

# Wharton Instruction Checklist

Instruction is a highly personal endeavor, and no one is mandating a particular approach. However, these *checklist* items are intended to be widely applicable to instruction at Wharton, representing a consensus on best practice. Also included are *suggestions* that some, but not all, instructors have found useful.

## Pedagogical Approach and Course Design

- Can you list the learning objectives for your course?
- Do you know the ways in which attending your class sessions leads to better and possibly more efficient learning than reading a textbook?
- Have you included in your course relevant results from your research and/or from that of others? What can you give your students that they can't get elsewhere?

*Suggestions some have found helpful:*

- Teach a mock first class with the Communications Program staff. (Contact Lisa Warshaw to arrange – warshawl@wharton)
- To get new ideas for your own teaching, ask a colleague if you can observe one or more of his or her class sessions. You may get ideas about leading class discussions, responding to student questions, concluding the class session, etc.
- Assess the fraction of examples and cases in your course that are set outside the U.S. (Even though most concepts are not specific to a geographic setting, students value a global context.)
- For core courses, reach out to the academic reps in each cohort and ask if there are any particular cohort dynamics you should know about.

## Syllabus, Calendar, Course Materials, and Information Technology

- Is your syllabus completed and available on line at <http://syllabi.wharton.upenn.edu> at least two weeks before the start of class?
- Does your syllabus contain each suggested item in the *syllabus template* (or do you have a good reason for omitting an item)? The syllabus template is available on the Faculty Tools page at <http://inside.wharton.upenn.edu/faculty/>
- Does your syllabus state your learning objectives explicitly?
- Have you communicated liberally and redundantly your policies on collaboration and on what resources students may use in completing graded work?
- Do you know if any of your cases or readings is used in other courses likely to be taken by your students? (You may search by keyword at <http://syllabi.wharton.upenn.edu> )
- Have you carefully considered each reading in your syllabus and clearly indicated if it is required or optional? Are you explicit in the syllabus about which readings/materials/exercises must be prepared before class and which are either optional or may be completed at any time.
- In your course pack, have you “branded” with the school identity any materials developed or published at Wharton?

- Well in advance of the start of the semester, have you selected a “learning management system” platform (e.g., Canvas) and requested of Wharton Computing how you wish for it to be set up?
- If you wish to have lunches with students under the Faculty-Student Meals Program, have you provided for sign-up (your IT person can arrange this)?
- Do you have a plan for when and how you will grade assigned work and for when/how you will provide feedback? Have you reserved capacity to get this done in a timely fashion?
- Have you arranged for recording grades in Canvas?
- If teaching a core course, have you coordinated due dates of major assignments with the instructors of other courses offered at the same time?

### **First Day of Class**

- Did you describe your goals for the course?
- Did you take at least one action to engage students (e.g., a puzzle, a challenge, an experiential activity, a case discussion)?
- Did you introduce yourself, expressing enthusiasm for the opportunity to teach your class, while avoiding self-deprecating remarks about your abilities as an instructor? (Under no circumstances suggest that you are inexperienced, that you don’t know a lot about a topic, or that you are in any way unprepared to lead student learning. Remarkably, some highly capable instructors erode their authority in this way, possibly out of nervousness.)
- Did you spend a few minutes clearly articulating your expectations for classroom behavior? (Even if you are very clear about expectations in your syllabus, this investment of class time is probably warranted.) For instance,
  - May students use laptops and mobile devices?
  - May students eat in class?
  - Do you record attendance?
  - Are there consequences for lateness or early departure?
  - Do you use a seating chart?
  - Do you expect name tents to be used?
  - May students attend another section?

### **Each Class Session**

- Do you know the most useful, surprising, thought-provoking, and/or memorable point of the session? Did your students comprehend what it is?
- Did you refer to concepts that you developed earlier in the course? Did students experience how previously taught concepts are useful?
- Did you start and end on time?
- Did you communicate the agenda for the session? (This roadmap may be provided orally, on the board, or via a slide.)
- At the end of class, did you summarize where you’ve been and where you’re going?
- Did you reinforce with your behavior and actions the expectations you set on the first day?

