

Spring 2019

Rewriting honors 300: Teaching for teaching assistants

Nina Schenk
James Madison University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/honors201019>

 Part of the [Curriculum and Instruction Commons](#), [Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Commons](#), [Educational Leadership Commons](#), and the [Educational Methods Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Schenk, Nina, "Rewriting honors 300: Teaching for teaching assistants" (2019). *Senior Honors Projects, 2010-current*. 712.
<https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/honors201019/712>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Honors College at JMU Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Senior Honors Projects, 2010-current by an authorized administrator of JMU Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact dc_admin@jmu.edu.

Rewriting the Curriculum for Honors 300: Teaching for Teaching Assistants

An Honors College Project Presented to
the Faculty of the Undergraduate
College of Arts and Letters
James Madison University

by Nina Wynne Schenk

May 2019

Accepted by the faculty of the Department of Anthropology, James Madison University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Honors College.

FACULTY COMMITTEE:

HONORS COLLEGE APPROVAL:

Project Advisor: Richard R. Lawler, Ph.D.,
Associate Professor, College of Arts and Letters

Bradley R. Newcomer, Ph.D.,
Dean, Honors College

Reader: Philip L. Frana, Ph.D.,
Associate Dean, Honors College

Reader: Rebecca E. Howes-Mischel, Ph.D.,
Associate Professor, College of Arts and Letters

PUBLIC PRESENTATION

This work is accepted for presentation, in part or in full, at Madison Union on April 6th, 2019.

Introduction

James Madison University's Honors College created a course titled Honors 100-Introduction to Honors in the Fall of 2014. This one-credit, pass/fail course was developed by honors students and faculty and was originally designed to emphasize exploration of self, and has transitioned to help all incoming first-year honors students to adjust to college academically and socially and learn more about what Honors is about and has to offer. Since its beginning five years ago, Honors 100 has advanced in terms of the content provided to students and how that content helps them transition to college-life. Using mainly the feedback from the Teaching Assistants (TAs)—upperclassmen honors students selected to co-teach sections of Honors 100 with approximately 10-15 students—the Honors College has been working to constantly improve the curriculum of this course. Honors 100 now primarily serves to help first-year students transition into college. Lessons about resources on campus, interacting with professors, learning about one's values, and researching one's major are embedded in the fifty-minute discussion-based classes that meet once per week. These topics were developed by a team of JMU honors students and faculty. The detailed lesson plans were then written by Jared Diener, Academic Advisor for the Honors College. Plans are then carried out by a pair of Teaching Assistants; partners were chosen by Honors College faculty based on schedule availability, experience (grade level and whether they had served as a TA before) and major. The Honors College faculty attempted to create a diverse and balanced pair. The pair met, often for the first time, the week prior to the first day of classes in the fall. The pair was required to create a plan for grading assignments, meeting outside of class to plan, and set up expectations of one another. Working with a TA partner also entailed sharing the floor within the classroom.

Along with this course came Honors 300: Teaching Honors for Teaching Assistants. Honors 300 is a course taught by Jared Diener, and Dr. Phil Frana, the Associate Dean of the Honors College. This 3-credit course meets once per week for an hour and fifteen minutes. Traditionally, students used this class period to discuss their experiences from their Honors 100 classes. Most of the class time is spent on reflection and problem-solving via discussion. Some years, the classroom has been arranged in a large circle. However, the past two years have been tables set in rows facing the front, with Dr. Frana and Jared facing the class. Towards the end of the semester, a group project is introduced. Every year The Project changes topic and can range from researching the mindsets of JMU Honors freshmen to researching the lack of diversity in Honors. The original purpose of this graded course was to provide an outlet for the Teaching Assistants to reflect on their experiences, share issues they may be confronting in their Honors 100 classes, and receive advice from their peers and honors faculty. Despite the growth that Honors 100 goes through every year, Honors 300 has remained relatively consistent in terms of design and purpose. However, Honors 300 was originally 1-credit, and is now a 3-credit course in total (1 for each section of Honors 100 and 1 for the weekly Honors 300 meeting). This course can now also serve as a credit for Honors students completing an Area of Emphasis—an opportunity to link Honors seminars in a two- or three-semester sequence to develop advanced knowledge and skills in leadership, research, creativity, global studies, or service that advance long-term personal goals and interests.

These transitions took place in part due to the transition of JMU's Honors Program to an Honors College. Overall, the Honors College has worked to improve these courses for their students every year and was excited about the prospect of my research to further their aspirations of constant advancement.

Purpose/Goals:

The purpose of this project is to rewrite the curriculum of Honors 300: Teaching Honors for Honors Students. After conducting research via survey and reading and analyzing works by Gonzales, Dallimore, and other university and pedagogy websites, meeting with organizations on campus, and getting feedback from other Honors TAs, the goal of my final project is to rewrite the Honors 300 curriculum and syllabus; this includes a restructuring of the TA selection and pairing process, a series of suggestions on training and orientation, and the recommendation for renaming the Teaching Assistants. I developed the following by consulting literature on pedagogy, classroom technique, and discussion facilitation and analyzing data from results from a survey sent to previous TAs, a focus group of previous TAs and individual interviews of previous TAs, which I will present below.

Methods:

Research included two articles by Jennifer Gonzales on classroom technique and pedagogy, a journal piece by Elise Dallimore et. al on classroom strategies, an article by The Teaching Center, a piece written by the University of Illinois, as well as the exploration of similar programs/courses at the following universities: Iowa State, Rutgers, and Duke.

The purpose of these resources is to accumulate a series of “best practices”—ideas, theories, activities, etc. that have been proven to assist in and be the most effective form for a classroom setting. In preparing for the potential addition of a professional development section to the Honors 300 course, I met with representatives from Learning Strategies Instruction (LSI), and a representative from Career and Academic Planning (CAP) at JMU.

To avoid a one-sided view of the TA experience, I created a survey that was sent to 103 previous TAs for the Honors 100 course. The questionnaire had a response rate of 33% (N=34) and included the following:

1. What is something (or multiple things) you wish you had known prior to becoming a TA?
2. What is something that would have improved your experience being a TA?
3. What was the most valuable part of your TA experience?
4. What was your biggest challenge when being a TA?
5. What do you think could be improved in the weekly TA class?
6. What support/training did you need to be more successful in your position?
7. What best practices did you use as a TA that could help future TAs?

The survey also included a list of potential professional development opportunities that respondents could choose from, as well as some identifying information (surveys were anonymous, though students were asked what year(s) they served as a TA, whether they approved of the use of their responses, and whether they would be willing to participate in a subsequent interview/focus group for which they had to provide an email address). Of those who responded, fifteen offered to participate in a focus group or interview. Four individual phone interviews were conducted, and one focus group with six participants.

In addition to the individual interviews with JMU Honors College alumni, I also conducted a focus group of seven students who have served as a teaching assistant for the Honors100 course. The purpose of the focus group and individual interviews was to collect a first-hand perspective and to assemble deeper responses and suggestions regarding the course. The questions that were prepared for this focus group are as follows:

1. How did your own TAs affect your Hon100 experience and influence you in becoming a TA? Did they make you feel more confident/prepared in being a TA?
2. If you were given a packet of information in the spring or early fall, what would you put in it? Of classroom activities that you would put in, what are some warm ups/ice breakers and other activities? What resources are you aware of on campus to help students?
3. How would you feel about structuring the class where the first half of the semester is built on partnership development, planning, pedagogy, etc. and the second part is focused on your professional/personal development as an upper classmen student? What suggestions would you have for this type of format? What would be most beneficial to learn about during the professional development section?
4. What is something you would say is an absolute must do on day 1, and what is absolutely something you must not do?

