What to Expect in Your First Year of University Teaching

Dr. Cosette Lemelin
Senior Educational Developer

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
CENTRE FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

The First Year

Instructors' Realities

Students' Realities

With the person next to you, define *good university teaching*.
You have 3 minutes.

Do you agree or disagree with these statements?
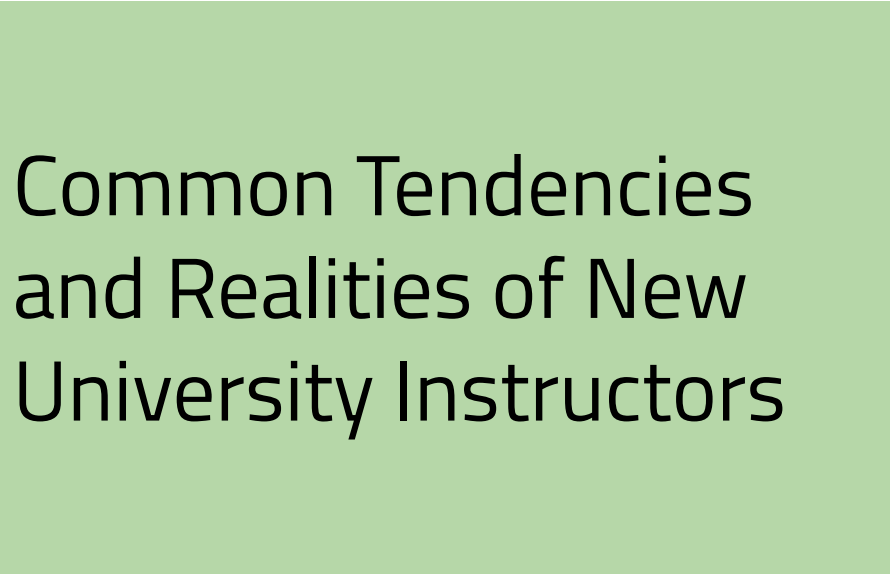(1 = absolutely disagree.......10 = absolutely agree)

1. I will teach my students as I was taught.
2. My role is to disseminate the content of my discipline or professional faculty.
3. I am responsible for my students' learning.
4. I am uncomfortable teaching parts of a course that are not in my area of expertise.
5. The student who I was (when I was an undergrad) is who I will meet in my classroom (when I teach this term).

Note: disseminate content = concepts, facts, procedures, ideas, attitudes, values, or skills

Take 2 minutes to think about it an jot down a few ideas.
Then turn to the person next to you who was your partner on the last activity & compare responses.

In the debrief with the participants: Why did I choose these particular phrases?
Let's find out in the next few slides....

Common Tendencies and Realities of New University Instructors

New University Instructors tend to spend the majority of their time preparing for lectures.

Many new instructors feel like they just have too much material to present…to the extent that they feel hurried or rushed to "cover content". Remember the level of your student in this course. You don't have to lecture about every aspect of the textbook. Your role in the classroom is to help them with the parts that are not easily digested through the readings (give them a reason to come to class).

If you cover more content than your students can manage in a lecture, your students' won't be able to keep up. They stop coming. They complain.
You are not solely responsible for students'; they meet you (at least half way) in the teaching and learning relationship by showing up and making the effort too.

4-5 hours of time for each hour of lecture is too much. 1.to 1.5 hours per lecture is much more of a realistic goal.
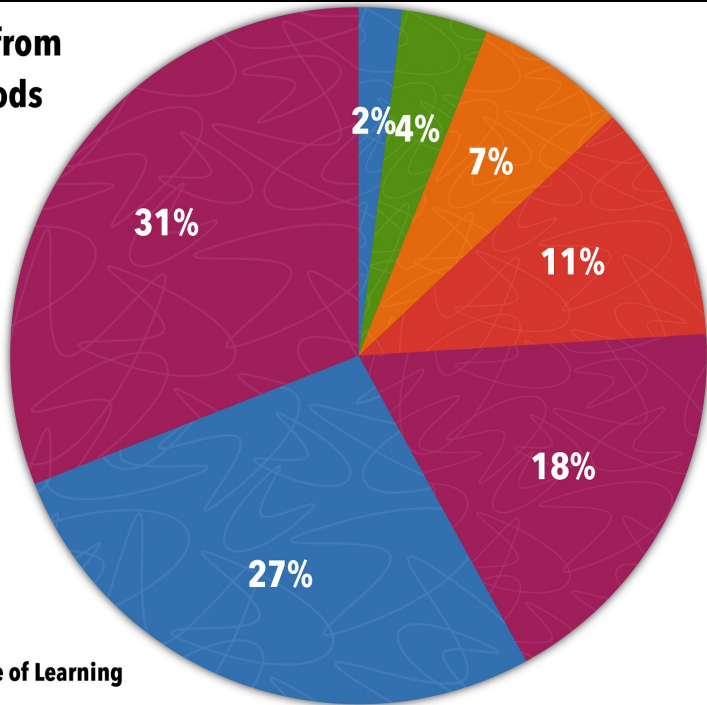
New University Instructors tend to lecture.

They talk for 3 hours in a 3 hour lecture. They are the centre of attention at all times (the sage on the sage...as they were likely taught).