- When seeking input from the class, did you call on different students, men and women, and include those who do not necessarily always volunteer?
- If you are grading attendance and/or class participation, have you recorded your grades in a reliable, timely fashion?
- Did you wait until the end of class to return any work (or return on line) to avoid disruptions at the start of class? Did you collect any work at the beginning of class (or on line) to allow students to concentrate during class?

*Suggestions some have found helpful:*

- Start each class session with a multiple-choice question (often simply posed with a Powerpoint slide) about the key issue you hope to address. This is particularly useful for subjects students may claim are “obvious.”
- Push and challenge students with respect to their positions, statements, and comments.
- If your TA attends class, ask him/her to provide feedback right after each session on what worked well, and on what did not work so well.
- If you require advanced preparation, then rely on that preparation in class.
- Cold call.
- Require submission of short responses to study questions on line before class, or use a brief on-line quiz before class. (Canvas makes it trivially easy to pose an on-line quiz that is self-grading.)
- Do not merely repeat the content of required reading in lecture format.
- Grade class participation.
- Ask students who are unprepared to flip down their name tent.
- Some good ideas on making class memorable: Chip Heath and Dan Heath, “Teaching that Sticks,” 2007. <http://heathbrothers.com/download/mts-teaching-that-sticks.pdf>
- On challenging students: Nicolaj Siggelkow, “Putting Students on the Hot Seat,” *Almanac*, October 12, 2010. <http://www.upenn.edu/almanac/volumes/v57/n07/tatl.html>

**During The Semester**

- Are you communicating with your words and actions that teaching is important to faculty at Wharton? The belief that “teaching doesn’t matter at Wharton” is one of the most corrosive threats to academic engagement.
- Are you fulfilling the expectations you set about the quality, extent, and timeliness of feedback on graded work?
- In providing feedback on graded work, are you including:
  - Reiteration of criteria, description of grading rubric.
  - Clear articulation of what the best work did that others lacked, preferably providing exemplars.
  - Description of common problems.
  - Information about grading distribution.
  - Credentials of TA if TA is grading (in a positive, not defensive, way).
  - What students should do if they have questions about their grades.

*Suggestions some have found helpful:*

- Solicit feedback from students prior to the mid-point of the course on (a) elements of the course that are effective, (b) elements of the course that are less effective, and (c) suggestions for improvement. If you gather feedback, take time in class to respond to it. (Many feedback mechanisms are possible, but a simple paper form works well.)
- Make notes to yourself, while the experience is fresh, for how you would improve your course the next time you teach it.

## **Exams**

*Suggestions some have found helpful:*

- Give exams back to students. Many students are infuriated by the logic that they can't have their exams back because instructors want to re-use questions. (If you must keep exams, do you provide ample opportunities for students to review their graded exams with a TA?)
- Don't re-use prior exams.
- To maximize learning, hand out the solutions to exams as students leave the exam room.
- Enforce rules about leaving an exam during the last N minutes.
- Use a web-based discussion forum (e.g., in Canvas) to post answers to questions posed to the instructor prior to the final exam.
- Provide lots of past exams and solutions, to the extent they are representative of what students can expect on their own exams.
- Plan review sessions that go over a specific framework or a prior exam, rather than merely responding to questions from students (as these questions are frequently highly person-specific, can hijack the conversation, and can be covered during TA sessions).

## **At End of Course**

- In your final grading, did you apply an absolute standard of performance in addition to complying with any maximum GPA constraints? That is, are you holding students accountable for learning the material in the course, not just for their performance relative to their peers?

### **About this Document**

These guidelines were compiled from the suggestions of many members of the Wharton faculty and staff. The original goal was to provide advice to new faculty. Some of the discussion associated with these guidelines can be found on the Wharton Brainstorm site at

<https://wharton.intuitbrainstorm.com/Idea.aspx?id=8125>

Any of the individuals who participated in that discussion would be happy to engage in further dialogue about these guidelines, or about teaching in general.

If you have ideas for improving these guidelines, please feel free to comment directly on the brainstorm site, or to send email to Karl Ulrich ([ulrich@wharton.upenn.edu](mailto:ulrich@wharton.upenn.edu)) who will integrate comments and edits.