. Keep in mind that not all students will openly admit they don’t understand some of the material. Be sensitive to their hesitancy to admit their lack of understanding. If your ADCP is cohort-based, this hesitancy should diminish as the group gets to feel more comfortable with each other (usually by the second or third class together). As the group bonds together, they will be more likely to open up freely with each other. But until that time, or if your ADCP is not cohort-based, then you, as the instructor need to be ready to draw out the questions that the students have but are afraid to vocalize. This is why assessing comprehension is so important. It is often through the assessment of comprehension that the questions arise. Through the use of Q&A, class discussion, or other means, you can determine what the students understand and what questions they may have about other areas.

## Analyze Alternative Viewpoints

IF . . .the readings did not present all the possible viewpoints of an issue . . . THEN . . . I need to introduce and analyze alternative viewpoints.

In most subject areas you will find more than one viewpoint, philosophy, theory, technique, etc. By requiring several different textbooks as well as additional readings for each ADCP course, the independent study assignments alone may expose the students to the major alternative viewpoints to be considered. However, if this is not the case, or when the reading assignments do a poor job of representing a particular viewpoint, then you, as the instructor, will want to spend some time in class explaining additional viewpoints of the topic at hand.

Once the students have a handle on the alternative ways of viewing a particular subject, the different theoretical or philosophical approaches, class time should be spent in discussing the pros and cons of each. While you may favor one viewpoint or approach yourself, or your institution may have its own stance, it is up to you as an educator to present all valid alternatives and allow the student to come to a conclusion. For example, in the Bible doctrine courses at our college, a fairly large portion of time is spent in discussing different interpretations of biblical passages or different theological viewpoints. Our instructors have their own take on the issue, and, for many of the major doctrinal issues, the College has its stance. But our ultimate goal is to bring the students to the point where they can make a decision on their own that they can defend based on the evidence at hand.

Besides through the independent work, alternative viewpoints may be presented in class via lecture, video or internet presentations, oral reports, or any number of other means. The analysis and critique of the various viewpoints can be accomplished through class discussion, debate, forum, panel discussion,

or case study, to name just a few. Which would be most appropriate really depends on the content, the size of the class, time available, and other factors.

### Augment with Additional Activities & Resources

IF . . .the readings need support or further clarification . . . THEN . . .I need to augment with additional activities and resources.

We all learn differently. Research tells us that there are various learning styles (Kolb, 1984; Endorf & McNeff, 1991). While one individual may learn primarily through reading, another person learns best by observing. Still another individual must have hands-on experiences in order to fully understand the subject matter. Hence, while we may rely heavily on reading and written assignments in the independent work we assign our ADCP students, it's important to remember that we must augment that with other activities or resources to help those with different learning styles.

A wise use of class time will include emphasizing the key concepts to be grasped by our students through a variety of additional activities and resources. A video, PowerPoint, or internet presentation may be used so that those who learn best through observation may be able to fully grasp the concepts. Small group projects, role-play, and debates may be beneficial to those who require a more hand-on approach to learning. Guest lecturers, panel discussions, and demonstrations are just a few more examples of teaching methods that will help cement the subject matter for those with various learning styles.

Of all the activities that we can employ in our ADCP classroom, those that involve the student in the process are the most beneficial. As it has been said, "maximum learning involves maximum involvement." Therefore, it is vital that we allow adequate time for student input.

### Allow Adequate Time for Student Input

IF . . .I truly want to have collaborative learning taking place in my classroom . . . THEN . . . I need to allow adequate time for Student Input.

Most of our ADCPs herald the fact that we incorporate collaborative learning in our classes. Since our students are all adults, chances are great that most of them will bring to class a wealth of practical information concerning the subject matter at hand (Apps, 1991). While some will have experiences in one class subject, others will have experiences in other subjects. We need to allow time for them to contribute to the learning process.

Not only do the students bring in experiences that they have had that relate to the subject matter at hand, they usually have a fresher outlook on, and a new way to explain the material they just studied in their independent work. What teacher hasn't experienced the inability to explain concept in terms a particular student could grasp? We use all the usual metaphors and similes only to still see the look of total confusion on the student's face. Finally, a fellow student comes to our rescue and is able to explain it just a little differently, but different enough to cause the 'a-ha' moment.

Class discussions, small group activities, role-play, Q&A, and student presentations are just a few of the ways you can solicit student input. And, remember, to be true collaborative learning, even you, the instructor, should be learning something during the class sessions.