These varying data genres allowed me to gain a broader understanding of the perception of this first-year program while also gathering information to improve the experience for the Teaching Assistants.

Results

Universities

The JMU Honor College's Honors 100 and 300 courses are based off Iowa State's first-year seminar program.

"The First-Year Honors Seminar (HON 121H) meets twice each week in the fall semester. Each section is limited to 10-12 students and is led by two upper-class Honors

students. The purpose of the seminar is to help you become familiar with Iowa State, the Honors Program, and other Honors students. The seminar includes an explanation of university policies and procedures and their effects on first-year students, tours of various facilities at Iowa State, and discussions of individual and group educational goals.” (Iowa State Honors Program)

The main difference between Iowa and JMU is that Iowa State’s “Leaders” are entirely sophomores (JMU uses all upperclassmen).

In addition to Iowa, Rutgers University also has a program for first-year students taught by upperclassmen. The main difference between JMU and Rutgers is that JMU’s first-year program is Honors-specific, where Rutgers is campus-wide. Therefore, Rutgers’ program, with a total of 1637 students enrolled for the fall of 2018, is more than seven times larger than JMU’s (which held 218 students). I collected ideas for improving the TA selection process, as well as gathered in-classroom activities and resources in an interview with Susan Bennett, the assistant director for Rutgers’ First-Year Engagement. I also gathered topics covered in their Peer Instructor (equivalent to our TA) course to potentially implement at JMU.

Utah State offers a Teaching Fellows program to upperclassmen undergraduates; however, based on their position description, these students act more as TAs than Teaching Fellows. Although they are paid, the only difference in their role is the ability to have a faculty mentor. Despite this, I was able to use Utah State as an example for assessment—both by their mentor and for themselves. I drew on questions asked in their pre- and post- position survey to create my own questions.

Lastly, Duke University offers their doctoral students a chance to be a TA. Although these students are not necessarily comparable to undergraduates, a study they conducted of

“7,000 highly successful, award-winning community college teachers” with a total of 1,670 responses gave insight to the most important lessons for a teacher. I apply some of their findings in the discussion, as well as in the resources to be provided to TAs.

TA Survey

The survey was sent out to 103 previous-TAs and had a 33% response rate. Of the respondents, eight students served in 2014 and 2015, the first two years of Honors 100/300, twelve students served in 2016, eight in 2017 and nine in 2018. All 34 individuals' answers to seven open-ended questions could be broken down into the following nine themes:

flexibility/creativity, structure, communication with/working with a TA partner, organization/preparation, presentation/facilitation, training, feedback, impact on self and students, and The Project.

Flexibility/Creativity: This theme was primarily used in response to the pre-fabricated lesson plans the TAs were to implement in each class. They were created by Jared, the Academic Advisor to the Honors College, and were very detailed. TAs felt that the content wasn't always getting through to their students, and that they were pushing concepts they didn't believe were the most important aspect of a topic. They would like “a bit more flexibility with the assignments...some of the things that were assigned were not...important.” They wanted “more freedom” to be able to adapt to their classes and emphasize the most relatable and useful information for first-year students.

Structure: While some students asked for more freedom, others asked for more structure. This can be attributed in part to which year respondents served as a Teaching Assistant. For the most part, students who served in 2014 and 2015 asked for more structure in the lesson plans, as

Honors 100 was just starting out. Many felt they were “thrown into it” without much instruction. This was due, in part, to timeline. TAs are selected in April, right before class registration. Post-registration, there are numerous time conflicts to be fixed and worked around. Although respondents from more recent years felt overly structured in terms of lessons, many also felt unprepared to enter the classroom on day one. Respondents asked for “access to materials prior to the start of the semester,” and “would've liked to know how our first few weeks would be spent, and just what the overall structure would be like, by seeing plans ahead of time.”

Communication/Working with a TA partner: Most of these responses were in terms of the positive or negative experiences students had with their partners. They also stressed the importance of communication as the number one way to succeed in this position. “Creating a better dynamic with my TA partner would have improved my experience as a TA and I think would have contributed to a better experience for my students. While my partner and I worked well together, there was not always great cohesion in lesson planning and this creating some obstacles.” Respondents asked for another way to be paired aside from grade, major, and schedule-matching.

Organization/Preparation: Past TAs felt that the position took more of their time than they were anticipating and wanted to warn future TAs to stay on top of their planning. “Planning out how much time each portion of class is going to take” was a common response. Respondents urged future TAs to “schedule a weekly meeting with your co-TA and stick to that schedule” and reach out to Jared and Dr. Frana when making lesson plans.

Presentation/Facilitation: Many respondents felt this was the most difficult part of the job. They had not anticipated the lack of student participation and felt inadequate at being able to fill the space; they felt they lacked the proper skills to present a topic so that it is of interest to

their listeners and struggled with facilitating conversation. Respondents asked for “facilitation training...tools for generating conversation” “help with structuring class” and more “individualized coaching on how to facilitate a classroom” along with advice, tips, materials and lists of activities to help them with learning how to command a classroom.

Training: Most respondents asked to be better prepared for their position. The vast majority of TAs are not education majors, and would like to learn more about pedagogy, classroom techniques, and be more prepared come the first day of class.

Feedback: Students felt they did not know how they were doing due to the lack of feedback from the Honors College and from students. They wanted “feedback from students at the midway point instead of just the end” and “more observations of my class directly from supervisors.” They wished they could have received proper constructive feedback, so they could improve both their own and their students’ experiences.

Impact on Students: Respondents overwhelmingly stated this was the most rewarding piece of their experiences. They loved giving back to the community and helping students who were lost and had questions.

“The relationship with your students that grows throughout the semester. You can watch their confidence grow through the semester as they become more accustomed to campus and new challenging courses. I always got the most value by giving advice to students who were struggling with indecision about their major since I had similar challenges. I loved reassuring students there was no pressure to choose right away.”

They found they gained confidence in how much they had learned or grown since their own first year and felt this was the best part of being a TA.

The Project: The project is something the TAs overwhelmingly disliked. Although students mainly wrote about their feelings with the purpose of the project, it is possible students also did not enjoy working in such a large group. Recommendations for The Project are further detailed under Discussion.

Focus Group

Six previous TAs for Honors 100 participated in an hour-long focus group. These TAs ranged from serving in 2015 to 2018. Responses have been summarized for each question.

1. *How did your own TAs affect your hon100 experience and influence you in becoming a TA? Did they make you feel more confident/prepared in being a TA?*

Responses to this question were perfectly split between three answers (two students per answer). Two students said that they didn't like the "you'll figure it out" mentality that their senior TAs had. It created a tension and schism between seniors and freshmen. They felt the TAs did not take the course seriously, which filtered down to the students. They also felt that their TAs would openly argue with one another. Both respondents chose to apply to be a TA to fix these issues.

2. *If you were given a packet of information in the spring or early fall, what would you put in it? Of classroom activities that you would put in, what are some warm ups/ice breakers and other activities? What resources are you aware of on campus to help students?*

All respondents agreed that a code of conduct or list of expectations is important. They all agreed that TAs hold a unique role and need to be explicitly told how to walk the line of mentor, peer, and teacher. Students also said the mandatory reporting laws need to be explained in more detail, and before they begin their first day of class. Another common theme was how to

properly facilitate conversation; respondents wanted further training on ways to be effective, cold calling, and making connections outside of class with students to encourage them to participate in class. All six respondents had incorporated a “warm-up” or “emotional check-in” at the beginning of every class and would highly recommend making this a requirement.

