

Syllabus Construction: Part Two Classroom Policies and Procedures

A viral article, passed around on *Facebook*, discusses one professor's expectations for student behavior in the classroom. Professor Scott Galloway of New York University offered advice to a student who entered his class 60 minutes late. Apparently, this student was sampling classes offered at six o'clock on this day. Galloway's class was this student's last sample; consequently, the student showed up 60 minutes late. Galloway, kicked this late student out of class acting in concert with the course policies he had just finished discussing. In response to the late student's email explaining why he was 60 minutes late, Galloway eviscerated this student with a jaw dropping email. In the email Galloway essentially told the student to get real (in terms that cannot be repeated here) and to get the easy things right...like showing up for class on time, having respect for institutional expectations and manners. Galloway goes on to say that if students can't get the easy things right, they will find it difficult to get the hard things right later in life. These hard things include working long hours, navigating workplace politics, and creating a healthy work/life balance. Like it or not, many of our students need to learn that there are boundaries, behaviors and policies that should be respected in the college classroom. So how do faculty, like Professor Galloway create these?

An article in the *Chronicle* (2011) offers a list of suggestions which might help you think about how you will create the policies and procedures for your next syllabus. These suggestions are:

1. Do not create policies you cannot enforce.
2. Decide what behaviors you can tolerate.
3. Think of the victims- many rules are simply created because some behaviors annoy us not because they prevent student learning.
4. Consider the consequences.
5. Understand the big picture- what are the rules and regulations held by the University? Is it okay to snatch a cellphone out of a student's hand?
6. Stick to the biggies-the author recommends that the fewer the rules the better but make certain that you do include disruptive classroom behaviors (like coming to class 60 minutes late) and academic honesty.
7. Make whatever policies you expect to be observed explicit. Publishing the rules isn't enough, they need to be thoroughly discussed on the first day of class and refreshed throughout the semester.
8. Be consistent- faculty must enforce their policies, regardless of the consequences.

Hopefully whatever policies and procedures you decide upon, your students will get real and respect the "easy things." Such will prepare these college students to be ready for the "hard things" life has to offer.

References:

Jenkins, R. (2011, December 13). The rules about rules. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. <http://chronicle.com/article/The-Rules-About-Classroom/130048/>
 Simones, Mariana. (2013, April 11). NYU stern professor's advice to student: Get your s**t together. *Business Insider*. <http://www.businessinsider.com/nyu-professor-scott-galloways-email-2013-4>

Adjunct Faculty Academic Calendar

<u>6/26</u>	Summer Classes End
<u>6/28</u>	Summer Classes Begin
<u>6/30</u>	Spring Grades due to Registrar by noon

Workshops

<u>6/18</u>	Getting the Most out of Outlook, Tips & Tricks 11:00 AM Online
<u>6/22</u>	Adobe Premier Rush Video Editing 2:00 PM Online
<u>6/23</u>	Echo 360: Engage Students with the Active Learning Platform 1:00 PM Online

**Register for these and other
workshops at:
svsu.edu/workshops**

Teaching Tip: Remember to Review

It is really helpful to students if you take the first few minutes of class time to review what was covered in the last class, as well as, salient points covered in the readings that were due and any other assignments. Such discussions get the students' heads into the class and prepared to learn new material!

How Prior Knowledge Can Help or Hinder Learning

What is the first image that comes to mind in association with the word, “cardinal”? What did you think of? Was it the St. Louis Cardinals, a Vatican Conclave, *Cardinalis cardinalis* in the family *Cardinalidae*, or the SVSU mascot? In asking this question, one important piece was missing. That piece is context. In the absence of context whatever association you made was based on prior knowledge. As faculty, we need to be aware of our students’ prior knowledge, good or bad, and understand that students need context in order to interpret new knowledge. Prior knowledge influences a student’s ability to learn as new knowledge is built upon what is already known and this prior knowledge influences her perception of new information.

Prior knowledge and learning

In our classrooms, students are bombarded with the jargon that is embedded in our disciplines. When presented with this jargon, or terms and concepts, students may not have the prior knowledge necessary for learning to occur. This then creates a situation where our students’ ability to digest the new material is hampered. Just imagine a student in a sociology course where such terms as rationality, *Gemeinschaft*, or functionalism are thrown around. The student having never had a sociology course might have no idea what these concepts mean. So, after listening to the professor lecture for fifteen minutes this student might begin to feel ignorant which is certainly not the intent. This is an important consideration because students in such situations might turn you off and eventually fail.

Good or faulty prior knowledge

Students in possession of good or valid prior knowledge, when employed in context, can create rich connections allowing new information to be hooked to existing knowledge. However, students in possession of faulty knowledge might have to unlearn to learn. This means that facts and truths always need to be presented, in either case, to allow the new information to be absorbed.

What can I do as an instructor do to help students learn?

It is helpful for faculty to begin by learning what prior knowledge your students possess in relation to your course and its content. Some questions to consider are: “What are their common experiences? Are they all from similar backgrounds, similar environments? How will that affect the way they interpret the content? Do they have common aspirations or goals? What does this tell you about the prior knowledge they will bring to class?” (Svinicki, 1993). You might consider starting each class with a pre-test to gauge your students’ prior knowledge. You can also intentionally use prior knowledge to get your students’ heads in the game. You can do this by reviewing what was done in the last class or by going over the latest reading assignment. In introducing new ideas, give examples from pop-culture or relevant news, as means of pulling out knowledge they might already possess. Try to tell a story and link it to the presentation of new knowledge. As you do this, also be mindful to check for faulty prior knowledge so that it won’t detract from learning.

The lesson

Our students do not enter our classrooms as blank slates. They bring with them a body of experience. It is our job to try to connect these experiences to new information by providing context. In understanding this and intentionally trying to create that linkage, our students can succeed.

Reference:

Svinicki, M. (1993-1994). What they don’t know can hurt them: The role of prior knowledge in learning. *Essays on Teaching Excellence-Toward the Best in the Academy* 5 (4). Accessed from: <https://grad.uic.edu/uic-ta-handbook-what-they-dont-know-can->