Encouraging Student Engagement

The good news is that there are many strategies to foster student engagement.

1. Learn your students’ names

If you don’t know your students’ names, you may be perceived as remote or unapproachable. Learning names shows respect and fosters a climate of learning in your class. In addition, encourage students to learn their colleagues’ names; this can be an important way of creating a friendly, nonthreatening classroom environment that facilitates participation. Strategies that can help you learn your students’ names:

- Get students to say their names every time they speak, until you are able to say their names.
- Give the students name tents, with their names printed on them (this can also double as your class roll).
- When you are completing the class roll, try to locate each student as you call out the name.
- Begin your very first class with a name-string icebreaker. Ask the first student to say, “My name is...” The student next to them will then say, “His name is ..., and my name is...,” and so on. Although it is unlikely that you will be able to remember every name in a class of 30 or more students, the repetition will help you learn a good chunk of them, fast.
- When students are completing reading, writing, or working in groups, silently say their name three times as you pick them out across the room.
- Take class roll verbally.
- Make an informal seating chart, since students usually sit in the same place after the first week of class.
- Pay attention when you accept and hand back student papers.

2. Find out your students’ interests

Knowing what your students are interested in can help ensure that the examples you use in your lectures hit the right buttons. Some ways to find out what they are interested in:

- Get you students to fill in a survey on their interests. This can be given out in the first class, or required as the first homework assignment.
- In your first class, ask students to email you a paragraph explaining who they are and what topics they are interested in. (This can also be a way of ensuring you have correct and working email addresses at the start of the semester.)
- In the first class, display a list of possible topics related to your course. Ask students to introduce themselves and identify which topics they are particularly interested in.
- Arrange to meet informally with each student during the first few weeks.
3. **Rearrange the seating**

If the seats are not fixed, consider getting students to arrange their seats in a semicircle. Although students may initially groan, sitting in a semicircle helps increase group cohesion and facilitate greater discussion.

4. **Tell students that participation is expected**

It sounds simple — but it’s fundamental. You can foster a culture of participation by:

- Writing a section on the importance of participation in the syllabus and making it a part of the final grade
- Discussing participation in the very first class. Ask students to think about which classes they participate in most and which they participate in least. Get them to identify barriers to participation (for instance, the fear of saying something stupid).

5. **Bring a positive attitude to class**

You need to convey your enthusiasm for the material, and for both teaching and learning. If you are not enthusiastic about your subject, then why should your students be? Smiling certainly helps, and when students speak, make sure you actively listen.

6. **Take polls**

Ask questions that have a number of different possible answers, and ask students to raise their hands. Such short breaks from the lecture help reduce fatigue and provide an opportunity to gauge student understanding (Middendorf and Kalish, 1996). A more high-tech version of this approach involves the use of “classroom response systems” also known as “clickers.” These remote-control devices allow students to vote on responses and answer multiple-choice questions, but they cost money and are little used at CUNY schools.

7. **Use attendance quizzes**

An attendance quiz is a quick quiz at the end of the class that focuses on the material covered in your lecture. As its name suggests, you use this quiz to confirm that students were both present and paying attention enough to understand key concepts. Grades for the quiz do not form part of any final grading scheme.

8. **Use your voice and body**

Stating “This will be on the test,” or “It’s useful to know this for the midterm” may certainly get attention, but may also increase anxiety. A better approach is to pay careful attention to the pitch (high or low) and speed of your voice: avoid a low, dull monotone or speaking too quickly. Varying the pitch, speed, and intensity of your voice during your lecture helps keep students hanging on your every word.
Build pauses into your lecture. Stopping to write out a phrase, or drawing out a relationship on the chalkboard gives students a chance to catch up with their notes, while also forcing you to change your pace. Tone and speed can also be used to build dramatic tension and signify ironic humor.

Your speaking voice can be trained over time — these are some useful exercises here to help you improve the quality of your speaking voice.

In addition to the tone, speed, and intensity of your speaking voice, be aware of the visual cues you are sending out, especially your facial expressions and gestures. Even the most exciting and stimulating information risks being killed if your face looks blank and your arms are pinned at your sides. Too much arm-waving, however, can be distracting. Use the space in the room by leaving the podium (if you have one) and walking around the classroom (a wireless presenter comes in handy here if using PowerPoint). Lecturing from the sides or the back of the room helps you develop a more interactive relationship with your students, while also serving the useful function of dissuading students from texting during your lecture.