- 3. How would you feel about structuring the class where the first half of the semester is built on partnership development, planning, pedagogy, etc. and the second part is focused on your professional/personal development as an upper classmen student? What suggestions would you have for this type of format? What would be most beneficial to learn about during the professional development section?*

The previous-TAs felt that goal setting and planning were essential to success, and valued the idea of having the first half of the semester dedicated to these topics. In terms of professional development, the TAs came up with fantastic ideas. They emphasized the importance of a capstone/thesis workshop, seeing as in the fall semester, no upperclassmen (unless the rare occasion of a December graduate) would have completed their project. After much discussion, the TAs came up with the following format for the second eight weeks of the fall semester. All eight weeks will have a pre-planned professional development topic (preferably regarding capstone/thesis work). TAs would be required to attend five of these eight. During the three weeks “off,” TAs would be required to spend this time “getting in hours” as a TA. For example, most respondents agreed that using the time to meet with students for a “coffee date” or check-in is beneficial not only for the students but for the TAs and the class as a whole. As another option, respondents suggested that the TAs use one week to meet with their capstone/thesis advisor. For sophomore students, this could be interviewing a professor in their major, or talking with a professor to get ideas for beginning their project. For juniors and seniors, this would be checking

in with their advisor on their progress. The TAs recommended using this one-time requirement as a way to build a mentorship with a faculty member.

4. *What is something you would say is an absolute must do on day 1, and what is absolutely something you must not do?*

Must:

- Answer questions about canvas and any other questions they may have (field question day)
- Start emotional check-ins
- Identify your position
- Set the tone for the class
- Learn every student's first name
- Go over hon 100 curriculum to know expectations
- Have self confidence
- Be honest, human, down-to-earth, vulnerable
- Be prepared (including opening all electronic materials ahead of time)

Must not:

- Let students overtake the class
- Be overly rigid
- Be unsure of yourself
- Bring baggage into class

Individual Interviews

Four individual interviews were conducted of JMU alumni who served as TAs for Honors 100; two of these were phone interviews and two were email. The respondents were asked the same four questions as in the focus group and yielded approximately the same results. There was little to no variance in the responses individually versus in the focus group. The TAs served in years 2014, 2015, and 2016. In summary, these interviews reemphasized the importance of finding the balance between teacher and friend in the TA role and using creativity and flexibility in planning. In addition, one respondent offered the idea that Honors 300 meet bi-weekly; the other three agreed with the new suggested set-up. One respondent offered the idea of teaching the TAs how to translate the TA experience into a resume or interview, which I have taken into consideration along with the information collected from Susan Bennett and Rutgers University.

Discussion

Based on the above results from the TA survey and the results from the focus group, I make several recommendations below.

I. Teaching Assistant Title

A teaching assistant is generally defined as an assistant to the classroom; they play a supporting role to the professor of the course in a variety of duties such as grading, review sessions, and proctoring. The teaching assistants for Honors 100 do much more than these traditional responsibilities. Teaching Assistants are responsible for running two sections of the Honors 100 course, without a professor present. Students are required to prepare for each class by reviewing lesson plans and organizing engaging activities. With another undergraduate

student referred to as a TA partner, these students facilitate the fifty-minute class, guiding discussion, answering questions, and commanding the classroom. Honors TAs are also responsible for taking attendance, grading assignments, and providing students with the opportunity to learn and grow in a unique environment. I therefore suggest changing the title of the Teaching Assistants.

Rutgers University, which has a comparable program where undergraduates are given the opportunity to run a classroom, refer to their students as Peer Instructors. Iowa State uses the term Leader. Utah State uses the term Teaching Fellow, which is the recommendation I make for JMU's Honors College. A Teaching Fellow is "an individual at a higher education institution, including universities, whose role involves teaching and potentially pedagogic research;" "teaching fellows teach entire courses." (Utah State) This distinction is important for the following reasons: 1) it establishes proper recognition to the work-load and skill required of the students; 2) it increases the perceived importance of the role the students play both to the students themselves and to the students they teach, and 3) it distinguishes between the role of a teaching fellow—someone who teaches their own classroom—and the role of a TA.

II. Professional Development Opportunities unrelated to the TA role during Hon 300

As mentioned earlier, I met with representatives from LSI and CAP at JMU. The purpose of meeting with these organizations was to learn about what they could offer to the TAs in terms of personal or professional development. LSI is an organization that helps mainly first-year students adjust to college. In our meeting we discussed what LSI has to offer; we agreed that inviting them to the TA class would be less of a professional development for the TAs, and more

of a way to spread the word about their resources to help students. Since the TAs have contact with twenty to thirty first-year students, LSI could help inform the TAs of what they have to offer and help to train TAs on how to provide some of this directly, or to pass the information on to their students. CAP is a center that offers a multitude of resources for students in all grades. They assist in career prep, search and planning, as well as provide academic resources. During our meeting we discussed their resources, and I invited them to potentially present multiple times to the TAs: once to teach about their resources so the TAs can pass it on to their students, and a second (and potentially third) time to help professionally develop the TAs by doing a workshop on resumes or interviewing.

III. Professional Development Opportunities related to the TA role during Hon 300

1. TA Partnership: Each TA is paired with another student, which helps to develop their sense of teamwork as well as responsibility. One of the most common responses to the survey and interviews was how individuals were affected by their TA partner (some good, some bad). To help develop this skill of teamwork and responsibility, I have built-in TA partner “bonding” days, or days in which the TA partners are given time to produce lesson plans together in person. Although in the past the TAs were told they are required to meet with their partner once per week and prior to every Honors 100 class they taught, this was not enforced, and often fell through the cracks as the semester progressed. By incorporating lesson-planning and TA partnership building into the Honors 300 curriculum, TAs are given the opportunity to learn and grow in a more regulated and consistent environment.

2. Lesson planning: TAs' planning and organizational skills continue to develop during the semester. However, students often felt they were "thrown into" the situation of making lesson plans without much guidance. At the same time, other students felt the lesson plans were too rigid, and did not allow the students to have much flexibility, creativity, or say in what they were presenting. By building in time during Honors 300 to learn how to create lesson plans, as well as time to make them, I have provided the opportunity for TAs to properly develop this skill, without the pressure of doing it outside of class time. In the syllabus (see appendix), I have dedicated an entire class period to work-shopping lesson plans. In addition, Dr. Frana and Jared will be circulating around during the first few weeks, helping students fine-tune their lesson plans and provide immediate feedback. Ideally, a handful of lesson plans (for example, for the first three weeks) would be due ahead of time, so they can be approved by the Honors faculty. This way students can also get feedback, while learning what does and does not work for their sections.

IV. TA Selection

Students who have been through Honors 100 often say that their class varied from that of their friends' in terms of content, discussion and learning outcomes. Most importantly, some students found the course ineffective, while others valued the lessons it taught. Since Honors 100 can have an important and lasting positive impact, it is important to highly consider the way in which the content is taught. Many students felt that their TA made or broke their Honors 100 experience. Based on personal experience as well as the best practices from Rutgers University, I

recommend a change in the TA selection process. When I first applied to be a TA, I answered a few questions online about why I want to be a TA. Selection for the year following included individual interviews. What was missing from these selection practices was a way to see how these students would behave and interact in the classroom; all honors students make great candidates because they are generally well-spoken and professional during interviews. However, in this unique position, we must remain relatable and less rigid so students feel comfortable asking us questions and participating in discussion. It is an essential skill to be comfortable speaking in front of peers, as well as knowing how to present information in a helpful and understandable way. I suggest adding an element of presentation to interviews. At Rutgers, candidates are required to make a five-minute teaching presentation on any topic of their choosing. According to Susan Bennett, who runs their FIGS (First-year Interest Group Sessions) program, this gives the sense of the candidate's teaching style, and allows for the interviewers to get a grasp on their strengths and weaknesses. For our Honors College, this is particularly helpful in 1. Deciding whether or not they are ready to take on this role and 2. Determining who their TA partner should be.