### Assimilate for Application

IF . . . adults seek relevant learning that can be used now . . . THEN . . . I need to take class time to emphasize assimilation for application.

Knowles (1998) and others (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982; Johnstone & Rivera, 1965) indicate that adult students are fairly pragmatic. They seek knowledge and skills for immediate use. Therefore, setting aside a portion of the class each week to discuss practical application of the academic content is crucial. For some subjects, application is obvious and straightforward. For other courses, we must put a great deal of effort in making sure the content is being assimilated by the student in a practical fashion, not just recorded down in a notebook.

Most ADCPs have a capstone project that is specifically designed to incorporate the sum total of the student's learning experiences into a very practical way. Even some of the final projects for the individual courses are geared towards immediate application. Nevertheless, we must not neglect the week-by-week assimilation for application. At the end of each class session, we should be challenging the students to ask themselves "What can I take away from this session and use this week?" And we should be following up with them the next week to see if they were able to assimilate and apply something from the previous week's material. In one of the courses I teach, I have the class meet in small groups at the end of each night and identify possible ways in which they can apply the material we covered that night. Then, the next week, they meet in the same small groups at the beginning of the evening and share how their attempts at application went.

The means by which we can encourage assimilation for application are numerous. As mentioned above, accountability groups and final projects that require application are excellent methods. The key factor in these methods is that they call for actual application in a real life situation that the student is involved in at the moment. Small group activities, role play, or case studies can be somewhat effective as they at least challenge the students to think about ways in which they can assimilate the content material with the goal of future application.

### Time's Up

Our time is up. Class is over. But hopefully you have been able to redeem the time you had available and were able to facilitate the learning process for the adults in your ADCP class. You refrained from the impulse to teach the textbooks because you knew the students grasped the bulk of the material through the independent work assigned. Instead, you concentrated on assessing their comprehension of that material and answering the questions that they raised about it. You used some of your class time to analyze the alternative viewpoints that were possible on one of the concepts under consideration, and you augmented their independent work with additional activities and resources, just to make sure you were reaching all the different learning styles present. Finally, you emphasized the fact that the goal of their study was not just more knowledge to be stowed away for a future time, but that it is knowledge that can be assimilated for immediate application.

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Granted, making the grade as an ADCP instructor is not easy. But I believe you will find that, the more you strive for all 'A's in your ADCP classroom, your students will likewise see a marked improvement in their accomplishments in your course.

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## ACTIVITY

Although the terms may be new or different, most of us already include the seven “goals” listed above in our classroom time. Granted, not all seven will be seen in each class session. But sometime during the five-week module, you will probably be incorporating all seven.

Pick just one course you teach in our program and send me, electronically or otherwise, examples of how you currently utilize at least one learning technique for each of the seven class-time goals listed (see examples below). If there are any of the seven goals that you currently don't cover, then briefly (one short paragraph) describe how you might be able to incorporate a learning technique to accomplish that goal.

Example: Evangelism and Discipleship

1. Assign Homework: I allow the students time each week to ask me any questions they have about next week's independent study assignment to make sure they understand it (i.e. questions & answers).
2. Assess Comprehension: We utilize the Role Play outlined on page 5 of the Faculty Handbook to assess the student's understanding of the use of their personal testimony in a witnessing situation. At other times I use oral quizzing to make sure they understood the reading assignments.
3. Ask Questions: We have a question and answer time at the end of each week for the students to ask questions about anything we did not cover or that they did not understand.
4. Analyze Alternative Assessments: Besides the extra readings in the Student Handbook, I give the students the attached article (handout) to expose them to an alternative viewpoint on methods of evangelism.
5. Augment with Additional Activities & Resources: During Week Three we access two different web-sites ([www.whatever.org](http://www.whatever.org) and [www.whereever.org](http://www.whereever.org)) to see how they are using the web as an evangelistic tool.
6. Allow Adequate time for Student Input: The curriculum includes at least one class discussion time each night. One that I find extremely beneficial is found on page 17 of the Faculty Guide. I use this one each time I teach the course.
7. Assimilate for Application: At the end of each class night, I give the students ten minutes to write out one specific application they can glean from the class session. I emphasize that their application should be Personal, Practical, Possible, Provable and able to be accomplished within the next week or two. They then share their application with at least one other individual and spend time praying for each other that they might be able to follow through with that application. In subsequent class sessions, they can hold each other accountable to see if they followed through with their applications.