9. Present information in chunks

Large amounts of unrelated information are hard for your students to handle. Your lecture needs to have a clear flow from one topic to the next. Certainly we expect student assignments to have a clear flow, rather than simply being a rambling narrative, so we need to approach our lectures in a similar fashion. The well-worn adage “Say what you’re going to say, say it, and then say that you said it” provides a useful structure for ensuring that your lecture has a logical flow. And repetition — while perhaps seeming redundant to you, as you already know the material — can help students frame and remember the most important parts of your lesson.

Say what you are going to say: Don’t just walk into the classroom and start lecturing. Give your students a preview of what you are going to cover. List the key points on the chalkboard, thus providing your students with a road map to follow. You can even check off each section as your lecture progresses. As well as helping your students follow your lecture content, it helps to keep you focused and on track.

Say it: Chunking your lecture into three or four key themes or ideas can help students follow the flow of the class. When recalling the lecture, students are more likely to remember each of the key themes. Summarizing key points of each block, in list form, helps slower note-takers and helps signify the end of one block of information before moving on to the next. Building in periodic pauses between each block of information can help students process the information. Bonwell and Eison (1991) suggest lecturing for 12 to 15 minutes, followed by a 2-minute pause. During the pause, students work in pairs to review, discuss, and revise their notes. Following the pause, another 15-minute lecturing block is introduced, before another periodic pause where students again compare and revise notes. They suggest that during the last 3 minutes of class, students should attempt to recall everything they learned during the lecture.

Say that you said it: End your lecture with a succinct summary of each chunk of information. Then demonstrate how the entire lecture fits with the course in its entirety, before introducing students to the topic for the next lecture. Highlight any readings or assignments that need to be completed before the next class.

10. Break up your lecture
If you just stand and lecture for the entire time, you’ll soon lose your students’ attention. Introducing a variety of activities into your lecture helps break up the monotony and facilitates learning. Your students will have different learning styles, and varying your approach means you can optimize everyone’s learning experience.

**Icebreakers:** Although particularly important to start students interacting and feeling comfortable with each other during your first class, icebreakers can also be used to re-energize students after breaks, or when you are aware that the class feels flat. A good activity for the first class is to tell your students to leave their papers and bags by their desk, and stand in a group against one wall. Ask students to arrange themselves in a line according to who traveled the farthest to come to class. I usually give a small gift (a piece of college memorabilia such as a free pen) to the student who traveled the farthest. After the students have returned to their seats, a quick discussion on how they measured distance (time or miles) can be a useful lead-in to course materials on various ways of measuring crime.

**Self-reporting deviant behavior:** Ask students to complete an anonymous self-report inventory form. Collate the answers after the class, and use the results the following week to explore the everyday nature of deviance and illegal behavior.

**“Where I stand” polling:** An energizing twist to polling students’ opinions involves them physically moving to corners of the classroom in response to statements. Ask students to leave their bags and papers behind, and stand in a group against one wall. In response to various statements, students then demonstrate “where I stand” by moving to a designated side or corner of the room. Students are then asked to volunteer why they made their particular choice. Possible “where I stand” exercises could include:

- Preference for a particular criminological theory
- Support of the death penalty for first-degree murder
- Support of torture as a form of interrogation

Adding additional statements can encourage more movement and a level of reflection. One example would be to identify one side of the room as “disease,” and the other side as “learned behavior.” Students are then read the following statements, and they move to the side of the room that best represents their views:

- Drinking a bottle of vodka every day
- Using heroin every day
- Child molestation
- Drug dealing

An interesting variant on “where I stand” polling involves asking students to make judgments concerning where they believe other students in the class would stand. This can be a useful introduction to labeling theory, especially when the choosers are asked to explain the grounds on which they made their particular choices.
**Video clips:** Short video clips can help break up your lecture while emphasizing key learning points. YouTube and Google videos are a good source of video materials you can build into your lecture. Don’t show an entire film during class time (it’s incredible how many times criminal justice students have sat through *The Shawshank Redemption*), but rather use short segments to provide relief, inject humor, and facilitate discussion. If you really want your class to watch an entire video, set it as an out-of-class “reading,” or make it the focus of their final paper.

