

# Instilling a Desire to Learn: The Importance of a Well Designed Course

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**Abstract** A Chinese proverb says, “*Teachers open the door, but you must enter by yourself.*” My goal as an educator is to inspire students to enter by instilling a desire to learn and think critically. To achieve this, I strive to (1) have well designed courses, (2) use a variety of tools and techniques, (3) include practical applications of theory, and (4) lead the students by example.

A well designed course provides the foundation from which students structure their learning. The course must have clear objectives, a well thought out timeline for achieving those objectives, and creative ways in which the content is engendered in students. I begin my courses with the big picture overview, and then dive into the details using a variety of methodologies. I end the course by reiterating the big picture. My goal is that the students leave the course not only inspired and curious about the area and its overall relationship to business, but also with numerous, practical tools they can apply.

Because students have different learning styles, I vary the tools and techniques in my classes. This also creates engagement in the class. Although I include traditional teaching methods (e.g., lectures, presentations, class discussions, readings, cases, exercises, videos, guest speakers), I constantly innovate trying new methods. Some which have been very successful are: current events discussions at the opening of class each week which relate to the overall class topic (e.g., market research), debates (e.g., the ethics of marketing experiments), a workshop approach in learning software (e.g., Qualtrics, SPSS), “pair and share” feedback among the students as they develop and implement their course project, having the students prep and lead the class (e.g., structured around a case or a reading), and building prototypes (e.g., designing structures as they apply experimentation concepts).

I feel it is critical for students to leave the course having applied the theories they have learned to practical applications. This engrains the experience in students by bringing the learning to life. Each course I teach has a semester long project in which the student has to apply the course concepts. Although I let the students determine the project, it must have a managerial focus which is practical and applicable.

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I also have the students present their work to the class so they have the opportunity not only to do the work, but to evaluate, critique and provide feedback on other student's work. Doing this encourages students to think critically, ask questions, and drill down not only on their own projects but also on those of their classmates. I apply a similar model with cases and current event discussions. Encouraging and applying this critical thinking throughout the course is a cornerstone of their learning. It increases student responsibility for learning and pushes students to deeper levels of analysis. I also frequently cold call on students as it forces them to always be prepared and engaged in class discussions.

Finally, to inspire excellence in my students, I lead by example. I am always prepared, organized and enthusiastic. I also create a personal connection with each student by asking them to share their background and some fun facts about themselves with me in an email. I respond to each of these emails cementing that personal connection which subsequently helps in engaging and motivating them. I am always available to my students. I arrive at class early and stay late so that students can chat with me. I also respond quickly to their emails, and will meet with them whenever they request. Finally, I do an extensive evaluation of the student's end of the semester course feedback. I make notes of what worked and what didn't. I then come up with a plan for how I can change and improve for the future.

This dedication and structured approach has resulted in courses which students will comment have changed their way of thinking. It is a joy for me to be able to engage with students in this manner.

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