Creating a Climate for Learning

How to Have a Great First Day

While the first day of class may focus on logistics, it sets the tone for the rest of the semester. Students form first impressions from this initial interaction that are hard to change no matter what occurs later on. The way a course is initiated directly influences student engagement, curiosity, and learning. Creating a climate for learning goes beyond course learning outcomes and syllabus requirements.

Important Pieces to Put Together...

Curiosity:
Pique student interest by communicating with them before the start date
1.) Early communication welcomes students to the course
2.) Understanding expectations makes students feel more at ease
3.) Establishes the value of course communication
4.) Builds momentum before first class day

Learning:
Learning starts as soon as the student enters the class. Ask them to try a cognitive task before they are ready by facing a challenging problem they will have learned by the end of the course. Support a student focus on learning by facilitating a conversation about how to be successful in the course.

Community:
Learning is very much a social process. Create a sense of community through connecting individually with students, greeting them, and getting peers to interact. For ideas on activities click here.

Supporting Online Classes:
- Create a welcome video to familiarize students with who you are.
- Have students make a video as well introducing themselves to you and each other.
- Practice building community through interactions like Think/Pair/Share.
- Use a problem or question to spark curiosity and have students discuss their reactions in groups or an online forum.

Preparing for Day 1:
- Know your environment, before the first day go to your classroom location and get a feel for the layout and technology set up.
- Look over your roster and plan for how you will get to know your students and build connections with them.
- When reviewing your syllabus, consider what impression you want to communicate to students about the course.

Infographic built based on How to Teach a Good First Day of Class Advice Guide, James M. Lang, Chronicle of Higher Education, How Student Learning Can Begin Before the First Day of Class, and a Starter Activity to Begin Any Class.