V. TA Partnering

Jared Diener and Dr. Phil Frana, the JMU Honors Faculty that run on Honors 100/300, have worked on pairing TAs based on the following criteria: 1) scheduling; 2) age older with younger); and 3) the major/area of study of each TA. Usually, scheduling takes precedent. However, the issue of TA partners failing or not being cohesive has come up multiple times. As an anecdote, here is a breakdown of my experiences for my three years as a TA:

I recommend one or more of the following:

1. Having students rank who they would like their TA partner to be. The partners would then be chosen by the Honors faculty. Many TAs apply not knowing other applicants, but the possibility for a pair of friends to select one another still exists. I recommend this option in conjunction with one or both of the following.
2. Having students rank who they would like their TA partner to be by filling out a form. The form would have a section for them to list their own strengths and weaknesses, and what they are looking for in a TA partner. The partners would then be chosen by the Honors faculty.
3. Including “speed dating” during the Spring Orientation where TAs meet one another and are prompted to discuss their work-ethic, teaching style, planning ethos, communication style, etc. TAs then rank who they would like to be paired with based of their interactions.

In addition to changing the pairing process, I also recommend imbedding TA “bonding” and lesson-planning time in the syllabus, which I mentioned earlier.

VI. Timing of TA Selection

I recommend, based off of TA alumni responses and best practices of other universities, moving the TA selection process as early in the spring semester as possible. My reasoning for this is mainly allowing time for the TAs to properly meet one another and make preferences for

their partners, as well as having time to require a Spring Orientation. The Spring Orientation would include but is not limited to:

- Housekeeping—going over roles and responsibilities, meeting TA partner and discussing goals
- Preparatory work on pedagogy/philosophy of teaching
- Brief outline of “what to expect” via feedback from past TAs
- Answering questions

Earlier selection also allows for the TAs to prioritize their assigned class times when they register for other classes. In the case of a mandatory class, this also gives the Honors College more time to work with scheduling to find the best solution possible.

VII. Classroom Space

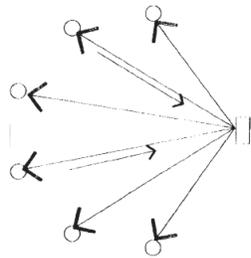
While researching classroom facilitation techniques, I discovered the importance of room layout. The architecture of a room can have a dramatic effect on the amount of participation from a crowd. In his article, *Classroom Design for Discussion-Based Teaching*, Michael O’Hare describes the issue with traditional classroom settings, where he says students easily ignore one another and “fall into two-way conversations with the teacher.” This becomes a huge problem in Honors 300, where conversation can easily be dominated by one pair of TAs, while the rest of the students do other work on their laptops. Often past TAs complain about the “vent sessions” that Honors 300 supports, and that the class felt like a waste of their time. Honors 300 has the potential to become a sort of think-tank—somewhere students can bring up problems and work together on a solution. Active engagement in the classroom for this course is critical and has

been lost in part due to the classroom space. For the past two years, we have been using a room in Keezel Hall—a room with long tables that seat four in rows facing the front blackboard. Every day at the start of class, we would shift the tables into a makeshift circle, where some desks would still be left in the center, and students would still be looking at the back of their peers' heads. This easily allowed for some students to opt out of conversation entirely, while others could dominate.

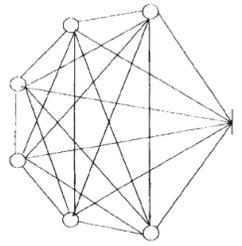
O'Hare lists several room layout options, including “the web,” (good) “the fan,” (not good) and “the horseshoe” (good). The web is similar to a circle. Unfortunately, some class sizes are too big for the circle; we can easily implement this set-up in the Honors 100 classes (which we do), but not so readily apply in Honors 300. Because the fan set-up is so comfortable and familiar, it is difficult to engage in active learning. Therefore, I recommend choosing a classroom with either a horseshoe set-up or a pod set-up. A pod set-up is where students sit in smaller circles in a room that has no designated “front.” Students must turn their chairs around to face different areas of the room. I researched classrooms on JMU's campus that could potentially allow for this type of environment. I found rooms in Madison Union, such as 256, which are already set up in a horseshoe shape. 306 and 404 are also potential horseshoe classrooms, while rooms 203, 206 and 304 hold 27-36 students (ideal for the 26 honors TAs and two professors there have been in the past). The bonus about Madison Union rooms is that they can be set up ahead of time, so as to not dig into class time. Duke Hall 2036 and 2039 are also great classrooms for discussion, due to their changeable/web-like design. Lastly, Harrison 102 would also serve Honors 300 well.

After discussing this issue with Dr. Frana and Jared, I was told that Madison Union becomes an issue because they aren't technically classroom spaces. Dr. Frana suggested I

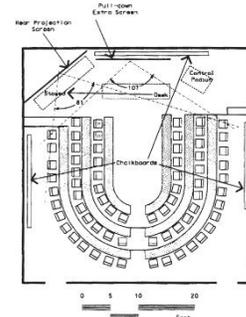
investigate rooms in the Student Success Center; rooms 4046 or 4043 would also work well for Honors 300. I recommend changing the classroom for the benefit of the TAs and the Honors 300 course overall.



Fan



Web



Horseshoe

VIII. Providing Feedback

TA alumni overwhelmingly argued that they did not learn as much as they could have because of the lack of direct feedback. The students were rarely observed in class, and many asked for a way to receive some constructive criticism to learn from their mistakes and create a better experience for the students in Honors 100. One way that I have embedded the concept of feedback into Honors 300 is through self-evaluation. Based off the practice from Utah State, I created a pre-TA self-evaluation form:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScz42mCBjs9nvzA4eyqpaolAKyxFOZax2I97QqlZBaB-uz5yg/viewform?usp=sf_link as well as a post-TA evaluation form:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSctmgCF4BTUSdZS-o3R-jUGGCw1gCeP_KRCyRJxuulW63tA3g/viewform?usp=sf_link

Pre-self-evaluation will help students realize what they can gain from their upcoming position, and post evaluation will help students understand what they have learned and how they have

grown. These evaluations will also help the Honors College highlight what students get out of this position, and what they are not being challenged with. This will also help the Honors College market and recruit new Teaching Assistants in the future by telling them what other students have gained from the position.