Many stand-up comedians and comedic shows relate to criminal justice issues. Ali G, Chris Rock, and Jackass come to mind. While some of the material is distinctly R-rated, students (this is New York, after all) are not easily offended by crude language. The following table links to some of short film clips of a more academic nature.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Video link</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advances in technology/Reflexivity in a postmodern world</td>
<td>Student brings a typewriter to a lecture</td>
<td>Clip</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age crime curve/ life course criminology/ delayed gratification</td>
<td>Marshmallow experiment</td>
<td>Clip</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anti-drug/ parody</td>
<td>“Twisted” Above the Influence commercial parodies</td>
<td>Clip</td>
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<tr>
<td>Appropriate use of force: campus police</td>
<td>Student escorted from classroom</td>
<td>Clip</td>
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<tr>
<td>Causes of crime/ psychopathic traits</td>
<td>Louis Theroux meets Melevin in South Africa (also see below)</td>
<td>Clip</td>
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<tr>
<td>Changing constructions of juvenile delinquents</td>
<td>Trailer for Wild for Kicks/Beat Girl</td>
<td>Clip</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class/ social structure</td>
<td>First half: Classic sketch from “The Two Ronnies” explaining class status</td>
<td>Clip</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conformity/ strain theory</td>
<td>Asch’s conformity experiment</td>
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<td>Topic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Differential association: learning crime in intimate groups</td>
<td>Classic scene in the musical Oliver! where children learn the techniques of committing crime in intimate groups</td>
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<td>Gender roles</td>
<td>Kids are asked about gender roles</td>
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<tr>
<td>Innovation/ strain theory</td>
<td>Excerpt from Charlie Chaplin’s The Kid</td>
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<tr>
<td>McDonaldization</td>
<td>George Ritzer talks about how to avoid McDonaldization</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nazi euthanasia program/ eugenics/ where biological positivism may lead/ theories of Raffaele Garofalo</td>
<td>Victim’s daughter talks of the Nazi euthanasia program</td>
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<tr>
<td>Normal distributions/ Galton board</td>
<td>Demonstration of naturalness of normal distributions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Police brutality</td>
<td>The case of Esteban Carpio</td>
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<tr>
<td>Portrayal of female offenders as mad and bad/ execution of the mentally ill</td>
<td>Aileen Wuornos’ last interview</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poverty/ American dream/ inequality</td>
<td>Poverty in America documentary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reflexivity in a postmodern world/ parody</td>
<td>Melevin mix (from Louis Theroux documentary); good to play at the end of the lecture as students leave</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reparation scheme/ gardening</td>
<td>Bob Anderson talks about his gardening scheme for young offenders. Useful for getting students to focus on why programs are believed to work/ introduction to what works? in criminal justice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Responsibilization/ rational choice theory</td>
<td>Chris Rock on how to not get your ass kicked by the police</td>
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<tr>
<td>Routine activities theory: motivated offender, suitable target, absence of capable guardians</td>
<td>Ford Ka commercial (with thanks to Jerry Ratcliffe from Temple University)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scientific research/ correctional quackery</td>
<td>“Theodoric of York” on Saturday Night Live</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social learning theory/ operant conditioning/ the role of free will in conditioned behavior</td>
<td>B.F. Skinner’s pigeons</td>
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<tr>
<td>Suicide</td>
<td>A powerful video, good for introducing elderly suicide as a topic</td>
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<td>Suicide responses</td>
<td>Responses to contagion suicide in New Zealand</td>
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<tr>
<td>The American dream/ corporate power/ social structure</td>
<td>George Carlin talks about the American dream (you may want to warn students about the offensive language before showing this clip)</td>
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<tr>
<td>The American dream/ strain theory</td>
<td>New Yorkers talk about what the American dream means to them</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thinking about causes of offending/ thinking about what constitutes “community”</td>
<td>Animated short film with young people and community members talking about what causes crime and what we should do about it</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unchecked free will/ work of Cesare Beccaria</td>
<td>Mr. Creosote scene from Monty Python’s The Meaning of Life</td>
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</table>
Guest speakers: Inviting guest speakers to your class can keep students engaged. Guest speakers can bring real-world experiences, raise current issues, and reinforce particular learning outcomes. Guest speakers also provide students with a different face and voice, injecting variety into your syllabus as the semester wears on. Inviting guest speakers is also good public relations, bridging the gap between academia and the community, and gives community members the opportunity to contribute to the education of students. Having too many guest speakers during a semester, however, can derail learning objectives, confuse students, and lead to a disjointed learning experience. Aim for no more than two guest speakers per semester. The following five-step process can help you make the most effective use of your guest speakers’ visit.

