

Teaching Winter Term courses

Challenges

Short-term intensive courses can pose some challenges for faculty, especially related to how to plan for and keep students energized in significantly longer class periods, how to stimulate significant learning in students in a course that ends so quickly, and how, given the intense pace, they can find time for grading and giving students helpful feedback.

Good News

Students tend to be positive about such learning environments and some studies suggest equal or superior learning outcomes over courses in a traditional format.

Opportunities

Faculty can leverage the opportunities provided by the Winter Term format:

- Longer daily meeting periods mean the chance for more and different activities inside and outside the classroom and DEEPER learning.
- Students are more focused because they are only taking one course.
- Faculty and students get to know one another quickly and can create a comfortable learning environment.
- Elon's Winter Term theme offers many and varied co-curricular opportunities for activities, connection, and reflection.

Characteristics associated with effective learning in short-term intensive courses

- Depth over breadth of coverage
- Activities which are engaging and meaningful
- Opportunities to critically reflect on those activities
- Variety in the processes of instruction and in learning materials
- Instructor enthusiasm and interest in students and their learning
- Clear communication and organization
- A collegial classroom environment.

Resources

John Bean, *Engaging Ideas; The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom* (John Wiley and Sons, 2001).

Barbara E. Walvoord and Virginia Johnson Anderson, *Effective Grading* (Jossey-Bass, 2010).

Raymond J. Wlodkowski and Margery B. Ginsberg, *Teaching Intensive and Accelerated Courses; Instruction That Motivates Learning* (Jossey-Bass, 2010).

Building Community

Intentionally try to build community in your class in respectful and interesting ways.

- Allow students to use (and if wish, explain their) names and practice names for a few days.
- Ask students to identify the useful experiences, knowledge, skills or values they bring to your course; ask them to share what they might be anxious about related to the course.
- Do an exercise that recognizes each one of us has many components of our identities.
- Assign mixed groups; change membership in small groups; assign different rotating roles in small groups; do exercises that require participation by all.
- Be clear about what “good participation” looks like in your class; allow students to build some expectations about class etiquette; in discussion-based classes, establish ground rules for civil discussion.
- Think about how you introduce yourself and the cues you send to students of various groups.

Leverage the “The Difference that Difference Makes” Theme

Take advantage of on-campus events

There will be conversations, lunch and learns, speakers, book clubs, a teach-in, workshops and training, poetry, panels, exhibit, game, and a retreat – about topics such as race, poverty, various religious traditions, leadership, LGBTQ allyship, sexism and racism in gaming, social activism, service, the Confederate flag, deaf-gain, and bodies, to name a few. See the Winter Term theme website at <http://www.elon.edu/e-web/academics/winterTerm/> and follow the link to Events.

- Mention them and/or encourage attendance.
- Require attendance at an event or two that complements or supplements your course.
- Ask students to reflect upon and connect ideas from the event(s) to your course.

Raise students’ awareness of and improve their diversity-related learning

- Explain to your class how and why diversity, inclusivity, and equity matter to you personally and how various types of differences are relevant to your field, profession, and or/the world.
- Explicitly point out how your course addresses one or more types of diversity.
- Acknowledge the difference that difference makes and show it with data; discourage over-generalization and complicate categories.
- Help students practice seeing situations from multiple perspectives.
- Ask students to articulate their learning and connect it to their lives.
- Frame intercultural learning as a lifelong process - by sharing a model or schema such as the AACU’s rubric for intercultural knowledge and competence.

