

Center for Instructional Development and Research

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Information for People who Teach
at the University of Washington

Teaching and Learning in Sections and Labs

Over the years CIDR staff have consulted with faculty members and TAs, observed their teaching, and gathered feedback from their students in nearly every department at UW. To help faculty members and TAs coordinate their teaching in sections and labs, we have identified underlying teaching and learning principles which apply across a wide range of teaching situations.

COMMUNICATE TO STUDENTS HOW SECTION OR LAB MEETINGS RELATE TO THE COURSE AS A WHOLE.

Since sections and lab meetings are usually attached to larger courses, students are better prepared to learn when the links between these parts of a course are clearly defined. To help communicate these links,

- Use the syllabus, course web site, and first day of class to show how various components of the course – for example, lectures, assignments, sections, labs, online discussion, tests – are designed to work together.
- As part of lectures, preview how material will be dealt with in section or lab meetings.
- During section or lab meetings, watch for opportunities to draw connections to lectures.
- Plan for members of the instructional team to meet regularly to discuss lecture and section or lab linkages.

COMMUNICATE TO STUDENTS WHAT THEY CAN EXPECT IN YOUR SPECIFIC SECTION OR LAB MEETINGS.

Sections and labs vary in purpose from one course to another, so it will help students to know what your intended purposes are. Otherwise they may base expectations for your course on experiences in other courses.

Expectations to clarify for students include:

- **Content:** Will sections and labs be primarily for review of lecture material, presentation of new material, discussion of selected readings, work on class projects?
- **Participation and Interaction:** To what extent will section meetings be based on discussion, group work, or student presentations?
- **Use of Time:** What is a typical agenda or schedule you plan to follow for each section meeting?
- **Grades and Tests:** How will work in sections and labs be assessed? Will sections and labs be places for test preparation and review? Taking tests or quizzes?
- **Availability:** How will you establish appropriate levels of accessibility and rapport with your students? How will office hours, e-mail, and study centers be used?

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HELP STUDENTS DEVELOP STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESSFUL LEARNING IN YOUR DISCIPLINE AND IN YOUR COURSE.

In many courses, students are exposed not only to new information, but also to new ways of learning and thinking about that information. To help them learn successfully,

- Assess students' preparation for learning. What do they already understand and what will be challenging to them?
- Help students connect new material to what they already understand. Be ready with familiar examples, analogies, and connections to students' prior experience.
- Show students how you think about (prioritize, organize, integrate, assess ...) the material. Create opportunities to practice analytical skills that are useful in your discipline.
- Frequently assess student progress and understanding to help you fine-tune your teaching from one day to the next.

HELP STUDENTS BECOME MONITORS OF THEIR OWN LEARNING.

In many courses, part of what students are learning is to assess their own level of understanding or the quality of their work. To help them develop these skills:

- Provide prompt feedback on tests and assignments so students can see how you assess their learning.
- Help students use study guides or review questions to assess for themselves how effectively they have studied.
- Ask students to reflect on their learning, and provide them with opportunities to apply, analyze, or extend it beyond points presented in class.

HOW CAN CIDR HELP?

At CIDR we can help you apply and adapt these principles as you work on planning, assessing, or improving your teaching. Call or e-mail to arrange an appointment.



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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, or visit our web site:

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