

## Center for Instructional Development and Research

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Information for People who Teach  
at the University of Washington

## What Helps Students Learn?

Research on teaching effectiveness identifies a number of factors that contribute to student learning: the instructor's expertise and interest in the subject matter, his or her ways of connecting course content to students' frames of reference, clarity of organization and expectations for learning, and opportunities for interaction. At CIDR we have had many opportunities to consult with instructors about their teaching, observe their classes, and in many cases, interview their students. Each situation is unique, but in nearly 20 years of consultations and observations, we have observed these factors at work in a wide variety of classes. In the comments that follow, students describe ways their instructors have implemented these factors in their classes at UW.

### INSTRUCTOR'S EXPERTISE AND INTEREST IN THE SUBJECT MATTER

*"We appreciate the knowledge base of the instructor – he incorporates relevant issues from his work into lectures."*

*"She is inspiring. Isn't that what it's all about? Trying to teach the student about something you love?"*

*"Topics are very interesting. For those topics that are not so interesting, he finds a way to make them so."*

Implications for teaching:

- Show students what interests you about the subject.
- Give examples, cases and illustrations which show how you draw on the content of the course in your own work.

### INSTRUCTOR'S WAYS OF CONNECTING COURSE CONTENT TO STUDENTS' FRAMES OF REFERENCE

*"She relates the material that we learn to real life situations which gives us a better picture of what is really happening related to what we are learning."*

*"The cases we read get reviewed in more everyday terms. He makes it much easier to understand and uses common examples to help clarify the important points."*

Implications for teaching:

- Learn about your students, what interests them about the course, and what they hope to learn.
- Develop examples that will present the material to students in contexts that are familiar to them.

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## CLARITY OF ORGANIZATION AND EXPECTATIONS FOR LEARNING

*"We appreciate the instructor's periodic summaries of where we've been, where we're going."*

*"She explains everything very thoroughly and all her examples tie in perfectly with the points she is trying to get across. The flow of the class is good; many new ideas can somehow relate to what we previously learned."*

*"Clarity – emphasizes important points, isolates specific points or arguments and writes these on the board."*

Implications for teaching:

- Use the syllabus, the board, and other tools to show students how you conceptually organize the material.
- Clarify for students how particular readings, assignments, and activities relate to course goals.
- Use class time to help students identify, assess, and record their understanding of the material.

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTERACTION WITH AND AMONG STUDENTS

*"He seems genuinely interested in whether we are learning and understanding the material, not just memorizing – stops and checks to make sure the class is getting it."*

*"When he has us do some thinking in groups on a question he poses, it gives me more time to formulate an opinion than just asking the question to the class in general."*

*"Class participation – getting other peoples' perspectives – adds to the learning atmosphere of class, causes us to think analytically."*

Implications for teaching:

- Regularly assess students' understanding of the material during class, and give them feedback on their learning.
- Structure specific times for class interaction, and help students prepare for it by asking them to work on specific problems or questions in writing or small groups.

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## HOW CAN CIDR HELP?

At CIDR we can help you apply these principles in your teaching, and we can help you gather feedback from your current students. Call or e-mail for more information.



## Center for Instructional Development and Research

CIDR promotes excellence in teaching and learning at the University of Washington through its work with individual faculty and TAs, departments, campus-wide initiatives, and University leaders. CIDR staff are available year-round to collaborate on the design, implementation, and assessment of ways to advance teaching and learning for all students in the diverse UW community. Consultations are confidential and offered at no charge to UW faculty, TAs, and departments.

If you have questions about teaching and learning, or you would like to find out more about working with CIDR, you can call us at 543-6588, send a message to [cidr@u.washington.edu](mailto:cidr@u.washington.edu), or visit our web site:

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