IX. Restructuring Class time

1. Get rid of The Project. The Project is something that has been a part of Honors 300 since the beginning—and has gotten mostly negative feedback. The Project was intended to put to use some of the best minds in the Honors College and have them work together on a collaborative project. This project could range from creating a document over 100-pages long about Honors 100, to researching mindsets in Honors Freshmen. The project has had some successes—including having a group of students attend a conference in Washington D.C. to present our class’s research. However, the majority of students found this to be a distraction, time consuming, and unrelated to their position as a TA.
2. Break the course into two main parts: I recommend the first few weeks of Honors 300 be used specifically to allow the TAs time to bond/work with their TA partner on constructing lesson plans, as well as giving the TAs a foundation on the basics of pedagogy. This first part of the course should also include discussion in small groups about issues the TAs may be facing in their first classes, so that the students can work together to figure it out. Should an issue not be solved within the small group, the issue can be brought to the entire group. During these discussions, Dr. Frana and

Jared should be walking around the room, participating in bits of each conversation. In addition, it is crucial to have the TAs understand some important resources that can proactively help first-year students in their transition. Towards the end of this half of the course, Dr. Frana and Jared would observe each TA partner in class and provide them with feedback during Honors 300. While this feedback is being discussed, other TA partners can work on their lesson plans.

The second half of the course should be designed to further developing the TAs as upperclassmen students at JMU, as well as citizens soon to enter “the real world.” Examples include but are not limited to resume-building and editing, learning how to use LinkedIn to find a job, learning about best practices for interviewing, and helping students develop their presentation skills, writing skills, etc. I recommend formatting the second half of the class with professional development opportunities for the TAs outside of their TA role.

3. Use activities suggested in the resource packet and other helpful discussion strategies in the Honors 300 course as an example for TAs to use in Honors 100. For example, Inkshedding is an activity where the TAs would have five minutes to write down the biggest challenge that they’re having in their class and then pass the paper to the closest person. That person writes some encouraging words, ideas, advice, etc. Typically pass it 2-3 more times so that when students receive their paper back they have lots of insights from various members of the class. TAs can then use this activity as a warm-up in Honors 100; it is both effective in having everyone share, and a change from the standard/expected “highs and lows.”

X. Lesson Plans

I recommend providing a general topic for each week with required assignments and allowing the TAs the opportunity to invent their own lesson plans, readings, activities, and discussion points. As an example, traditionally Honors 100 has had two weeks where we focus on professors; in these weeks' students learn the difference between Associate, Assistant, adjunct, etc. as well as learn the importance of using office hours, Ratemyprofessor.com, etc. Rather than having a lesson plan fully developed for the TAs, I recommend prescheduling which week will be used to discuss Professors, and having TAs introduce the "Interview a Professor" assignment, but giving them the freedom to choose what other materials and details they relay to their students from their experiences. I have built in time for this in the first few weeks of the semester so that the TAs can make lesson plans under the advising of Dr. Frana and Jared. This will also keep some of the pressure off of the TAs to meet outside of class, which can ultimately result in no meeting at all.

XI. Professor Week(s)

Honors 100 usually holds two weeks dedicated to discussing the student's professors, including their roles, their importance, how to talk to them, etc. I recommend the Honors College creating or asking previous TAs to create a list of tips on how to talk to professors. According to the TAs in the focus group, students in the Honors 100 courses I have taught, and personal experience, some students find it is both difficult and uncomfortable to walk into a professor's

office hours with nothing to say. Creating a list of tips or advice would be beneficial to encourage this communication.

Conclusion

My hope for this project is to develop Honors 300: Teaching for Teaching Assistants from a course that is reactive and retrospective to one that is proactive and empowering. The course began as Honors Faculty helping TAs help first-year students by providing them with a script; my proposal has Honors Faculty helping TAs help first-year students by providing them with the tools and confidence to succeed independently. The course content will move from reflection, discussion, venting, trouble-shooting, problem-solving, logistics and housekeeping to training, empowering, and building of transferable skills.

Each of my recommendations serve a purpose to help reach this result. For example, Honors 300 currently lacks a training module. Using the feedback from past TAs and research on classroom pedagogy, training will be mandatory in the spring semester prior to teaching. This allows for less time wasted during the class in the fall “putting out fires” that could have been prevented with proper training and knowledge.

As another example, the Honors 300 classroom is currently not conducive for the class format; it is not remotely like the Honors 100 experience it is supposed to lead. The new Honors 300 will be held in Madison Hall, room 2001: a wide-space area with easily moveable tables and chairs to better fit the discussion-based course. As an extension of classroom space, Honors 300 will now reflect Honors 100 in other ways. Honors 300 will develop upperclassmen students, give them time to learn more about what it means to be in Honors (for example, focusing on their Capstone projects), and provide them with tools necessary to complete the rest of their

undergraduate career. Honors 300 will implement activities and discussions that can be simplified and brought to Honors 100.

The experience of the Honors 300/100 pair is a unique prospect. James Madison University's Honors College is implementing a program not commonly adopted by other universities. This course offers an opportunity for upperclassmen Honors students to gain the skills and knowledge required to facilitate weekly discussion. The tools attained result in the development of these individuals as students, professionals, and citizens. The Honors 300 course challenges these mentors to prepare, plan, and present to benefit those with less experience.

Appendix

- I. Syllabus (pp 12-14)
- II. Resource Packet (pp 15-21)

HON300: TEACHING FOR TEACHING FELLOWS

Course Information

HON300
Teaching for Teaching Fellows
3 credit hours
Class # 72896
Fall Semester, 2019
Friday 10:10am-11:25am
Location: Madison Hall 2001

Instructor Information

Instructor: Jared Diener, Dr. Phil Frana
Office: Hillcrest 104, Hillcrest 204
Office hours: Open door policies, but to schedule a meeting contact Dianne Fulk at fulkde@jmu.edu
or 540-568-6953.
Email: dienerjl@jmu.edu, franapl@jmu.edu

Course Goals and Course Content

The goal of this course is to train and prepare you to serve as Teaching Fellows for the Honors 100 course. You will be participating in full-classroom discussion with other TFs, as well as engaging in planning with your TF partner. Meetings will be held throughout the semester with Jared and Dr. Frana to answer questions and ensure you are on the right track. The Teaching Fellow position is a unique experience to guide your own classroom and learn to facilitate discussion. You will have a large impact on first year honors students, and will serve as a mentor to them. This course will give you the tools you need to feel confident in your position. It will also provide you with lessons to help further yourself as an honors student: what are your goals? What do you need to work on personally or professionally? As an upperclassmen honors student, are you prepared for “the real world”? What are questions that you still have for Honors or for JMU in general? How can we help you succeed?

Required Texts

There is no required textbook for this course. You will be required to read the book James Madison by Richard Brookhiser over the summer in preparation for the trip to Montpelier. You must also complete readings on the canvas site required of students prior to class, and in order to create lesson plans.

Attendance

Attendance is required and will be recorded at each class. In case of emergency, such as illness, please notify your instructor prior to missing class. After two absences, you will need to conference with the instructor. Students who do not fulfill these obligations may receive a failing grade and be removed from the class. Unless otherwise announced in class or on the JMU website, students should assume that classes will meet. See JMU’s inclement weather policy at <http://www.jmu.edu/JMUpolicy/1309.shtml>.

Participation and comporment

Your responsibilities as a contributing member of this class and community: You have a responsibility to come prepared for class, ready to contribute to the discussion and activities. You have a responsibility to be open to the ideas and opportunities offered in this class. You have a responsibility to be respectful of your peers, your instructors, and any guest speakers. We can do so much more together than we can do separately. You have a responsibility to do you very best in the

pursuit of understanding the philosophies of higher education as it pertains to your own growth and development. You have a responsibility to appropriately voice any concerns and questions that pertain to the contents of this class. You have a responsibility to appropriately agree to disagree with others. You have a responsibility to take what you learn here and apply it to your education here at JMU.

