

January, 2020

## Lessons in Teaching Undergraduates, Part One

Andrew Pegoda began teaching History in 2007. As a part of his blog, in *Inside Higher Education*, he offered some lessons he has learned through teaching undergraduate students (2013). We would like to share some of these lessons with you. It is our thought that these lessons might confirm some feelings and ideas you have had while teaching or they might be instructive in helping you learn more about yourself and your students.

- **Teaching is about learning.** Faculty learn best when they teach. They learn about the content they are teaching and they learn about their students. This learning is a rich and satisfying experience.
- **Knowing adult learning theory is essential.** Late adolescent brains are still developing and require certain teaching methodologies so that student learning can be broad and deep. It is therefore essential to connect the student's lives as they live today with the material being taught. As Pegoda says, "Adult learners must also see the relevance of a class and a lesson to be successful, and they must have active, hands-on lessons."
- **Getting students to your office hours is difficult.** Students are often scared or intimidated by their professors so they tend not to attend office hours, even when they need help. To solve this problem, it is helpful to arrive early to class and talk to your students. Let them get to know you. Be visible in the dining areas on campus and talk to your students when you see them. You might find that by investing a few hours of your time at the start of the semester, you will cease to be lonely during your office hours!
- **Students, especially freshmen, do not truly understand what is expected of them.** After having spent some thirteen years of their lives in public schools, many students have had critical thinking and analytic skills wired right out of them. And, much of the information they have learned, has to be unlearned. To help them overcome such problems, faculty need to create opportunities for better learning to help them unlearn and then relearn. This can be done by following the next piece of advice.
- **Make your course challenging.** If your course is "hard," you will find that your students will rise to the occasion. They actually like to be challenged and in doing so they will come to class prepared, they will complete their assignments, and they will put more work into the class. If you find that your students begin to struggle, you can back off a little. Importantly, your class focus should be on learning.
- **Create as many low-stake learning assessments as possible.** College is about learning and it is difficult to assess successful learning by offering only two exams. Therefore, it is important to offer as many low-stake assignments as possible. This can be accomplished through a series of quizzes, book reviews, writing prompts, etc. Pegoda says, "Assignments are best when they are active – that is, they involve a mixture of reading, writing, speaking, listening, and moving, as they have to use their full senses. Assignments require a mixture of recall, application, and synthesis with fun and creative prompts. Using new and creative assignments every semester almost completely eliminates the opportunities for plagiarism." And remember, not every assignment needs to be graded. By simply completing assignments, students can earn credit.

More words of wisdom from Pegoda continue in Part Two on the next page.

The Office of  
**Adjunct Faculty &  
 Academic Support  
 Programs**

### Adjunct Faculty Academic Calendar

#### January:

- 13 Classes Begin
- 10-17 Late Registration
- 17 Last Day to Withdraw with a 100% Refund
- 20 MLK Day, No classes
- 21-24 Late Course Adds (only if already registered)

#### Workshops:

- 8 Echo 360: Introduction  
 11:00 AM Z 115
- 10 Canvas: Quizzes & Surveys  
 1:00 PM Z 115
- 21 Canvas: New Gradebook  
 10:00 AM Z 115
- 28 Lifesize Cloud  
 10:30 AM Z 115

Register for these and other workshops at: [svsu.edu/workshops](http://svsu.edu/workshops)

Welcome to a New  
 Decade, New Year  
 and New  
 Semester!  
 Make it great!

## Lessons in Teaching Undergraduates, Part Two

- **Cover everything in your syllabus.** Given that our students have become "classroom lawyers," Pegoda says, it is very important that faculty clearly outline all of their expectations and rules for class. Faculty should always include any exceptions they might have. He states that, "A detailed syllabus can also save time and stress, as students can consult the syllabus for course information." (We would also like to add, that once you set a rule and publish it in your syllabus, you should stick to it. Otherwise you might be leaving yourself open to a grievance).
- **Quizzes guarantee that students will be on time and prepared.** Pegoda learned that once he implemented quizzes in his course, his students began to arrive on time and they actually started to complete their reading assignments!
- **Discussions and activities are essential to learning.** Edgar Dale, who is credited with developing the *Cone of Learning*, outlined the importance of active student engagement (1946). Later, others took his Cone and tied the following quotation to it: "Students remember 10% of what they read, 20% of what they hear, 30% of what they see, 50% of what they see and hear, 70% of what they see and write, and 90% of what they do." Your goal in the classroom is to engage all of your students' senses so that deep learning will occur. Music, art, role playing, group work, writing prompts, and kinesthetic activities are all excellent ways to engage your students and help them learn.
- **Don't waste time policing cell phones.** If you think about it cell phones are mainly small computers that can be used in instruction to produce a more purposeful learning environment. Have your students use them to look up/*Google* new words or ideas. Have your students use them so that you can poll what they know or don't understand (see Polleverywhere.com). Turns out that cell phones can be a valuable learning tool!
- **It is okay to sit during class.** Pegoda found that by sitting during class promoted a freer, more equitable learning environment that facilitated better discussion.
- **Students will disappoint and surprise us.** One of the things we must remember as faculty is that we love learning. We love exploring. We love what learning does to us. Problem is, a lot of students don't hold that same passion. Many of the courses we teach are general education courses which some students feel are a waste of their time! To them, making the grade is what is important. As well, some of our students are ill prepared to complete your course. Others, might have been straight "A" students in high school who fall off the edge of the cliff during their first semester. BUT then there are those who will work really hard, do the stretching, and, as a result, will make progress as the semester continues. Regardless of the kind of student we encounter in class, it is important to remember it is our role as faculty to help each be successful regardless of their motivation.

You might be able to add to this list. We didn't include all of the lessons in this newsletter so feel free to access his blog at the address below.

### References:

Dale, E. (1946). The cone of experience. *In audio-visual methods in teaching* (pp. 37-51). New York: Dryden Press.

Honeycutt, B. (2013, March 25). Looking for Flippable Moments in Your Class. *Faculty Focus*. Accessed from: <https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/blended-flipped-learning/looking-for-flippable-moments-in-your-class/>

Pegoda, A.J. (2013, July 19). Nineteen Lessons I Have Learned About Teaching Undergraduates (so far). *Inside Higher Education*. Accessed from: <https://andrewpegoda.com/2013/07/19/19-things-ive-learned-about-teaching-undergraduates-so-far/>