1. Identify a suitable guest speaker: You want to find a speaker who has a particular interest and experience in the topic area you wish to cover. Judges, probation officers, parole board members, police officers, community advocates, alcohol and drug counselors, and social workers may provide thought-provoking insights into criminal-justice topics, and all have some skills in communicating with others. You want guest speakers who can communicate accurate and considered information. Drawing on community members outside of the field of criminal justice may also be useful, exposing students to cross-disciplinary learning experiences. For example, a market researcher may provide students with useful examples of applied research methods or applied statistics. A local historian may have interesting insights concerning the use of archival materials. In any case, the ability of your guest speaker to communicate effectively is still key. Ask other faculty members for recommendations. Don’t forget that you could also ask other faculty members to speak to your class, as they may be “expert” in the topic you are covering. Arrange to teach one of their classes in return. The collaboration can help cement faculty relations.

2. Prepare your guest speaker: Tell your speaker about your course. Give the person a copy of your syllabus, and explain what you would like to cover, what learning points you would like students to take away, and how the talk fits with your entire course. Tell the speaker how many students to expect and what their interests are. Do you want the speaker to speak for the entire class period, or just a portion of it? Ask for suggested readings students could undertake before the class, or provide the speaker with the readings the students are expected to absorb before the class. Discuss your guest speaker’s teaching style, and advise him or her of what techniques seem to work with your particular class. Ask for a biographical sketch so you can introduce the person. Make sure the speaker knows what room your class is in, and the day and time. Provide public transportation or parking details as necessary, and address any campus access issues.

3. Prepare your class: Advise your students in advance that a guest speaker will be coming to class. Seek to build anticipation and excitement by stressing that the class is privileged to have such a speaker come. Develop interest by designing a class assignment around the topic in advance. For example, if your guest speaker is a member of the parole board, have students identify the key tasks of the parole board and engage in a parole board decision-making role play with case studies (see group work and role play section below) prior to the class. Talk to your class about the teaching style of your guest speaker, warning them that it may be a different experience from what they are accustomed to. Get your class to prepare questions for your speaker in advance. Remind students of the importance of applauding at the end of the class, and thanking your guest speaker as they leave.
4. **On the day:** Attend the class. We can’t stress this enough. Don’t view guest speakers as an opportunity to skip class. Being in the class models to your students that you take your guest speaker and your class seriously, and you can help elicit class questions and responses if necessary. Knowing what your guest speaker said can help you link your next class to the talk, and it is likely that you will learn something new. Introduce your speaker to the class or (even better) get a student to introduce your speaker.

5. **Debrief:** Give students a short evaluation form. Include questions on how relevant the topic was, whether the talk fit with the overall course, what they learned, and what could have been improved. Write a thank-you letter or email to your speaker, including a summary of the student evaluations. Send a copy to the chair of your department, and/or the dean, so that others are aware of your college-community collaboration. In the following lecture, discuss with students what they have learned, what issues the speaker raised, and what information remains unknown.

**Group work and role playing:** We can hear you groaning already. Many professors are down on group work. The bad rap group work gets is likely to stem from our own experiences of enduring poorly planned and managed groups. Students often complain too. Brighter students complain that they are hindered by group members who don’t pull their weight. Shyer students may not want to interact with others and worry that they will make fools of themselves. Unmotivated students will see group work as too much like hard work, and become staunch advocates of passive and unproductive “learning” techniques.

But if organized and managed appropriately, group work and role playing can enrich the classroom experience, provide a break from lecturing, and provide an opportunity for students to grapple with and reflect on key learning points. Group work and role plays are a responsive way of meeting diverse learning styles, assisting in the reflective processing and retention of lecture information. If you are good at conducting group work, these activities will be easy and fun. But even if you think group role play isn’t for you, give it a try. Students rarely object to trying new things. They usually go well, especially if used sparingly.

Groups should consist of no more than 6 students. If groups contain more than 6 students the chance of all students participating decreases dramatically. If students are relatively new to the subject area being discussed, or inexperienced at working in groups, groups should be smaller, perhaps just 3 or 4 students. The table below details Jenny Rogers’ (1989) now classic research detailing the relationship between group size and individual contributions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Size</th>
<th>Individual Contributions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3–6 people</td>
<td>Everyone speaks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7–10 people</td>
<td>Almost everyone speaks. Quieter people say less. One or two may not speak at all.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11–18 people</td>
<td>5 or 6 people speak a lot. 3 or 4 others join in occasionally</td>
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<tr>
<td>19–30 people</td>
<td>3 or 4 people dominate</td>
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<td>--------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>30+ people</td>
<td>Little participation possible</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Build up to group work: Recognize that your students are likely to be very wary of group work and role play. Build up to it slowly. Ask students to write their responses individually, before comparing their notes in pairs or small groups of 3 or 4. When students are in their groups you will need to circulate around the classroom ensuring that students are staying focused. Be ready to intervene and help groups if they appear at a loss and not speaking to each other. Keep a positive atmosphere by praising any suggestions. Group work and role play can be a fun, memorable, and effective experience for your students. Start with the easier group exercises, and as you and your students get more comfortable, start introducing the more complex, longer exercises.

