20 Practical Teaching Tips for College Science Teachers: How to Get Off to a Good Start

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You have the advantage of being in command of the situation. You can set the direction and take the initiative in establishing a good learning atmosphere and expectations.

1 Prepare thoroughly. Be sure that you thoroughly know the subject matter you will be dealing with during the first few classes. You should write an outline specifying objectives, key concepts, and questions to ask students. Plan the strategy you will use for teaching that first class session. Students sense insecurity and lack of preparation. They will be testing you during the first few class sessions to establish whether or not you know the material. If they gain confidence in your subject matter competency you have taken a major step forward in establishing a positive learning atmosphere.

2 Tell students who you are. Tell students something about your background and special interests. A complete autobiography is not necessary, but you do want students to know that you are a real person, not just a talking statue.

3 Tell the students as much as you can about the course objectives and how you will conduct the class. Tell them about assignments, exams, grading, class procedures, and your expectations of them. Be sure to allow for flexibility. Let students know that you are receptive to suggestions and criticisms, and that you are willing to change course procedures when such changes seem reasonable. The essence of your approach should be to make your students aware that your procedures are intended to facilitate student learning.

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5 Inform students about any special rules or policies. For example, inform them as to what your policy is concerning class attendance, or handing in assignments on time, or making up missed exams. Informing students about such rules or policies early in the semester will usually bring about the desired behavior.

6 When you establish a policy or special procedure, explain the rationale to your students. Explain how the policy or procedure will help facilitate their learning. Students are usually more reasonable and adult-like in their thinking than you might imagine. If you don’t have a good rationale for what you do, then don’t do it.

7 Explain exams, grading, and other evaluation procedures very clearly, in writing, if possible. Grades are obviously of great interest to students. Inform them

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