So...You’ve Never Taught “That” Class Before!
By Sandy Chapman and Peter Connor

If you are planning to teach a new course—one you’ve never taught before—and want to get it right, here are some “Don'ts” you will want to pay attention to, from "How to Prepare New Courses While Keeping Your Sanity," a 2007 Chemical Engineering Education article by Drs. Felder and Brent, noted experts in the fields of effective teaching and course design.

1. **Don't go it alone:** Don't create your syllabi, learning objectives, lecture notes, demonstrations, assignments, tests, etc. from scratch. Don't save yourself the embarrassment of asking colleagues who have taught the course in the past for help, or to borrow their past syllabi and course materials.

2. **Don’t become a human encyclopedia:** Don’t gather a massive amount of books and research materials and stuff your notes and lectures with everything ever known about the subject so you can answer any conceivable question a student may ask.

3. **Don't skip the preparation all together:** Don’t “Wing it.” Don’t think a skeleton syllabus with course name, number, required textbook title, your office hours and a phone number will do. Don’t Invent and implement policies and procedures as you go along and decide your learning objectives at the last minute—while you're writing up the course exam.

Felder and Brent think that doing such things is a recipe for disaster.

You’ll spend an outlandish amount of time on the course—ten hours or more of preparation for every lecture hour. You’ll start neglecting your research and your personal life just to keep up with the course preparation, and if you're unfortunate enough to have two new preps at once, you may no longer have a personal life to neglect. Your lecture notes will be so long and dense that to cover them you'll have to lecture at a pace no normal human being could possibly follow; you'll have no time for interactivity in class; and you'll end up skimming some important material or skipping it altogether (Felder & Brent, 2007).

The article provides a rational approach to planning and many helpful hints for avoiding disaster. The key points for successful preparation Felder & Brent explore are:

- Beginning your preparations early
- Not reinventing the wheel
- Writing detailed learning objectives
- Using learning objectives as study guides
- Developing lesson plans, assignments and tests
- Collecting feedback and monitoring course progress
- Making mid-term corrections when necessary
- Planning to teach new courses and your career

"How to Prepare New Courses While Keeping Your Sanity," by Felder & Brent, can be found, reprinted by permission, online in ©Tomorrow's Professor™Message #800.
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