Good introductory group work exercises may ask students to brainstorm ideas, detail the pros or cons of particular causes of action, or reword short passages of text.

**Brainstorming exercises:**

Students individually list all possible consequences of a criminal record. The lists are then compared with others to form a definitive group list. Each group then takes it in turn to read a consequence from their list as the professor produces a definitive class list on the chalkboard or video projector.

The same exercise can be done with lists of potential problems faced by the formerly incarcerated reentering the community, or all possible factors predictive of reoffending.

**Pros and cons exercises:**

Half of the class lists the pros of gun control, while the other half lists the cons. Students then share their lists with others on their side. The professor collates both lists on the chalkboard.

The same exercise can be done with the pros and cons of the death penalty, for instance, or marijuana legalization.

**Rewording text:**

Individual students are given a piece of paper stating one of Sutherland’s nine principles of differential association:

1. Criminal behavior is learned.
2. Criminal behavior is learned in interaction with other persons in a process of communication.
3. The principal part of the learning of criminal behavior occurs within intimate personal groups.
4. When criminal behavior is learned, the learning includes techniques of committing the crime, which are sometimes very complicated, sometimes simple and the specific direction of motives, drives, rationalizations, and attitudes.
5. The specific direction of motives and drives is learned from definitions of the legal codes as favorable or unfavorable.

6. A person becomes delinquent because of an excess of definitions favorable to violation of law over definitions unfavorable to violation of the law.

7. Differential associations may vary in frequency, duration, priority, and intensity.

8. The process of learning criminal behavior by association with criminal and anti-criminal patterns involves all of the mechanisms that are involved in any other learning.

9. While criminal behavior is an expression of general needs and values, it is not explained by those needs and values, since non-criminal behavior is an expression of the same needs and values.

In response, students then describe what the principle is saying in their own words and then identify one type of criminal behavior that seems to apply to the principle, as well as one type that doesn’t.

Students then join the others who worked on the same principle, to share ideas, before feeding back to the professor and class.

Brainstorming, pros and cons exercises, and rewording text, if completed individually and then collated as a group, should be fairly nonthreatening and make students more comfortable with group work. Introduce a small amount of group work each week, so students come to expect it in each class. You can then begin to introduce more complex group work activities, such as brief role plays.

**Stakeholder role play:**

Taking an entire class period, the following role play encourages students to think about the issue of drugs and prostitution in Hunts Point, Bronx, from the points of view of various stakeholders involved. Students examine potential relationships between different stakeholder groups, seeking to identify an appropriate strategy for positive planned change. Variations of the role play structure can be adapted for any role play where you would like students to empathize with, and explore, the viewpoints of multiple community stakeholders facing a common issue or problem.

First, you need to introduce your students to the topic. Although some students will have visited Hunts Point, for others it is an unknown area of New York City. Bring students up to speed by showing the following two documentary clips, a news report about an area in Hunts Point called “The Yard”:

[Clip 1](#) [Clip 2](#)

Divide your students into eight or nine groups (groups of three to five people work well). Each group will represent different stakeholders involved with the issues of drugs and prostitution in Hunts Point. Give each group a name tent detailing which stakeholder they will be representing. Stakeholders could include:

- Council officials
- Prostitutes
- Police
• Sex worker agencies
• Drug agencies
• Tenants association
• Parent-teacher association
• Small-business owners
• Faith-based and community groups
• Johns and drug users

Tell each group that the council officials will be calling a town hall meeting in 45 minutes. Each stakeholder group must plan what they want to say at the town hall meeting. What are the problems they face? What are their goals for the meeting? What do they want to achieve in the long run? Who may share similar goals that they could collaborate with?

The students designated as council officials should consider the issue of drugs and prostitution from all stakeholder perspectives, identify the questions they might want to ask stakeholders, and decide which stakeholder groups may be heard at the town hall meeting.

After 20 minutes, advise the stakeholders that they may visit other stakeholder groups to share strategies. Stakeholder groups can only meet if both groups wish to share information.