Attention spans of students have changed (note: ours have too!) This form of "broadcast learning" (the transfer of knowledge from the teacher to the student) will not hold your students' attention. Current students have shorter attention spans and cannot concentrate for sustained periods of time. Research indicates that students' attention spans get shorter and shorter as the lecture over lecture; mimic television programming.

Average Retention Rate from Different Teaching Methods

Lecture
(Verbal Processing)

Reading
(Visual Processing)

Audio-visual
(Verbal & Visual Processing)

Demonstration
(Verbal & Visual Processing)

Discussion Group
(Verbal & Visual Processing)

Practice by Doing
(Doing / Kinæsthetic)

Teaching Others / Immediate Use of Learning
(Doing / Kinæsthetic)

2% 4% 7% 11% 18% 27% 31%

Lecturing is not wrong. It can be effective when used in combination with other strategies.

Start with lecture at 2% and move clockwise through reading, audio-visual, etc.

New University Instructors commonly struggle with classroom management.

Classroom management is about creating a safe productive learning environment for all the students in the class. Students resent it when their classmates are disruptive. The are watching you and hoping you will do something about it.
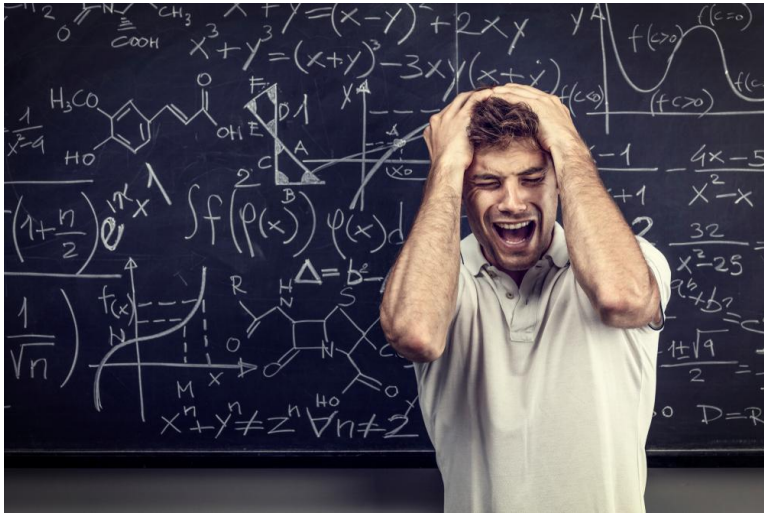
Low student ratings or negative comments from students *feel personal* for many new instructors

New instructors want to be liked. However, being liked is not your role. Your role is to engage the students in the ideas and concepts of your discipline and learn to think. You can be friendly. But you are not their friend. It is more important to be respected than to be liked as an educator. The paradox of teaching is that if the students respect you, they will like you.

New instructors tend to attribute disappointing student ratings to students' inability to handle challenging material. The answer they saw was to "get more organized" and lower my standards.

New University Instructors encounter varying attitudes about teaching among their colleagues

Some colleagues have very negative attitudes towards students.
Some colleagues are very flexible about deadlines and policies and others not so much.
You will get conflicting advice from time to time.
Some colleagues will be more interested in achieving high student ratings/evaluations than how to teach.
Know what you want to achieve and what you value.
CTL is here to help.

New University Instructors tend to experience stress around the teaching, research, and personal life juggling act.

The faculty development literature shows that the early years of a faculty appointment or contract, the first 3 years in particular, is a period of intense socialization to the role of instructor or professor. Retrospectively, faculty report the early years to be a period of poorly defined work-life boundaries as they discovered what their chosen profession is really like.

New instructors report feeling they have a lack of time, work overload, and high self-expectation.

Learning to prioritize time and effort.

Your Questions

What are you most concerned about?
Why?

Common Tendencies and Realities for University Students

University students are not you, but they are us in 2019.

University Students tend to multitask during a class or lecture

A recent study shows that splitting attention between lecture and laptop or cellphone hinders long term retention, and those in class suffer from others' use of devices (Glass, 2018).

For many, multitasking is a way of life. Most students will check their phones in class or have them on the desk in front of them. Some will participate in other activities during the lecture: take notes in lecture while checking instagram, eating, finishing homework from another class, playing candy crush, charging their devices, knit, draw, socialize.

Take lecture breaks: give them a problem or a short task to complete. Ask them to turn to a partner or form a group to complete a task.

University Students expect explicit instructions and grading criteria

Students' preoccupation with getting the highest grade has been linked to learners with a consumerist orientation to learning

(Bunce et al., 2016; Thomlinson, 2017)

Instructors are expected to give the students what they need, not only to pass, but to do well. Many of your students are very goal oriented and focused on getting through school to get a well-paid career. Student ratings of profs are often highly influenced by the assignments.

University Students can be assertive in making their expectations known

Paying tuition (commonly perceived as an investment in one's future) can create feelings of wanting value for their money or entitlement (Finney & Finney, 2010).

Undergraduate students in Canada graduate with an average of $20,000 of student debt following an undergraduate degree.

They commonly value "doing" over "knowing" as information is so readily available (I'll just google that...)

Your Questions

What are you most concerned about?
Why?

Cosette Lemelin
cmt@ualberta.ca