Student Conduct

James Madison University affirms its commitment to academic integrity and expects all members of the university community to accept shared responsibility for maintain academic integrity. Penalties for academic misconduct in this course may include a failing grade on an assignment, a failing grade in the course, or any other course-related sanction the instructor determines to be appropriate. Continued enrollment in this course affirms a student's acceptance of this university policy. The JMU Honor Code is available from the Honor Council Website: <http://www.jmu.edu/honor/code.shtml>.

Evaluation and Grading

You are required to take four hourly exams and one cumulative final exam. The four hourly exams will each count for 20% of your final grade. Each hourly exam is NOT cumulative. The cumulative final exam counts for 20% of your final grade. The exams cover material presented in lecture and any additional material from films, guest lectures, etc.

In short, your grade is based on the following:

Four hourly exams: 20% of your final grade (20% each) (50 questions on each exam—no significant digits)

One cumulative final exam: 20% of your final grade (80 questions on final—two significant digits)

Registration:

Students are responsible for registering for classes and for verifying their class schedules on MyMadison and Canvas. The deadline for adding/dropping a fall semester class through MyMadison without instructor and academic unit head signatures is September 9, 2019. By September 12, 2019 instructor and academic unit head signatures are required to add a class for Fall 2019. No exceptions will be made to these deadlines.

Note to Disabled Students

Any student who is learning, sensory, or physically disabled, and feels that he or she needs special assistance with any of the work in this course should contact the instructor. The first couple of weeks of the semester are the best time to do this. Faculty will hold all such matters in confidence. If you need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability, you should contact the Office of Disability Services (Student Success Center, suite 1202, www.jmu.edu/ods, 540-568-6705)

Inclement Weather and Religious Observances

If classes are canceled due to inclement weather I will make adjustments to the course schedule to include any material that is missed; this may include using an officially designated "make-up day." The official JMU "bad weather" policy is here: <https://www.jmu.edu/osarp/about/inclement-weather.shtml>. You can also log on to the JMU Homepage and weather information is updated there. If you have a religious holiday that you need to attend please let me know and I will accommodate you.

Privacy and Confidentiality

Please see the JMU Title IX website for details regarding Title IX: <https://www.jmu.edu/access-and-enrollment/titleIX/index.shtml>

Please see the JMU FERPA website for rules and regulations on privacy and confidentiality:
<https://www.jmu.edu/registrar/FERPAOutline.shtml>

Schedule

WEEK 1

F Aug 30 First day of class—review of class structure, TF partner activity, lesson planning workshop/preparation for first week of Hon100

WEEK 2

F Sep 6 Small group discussion on first week of classes, classroom facilitation techniques/activities (including someone from the libraries coming to present on assessing student work), preparation with TF partner for week two of Hon100

WEEK 3

F Sep 13 LSI Presentation

WEEK 4

F Sep 20 Small group discussion on second week of classes, campus resources lecture, groups of TF partners discuss preparation for week three of Hon100 (Jared/Dr. Frana attend Hon100 classes this week and next week)

WEEK 5

F Sep 27 TF Partner meetings with Jared and Dr. Frana begin, preparation with TF partner for week four of Hon100 (Jared and Dr. Frana attend Hon100 classes this week in preparation for meetings)

WEEK 6

F Oct 4 TF Partner meetings with Jared and Dr. Frana continue, preparation with TF partner for week five of Hon100

WEEK 7

F Oct 11 CAP Presentation on resources

WEEK 8

F Oct 18 Large group discussion and mid-year check-in/self-evaluation, turning point in Hon300, planning with TF partner for week 8 of Hon100

WEEK 9

F Oct 25 Professional/personal development overview, goal setting: personal, professional, TF role.

WEEK 10

F Nov 1 New Honors People come in to discuss their roles and share information; Capstone/Thesis workshop

WEEK 11

F Nov 8 NACE Career Competencies and Career Development Workshop

WEEK 12

F Nov 15 Capstone/Thesis workshop

WEEK 13

F Nov 22 CAP Presentation: Interviewing

WEEK 14

F Nov 29 **No class- Thanksgiving break**

WEEK 15

F Dec 6 Last day of class—Post TF Survey and celebration

Teaching Fellow Resource Packet

Honors 300—Teaching Honors for Teaching Fellows

Spring 2019

Nina Schenk—Honors Capstone Project

Pedagogy

Definition: the method and practice of teaching, especially as an academic subject or theoretical concept.

Pedagogies vary greatly; typically, Western pedagogy states that the teacher is the knowledge holder and the student is the recipient of knowledge. However, theories of pedagogy have increasingly been leaning towards the student as an *agent* and the teacher as the *facilitator*. This is a more accurate description of your role in the HON100 classroom. Critical pedagogy is an approach and broader social movement that acknowledges the consequences of traditional educational practices; favoring some students over others, marginalizing some voices and opinions, giving the teacher power over the students. It aims to include empowering students through support rather than direct instruction. Dialogic learning, another aspect to pedagogy, is learning through dialogue. Students use discussion to learn from one another and take into consideration validity of arguments rather than power of the speaker. Student-centered learning is another consideration of pedagogy. As the name implies, this method shifts the focus from the teacher to the students to develop learner autonomy and independence that enables life-long learning and independent problem-solving. One way you might go about incorporating this method on a smaller scale is having a student decide on the warm-up activity for the day or assigning a student to lead discussion on a topic.

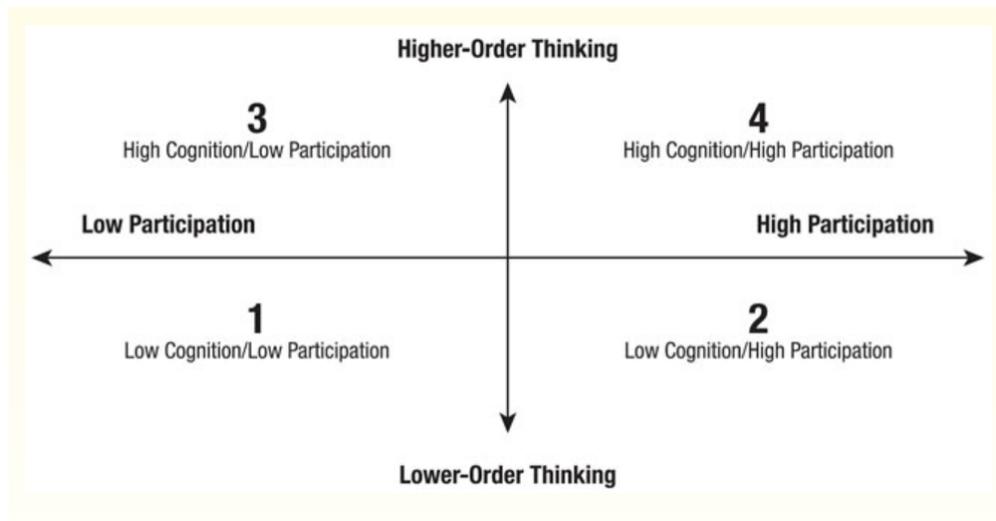
Learning space is the physical setting for a learning environment and can vary. The learning space is just as critical as the lessons taught. Considering the learning space can have significant effects on the students. Although as a TF you will be assigned a classroom or space, think creatively about how to set up that space, or change the location if the lesson requires it (for example, have class in SSC when talking about on campus resources). Learning space also means creating an environment that your students feel comfortable speaking up. As a TF, your role is to encourage all students to speak.