Partner with another course

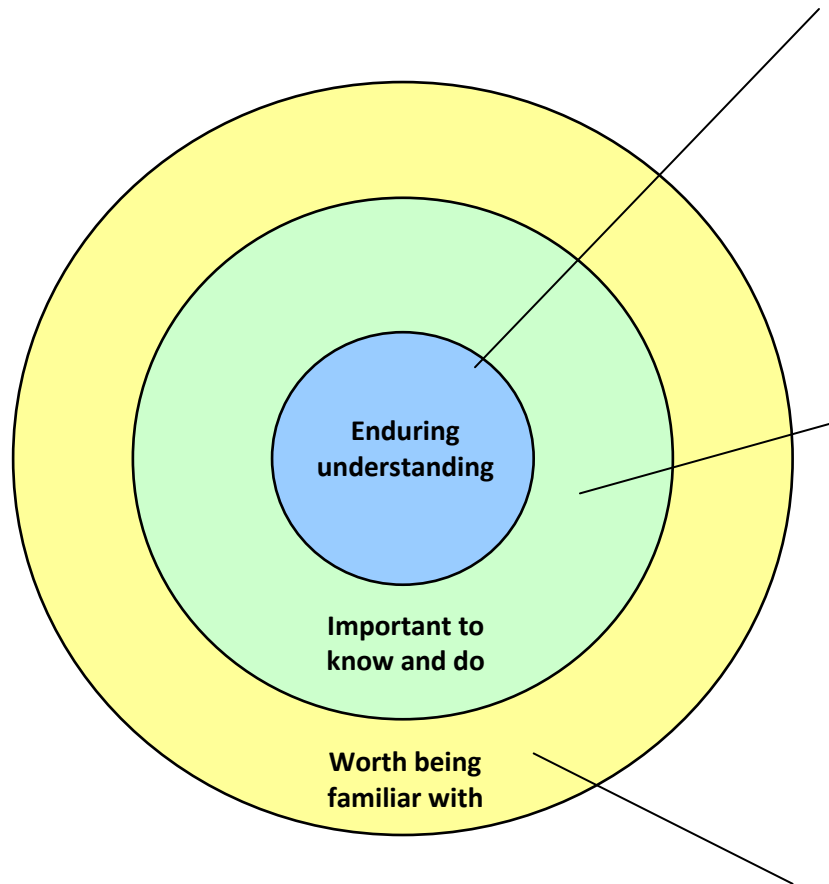
Give students a chance to approach new content or similar content from another perspective by designing an activity involving students and instructors from two courses. See the list of varied course offerings in the Winter Term schedule booklet.

Teach inclusively.

See CATL’s inclusive classrooms website at <http://tinyurl.com/CATLinclusiveclassrooms>

Which topics, ideas, and skills

- 1) lie at the heart of your course,
- 2) are important for students to know or be able to do, or
- 3) are simply worth being familiar with?



Important Questions

1. Enduring Understanding: What big ideas or conceptual understandings are central to your course? What will students learn & apply in other contexts?

2. Knowledge and skills: What knowledge will students be expected to think critically about? What specific things (skills, processes, strategies, methods) will they be expected to do or perform? (*Hint: Think both about daily work & larger projects*)

3. Familiarity: What knowledge (topics, facts, concepts, principles) will students encounter in course materials but not be expected to have more than a familiarity with?

Feedback

It can be challenging to give timely feedback during the rapidly-paced Winter Term. Thinking strategically about what feedback to give and what form it will take can help support student learning and our own mental health. It helps to keep in mind that grades are just one of many forms of feedback and that feedback doesn't have to be individual or written.

Strategic Approach to Feedback

Think about which things need to be graded and what style of grading is sensible for them

- Are you making sure that you are grading work that is important to and aligned with your course objectives?
- Is the material basic level or factual that can be graded quickly with quizzes or a pass/fail or check/plus/minus system?
- For complex assignments, have you developed specific evaluation criteria at the same time you designed the assignment so that you're ready to grade efficiently as soon as the work is turned in?
- Have you considered using rubrics that communicate your grading criteria?
- Have you considered technology that may increase your efficiency (e.g. rubrics in Moodle or google forms)?

Think about alternatives to writing comments on every individual student's work

- Can you give feedback to the whole class orally (e.g. analyze some student work in which to look for common themes) and/or in a shared written document?
- Can you share exemplary and average (anonymous or volunteer) examples of student work with your comments on them?
- Can students provide peer to peer evaluation using clear rubrics you have provided? Can they practice some self-evaluation using rubrics?

Consider some time-saving strategies

- Are there pieces of work that can be done in groups so there are fewer numbers for you to grade? (need to think through how to help students work together effectively and decide which elements are graded individually or collectively)
- Can you grade just some samples of student work? (e.g., select writing assignments to grade each time class turns in, allow students to choose subset to turn in out of all assignments, pop quizzes, portfolio of best work)
- Have you considered contract grading? (instructor sets detailed standards students must meet to achieve each grade and then his/her job is more of confirming that students did what they aimed for)

Reflection on Feedback Approach

Think about your Winter Term course and try to boil it down to the essentials. What do you want students to have gained from the course by the end of the three weeks? In five years, what do you want your students to remember from the course? How will you give feedback that helps them learn those things for the long-term?

What are your main goals for student learning? What student work most needs feedback in order to meet those goals?

How will you grade/give feedback on that work?

What time-saving strategies can you employ?