“Give students time to think before they respond to your questions. Do not be afraid of silence. Give students 5-10 seconds to think and formulate a response. If 10-15 seconds pass without anyone volunteering an answer and the students are giving you puzzled looks, rephrase your question. Do not give in to the temptation to answer your own questions, which will condition students to hesitate before answering to see if you will supply “the answer.” Patience is key; do not be afraid of silence. The longer you wait for students to respond, the more thoughtful and complex those responses are likely to be.” (Washington University in St. Louis, 2009)

Research on classroom questioning and information processing indicates that students need at least three seconds to comprehend a question, consider the available information, formulate an answer, and begin to respond. In contrast, the same research established that, on average, a classroom teacher allows less than one second of wait-time. After teachers were trained to allow three to five seconds of wait-time the following significant changes in their classrooms occurred (from Rowe, 1974):

The number of students who failed to respond when called on decreased.
The number of unsolicited but appropriate responses increased.

The length of student responses increased.
 The number of student statements where evidence was used to make inferences increased.
 The number of responses from students identified by the teacher as less able increased.
 The number of student-to-student interactions increased.
 The number of student questions increased.



This process of the image above works best when teachers have thought through the big picture of their lessons and understand what is most important for students to walk away with. Your students will not remember everything you try to teach them, just the meaningful parts, so focus on deep meaning. In this way, relevance will be made transparent to your students. What is the big picture in your content objectives? How can you make it relevant? Through the act of ensuring higher-order thinking, you engage children in thinking through the implications and the relevance of the content to their world. (Ferland, 2014)

Sometimes, classroom discussion can seem to be going well. Beware of The Fisheye Effect: Thinking you're having a great classroom discussion because there are a few verbal students, when there are others who are completely silent or on their phones. This can be especially hard in a smaller classroom. You can try to combat this issue by:

- Making your intentions transparent. (Gonzalez 2013) Let students know that you would love to hear from the quieter ones. Try to avoid knocking down talkative students, rather, focus on getting the quieter students to speak more (the exception to this would be a student who is talking about inappropriate things, or putting down others' opinions. Talk to this student individually after class, and/or reach out to Jared for assistance in this scenario).
- Increase wait time. As the quote from Washington University in St. Louis above states, don't be afraid of silence. Wait at least three seconds between posing a question and calling on a student to answer. To go further, add a "no hands" time—tell students to think for a few seconds and then ask for responses. (Gonzalez 2013)

- Redirect comments and questions to other students. Encourage students to respond to one another, rather than merely to you. When a student is speaking, look around the room, not just at the student who is speaking; making eye contact with other students lets them know that you expect them to be listening and formulating responses. Provide students with a model of civil discourse by demonstrating respect for, and interest in, the views of others. Learn to limit your own comments. Particularly when facilitating a discussion, hold back from responding to every comment; otherwise, students will learn to wait for you to respond rather than formulating their own responses. (Washington University in St. Louis, 2009)

Grading Assignments/Providing Feedback

1. It is vital to comment on each of your student's turned-in work for several reasons: it lets them know that it is being read/checked, lets them know that you care, allows them to get feedback on their work and how they can improve, and helps you grow as well.
2. Read through the entire assignment once before leaving any comments.
3. Make comments specific and explain why you are changing that section of their work.
4. Look things up before you comment on/change them. You don't want to accidentally correct something that isn't a problem.
5. Don't make judgements on opinions.
6. Leave an overall comment at the bottom about what they could improve on, in addition to what they did WELL. It is important to mention both aspects. Since the course is pass/fail, as long as they turned it in on time and met any length requirement, they pass regardless.

Tips/ Must Dos to Succeed

Before the Classroom

1. Communication with Jared and Dr. Frana is key
2. Communication with your TF partner is key

In The Classroom

1. Always arrive to class at least 10 minutes early if possible. Students are bound to get there early as well, and it's good for you to be there first.
2. Regardless of whether you are there first or not, you should still be early enough that you can play music on the computer in the classroom. It helps kill dead air and sets up a casual yet conversational tone.
3. Always address students by name when they walk into the classroom.
4. Use nametags every day REGARDLESS OF HOW FAR INTO THE SEMESTER YOU ARE—you will be surprised how long it takes students to learn each other's names and remember yours.
5. Be flexible—if the class starts talking about something that they have all experienced, it's okay to let them talk. The point of the class is to get students to learn about the First Year Experience, and having validation from their peers is important.
6. Be assertive—if the class starts talking about something inappropriate or going so far off track they are no longer learning from one another's experiences, bring it back together.

7. Alternate sharing activities: Your odds of keeping your students on task go up when you mix things up and keep the energy feeling fresh. Alter your activities, occasionally rotating partners and changing up your students' modes of response. The first time you ask them to turn to a partner and share, you'll feel a fresh energy in the room. The sixth, seventh and eighth time in a row that you ask them to do so, however, you'll likely hear a growing sigh. You can mix it up by having them write their answer down and be prepared to share it with the group, write it on a mini white board and be ready to hold it up or just think to themselves for a few moments before they share out. Small changes of routine increase the motivation to attend to the task at hand. (Ferlazzo, 2014)
8. Always have a back-up activity, or multiple. Some classes will respond to topics differently. If they aren't interested/invested, it's best to have another activity or topic lined up so the class time is not wasted. One great back-up is an open forum of questions. Allow students to ask questions about anything about JMU at all—from using UREC to taking the buses to dealing with a difficult professor. Let them ask, and do your best to answer through experience.

First Day

- Have students make nametags on the first day, and then you collect and keep them. Start every day by putting them out. Suggestion: put them out after people sit down for the first few classes, so they get to pick their desired seats. After a while, you'll memorize where people sit and be able to put the nametags out before some people get there. You could also try putting nametags out randomly to switch up who is sitting next to who. This can especially help if you're having an issue with people who talk too much.
- Try to avoid ice breakers that are “get to know you” activities—the students at this point are usually 100% over that aspect. Instead, try to use ice breakers that help get conversation flowing before jumping right into content.
- Maintain your humanity. Let the students know you are a real person, and that you are there to be more than just a “teacher.” Try to avoid being overly rigid. Emphasize the importance and feasibility of Honors, and how many people are here to help you get the most out of it.
- After going over the syllabus and expectations, field questions about the class and JMU in general. This will get the students to understand the type of classroom setting they are in, and that this is a comfortable space.

Classroom Activities for Facilitating Discussion

Rules:

1. Be creative.
2. Pay attention to what your class responds well to, and what they don't. Note: if the students grumble about an activity at first, but end up participating and engaging with the material, it was a *successful* activity.
3. Always try to switch up your activities. Although routine is comfortable and requires less prep, changing an activity slightly can help keep the students on their toes and prevent boredom/burnout.

Warm Ups/Check-ins

- Rose/bud/thorn: one positive from recent past, one looking forward to, one negative
- Highs/Lows: one good, one bad from the past week or upcoming
- This or that: start class off by giving students the opportunity to choose what to share. Ask them to either share the best part of their week or their favorite vegetable. Or, ask them to share their current favorite class or their favorite TV show. You can pick both options, and always switch it up!
- Pair and share: have students share their highs and lows with a partner, and then have them present their partner's highs and lows
 - Note on pair and share: students will often know at least one other person in the class and sit near them. When pair and share is used, they will turn to the same person every time. Switch this up by using a pair and share activity such as preparing famous duos on notecards and handing them out to partner people up or have students stand in two circles, one inside the other, facing a partner. Students in the inside circle can shift to their left as each question is asked. This can also be done in 2 lines, with the person on the end shifting to the beginning of the line. Getting students moving is always good.
- Inkshedding: Give students 5 minutes to write about the biggest challenge that they're having and then pass the paper to the closest person. That person writes some encouraging words, ideas, advice, etc. Typically pass it 2-3 more times so that when students receive their paper back they have lots of insights from various members of the class. This allows all students to be heard, while not taking too much of the class period to vent. This activity can also be used to get a conversation started on a particular topic.

Discussion/Topic-Based Activities

- Gallery Walk: Stations or posters are set up around the classroom, on the walls or on tables. Students travel from station to station responding to a prompt in small groups.
- Philosophical Chairs: A statement that has two possible responses—agree or disagree—is read out loud. Depending on whether they agree or disagree with this statement, students move to one side of the room or the other. From that spot, students take turns defending their positions.
- Pair and share: Students respond to the prompt with a partner, and then share what they learned, their similarities and their differences. (Again, remember to switch up how pairs are chosen)
- Grouping students: Similar to pair and share, except in groups of three or more. Find creative and fun ways to pair students that aren't just counting off. For example, the "Taco Bout it" activity is where students were given an index card with an ingredient in a Taco and then were told to make groups forming a full taco (the key to this one is pre-planning so you have the right number/combination of cards... we said "guac was extra!" when groups were uneven.)
- Snowball: Have students write the answer to the prompt on a piece of scrap paper. Once all students are done, have them crumple and toss their paper across the room. Each student picks up a piece and reads the answer.

- Poll Everywhere/Wordcloud: Have students submit answers on a word cloud/chat room; then analyze for similarities, differences and surprises.
- Quick write: Students write their responses down to prepare to share. This gives students time to think and process.
- Bounce cards: Prepare enough questions so that the entire class (TAs included) get one each. The questions should relate to that week’s topic. Have students draw at random, and answer their questions. You can do this once or multiple times. Use it as a way to see what people agree on and disagree on, and what sparks interest/conversation, and go from there for the rest of the class period.
- Cold calling: Seems harsh but isn’t. Calling on students from the beginning, rather than waiting to see if someone is going to raise their hand first, increases energy and gets the ball rolling. It avoids the awkward lull and keeps students on their toes and invested in the conversation. Frame the call as you being interested in their experiences, thoughts and opinions. The good news is this class generally doesn’t have any right or wrong answers, so cold-calling only leads to the sharing of various opinions, and no one has to feel bad about it.
- Icons: This can seem childish at first, but it can be silly and fun to use in the classroom to help shake up discussion and who is talking. Prepare 4 images for class, and cut them up so there is one image per student. At the beginning of class, hand an image to each student. Whenever you ask a question or look for someone to respond to a discussion prompt, randomly select one of the images. The students with that matching icon should be the first to respond. See below for an example.



TA: “What is one thing you disagreed with the article about? People with the James Madison cartoon.” Then students with that image will respond first.

- Promote Silent reflection/anonymous input: Use PollEverywhere to get student input to start a discussion, or pair it with a reflection/journaling activity to have students brainstorm their ideas, write questions, etc.
- Stop Light Discussion- Post controversial ideas or statements regarding that week’s topic on the board and have them hold up a card to indicate their level of agreement (red-disagree, yellow- unsure, green-agree). These have to be debatable topics to work well but the visual cue of how people in the room feel is helpful to see where we agree, disagree, etc. It’s also very helpful to get new voices in your classroom discussions. This helps

people to feel less like they're being cold-called if the TA asks why they held up their color. They have already visually shared their opinion, so it is easier to ask questions.

- **Make a Date:** give each student a paper plate or a piece of paper with a pre-drawn clock with slots next to each time. To prepare for the discussion, have students “make a date” with different classmates by signing their names on the partner’s clock at the same time (each write the others name at 3:00 PM), continue until everyone’s clock is filled. Then as a facilitator, announce a time and a question for the partners to discuss. Give them a few minutes to chat and then call out a new time and a new question.
- **“Speed Dating”-** form a snake pattern of two desks side by side throughout room. Have students sit with a partner to discussion one or two discussion questions then have half the students rotate one seat to talk with someone new about the next question.

On Campus Resources

Learning Resources

- **LSI—Learning Strategies Instruction:** provides individualized, student-centered, academic coaching designed to increase student success. The diverse range of undergraduate and graduate students we serve will be motivated to achieve individual goals by becoming self-regulated learners and building academic and personal self-efficacy. SSC 1202.
- **CAP—Career and Academic Planning:** provides advising with exploring majors, learning how to write resumes and cover letters, or conducting internship, job, or graduate school research. SSC 3210.
- **Math and Science Learning Center:** understanding course content, homework assignments and lab reports found in first and second year physics, chemistry, math, and statistics courses. No appointments are necessary and the services are free. SSC 1100.
- **Writing Learning Center:** develop writing skills and confidence by providing one-to-one consultations, resources, and programming that support and enhance writing across campus. SSC 1st floor.
- **Communication Center:** help develop communication and public speaking skills. SSC 1143.
- **MAPS—Madison Advising Peers:** provides student academic advising. Roop 200.
- **PASS—Peer Assisted Study Sessions:** support for studying BIO, COB, CHEM, ECON, and MATH. Check www.jmu.edu/pass
- **First Year Involvement:** help being successful in the classroom, mentor if on academic probation, or connecting with other students to receive tutoring, stay motivated, set goals, improve time management and change study habits.

Other Resources

- **Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention, Intervention, and Recovery.** SSC 1st floor, The Well.
- **Counseling Center:** specialized treatment programs, group therapy, workshops, couples’ therapy, individual therapy, art center, relaxation room, events and programming. SSC 3100.
- **ELLS—English Language Learner Services**
- **SOGIE—Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression.** SSC 1st floor.
- **Office of Disability Services:** physical, mental, sensory, learning or other disability, screening, access to services.

- Office of the Dean of Students: family or personal crisis challenging life situation, withdrawing from classes, or absence from classes for extended period of time.
- Office of International Programs: information about studying abroad or if you are an international student
- Office of the Registrar: registration, course enrollment, graduation. SSC 5300.
- Sexual Violence and Advocacy Prevention: experienced sexual assault and want to learn more about resources or want to learn more about identifying and preventing sexual and intimate partner violence. SSC 1st Floor in The Well.
- Title X: identifying, reporting, experiencing or witnessing sexual misconduct or gender-based harassment or discrimination. Contact Office of Equal Opportunity.
- University Health Center: Medical and urgent care, general medicine. SSC 1st and 2nd floor.

Bibliography

- Dallimore, Elise J., et al. "Classroom Participation and Discussion Effectiveness: Student-Generated Strategies." *Communication Education*, vol. 53, no. 1, 4 June 2004. *Routledge*, doi:10.1080/0363452032000135805.
- Gonzalez, Jennifer. "The Fisheye Syndrome: Is Every Student Really Participating?" *Cult of Pedagogy*, *Cult of Pedagogy* , 25 Sept. 2013, www.cultofpedagogy.com/fisheye/.
- Gonzalez, Jennifer. "The Big List of Class Discussion Strategies." *Cult of Pedagogy*, 15 Oct. 2015, www.cultofpedagogy.com/speaking-listening-techniques/.
- "Increasing Student Participation." *The Teaching Center*, The Teaching Center, 2009, teachingcenter.wustl.edu/resources/teaching-methods/participation/increasing-student-participation/.
- "Pedagogy." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 14 Feb. 2019, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pedagogy#Pedagogical_considerations.
- "Questioning Strategies." *CITL*, Illinois CITL , citl.illinois.edu/citl-101/teaching-learning/resources/teaching-strategies/questioning-strategies?src=cte-migration-map&url=/resources/topics/methods/strateg.html.