Advise the groups that they must pick one or two members who will attend the meeting and represent their views. After 45 minutes, ask the council officials to convene the meeting. Some stakeholders may be excluded. Sit invited stakeholder representatives around a table at the front of the room, with their respective name tents in front of them. Council members will coordinate the meeting, introducing stakeholders, and asking them to outline their views. Help council members ask pertinent questions after each stakeholder speaks.

After each stakeholder has spoken and answered questions, end the town hall meeting. As a class, discuss:

• Whose views were included and excluded from the discussion? How did this feel for the excluded groups?
• What role do informal networks and collaborations play?
• If the views of the excluded were represented through collaborations, how well were their views represented?
• Who has the power to influence decisions?

Debates:
Debates have been used for thousands of years to help scholars consider and develop arguments and positions. Debates can help students develop critical thinking, practice public speaking, and make issues appear more “real.” A debate can be used both to review known information, and to identify what remains unknown. Debates are about encouraging students to take a particular side on an issue. Good topics include:

- Criminals are born, not made.
- Drug use is a disease, not a learned behavior.
- Convicted offenders should have the opportunity to be flogged rather than serve a prison sentence.
- No juvenile should receive a sentence of life without the possibility of parole.
- All states should abolish the death penalty.
- The primary purpose of the criminal justice system should be offender rehabilitation.

There are two main types of debate you could effectively deploy in a university setting: the SPAR (spontaneous argumentation) debate format, which requires little planning on the part of students, and team debates, which students should prepare for over a number of weeks.

10. Encouraging “deep processing.”

Marton and Säljö (1976) identify two types of learning that students often engage in during lectures: “surface processing,” in which students are simply trying to remember the words you are saying, and “deep processing,” when students are relating the information you provide to other information contained in the lecture, or combining your new information with their own experiences and understandings. The former relies on regurgitation, while the latter involves a transformation of your words into nuggets of understanding. Studies repeatedly show that information that is “deep processed” is more likely to be retained in memory than information that is only processed on the surface. The good news is that there are some simple things you can do in your lecture to encourage “deep processing” and thereby foster student engagement.

Don’t write out your lecture verbatim. If you’re reading a lecture script, students are likely to switch off. A skeletal outline can be useful, serving as a reminder and helping you keep on track; however, relying too much on detailed notes will encourage student passivity. Make sure your notes only include bullet points of the main headings, or even better single words to remind you what’s coming next.

Use PowerPoint, but use it wisely. There has been some recent backlash to PowerPoint, understandably, but at this point, students expect it.

Certainly we’ve all sat through presentations that feel like “death by PowerPoint”: too many words on the slides, moving through the slides too quickly, six-point fonts, and reading directly from the slides.
But when used well, PowerPoint can be a useful teaching tool that makes your job easier and complements the learning experience.

Think of a PowerPoint as a supplementary tool. It provides the main points or focuses what you are trying to say. But it’s your lecture and your class. You are not simply a PowerPoint presenter. Many students take notes on PowerPoint printouts; you can help them by making the file of your presentation available to them in advance, with six slides per page.

Here are some helpful do’s and don’ts for using PowerPoint in the classroom:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Don’t</th>
<th>Do</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use a white background. It can be uncomfortable to stare at a bright screen for a lecture.</td>
<td>Consider using a dark or black background, with white or yellow fonts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use a font smaller than 24, or “wacky” fonts.</td>
<td>Use Arial, Times New Roman, Tahoma, or Verdana. And stick to the same font throughout your lecture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use excessive animation: words that fly in, spin, and flash don’t make your presentation more interesting. They just make it more distracting.</td>
<td>Use entrance “fade” with the speed “very fast” and start “on click,” to control the display of your key points.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare your lecture by writing your slides.</td>
<td>Develop your slides to illustrate essential points.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rely solely on textbook-provided PowerPoint.</td>
<td>Make your own slides that illustrate what you want to say.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just stand there and read the slides — or, conversely, try to paraphrase the words on the slide; — they probably say what you are trying to say much more clearly and succinctly.</td>
<td>Embed short YouTube clips into your presentation to illustrate the concepts you are discussing. Commercials and news reports can be useful triggers for discussion. (This only works if your classroom has an internet connection.) You can also draw on screen, to highlight trends in graphs, or underlining key words in text; press Ctrl+P to turn your cursor into a pen,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Design a presentation that takes the entire lecture period.

Take a break from PowerPoint during your lecture. Blanking the screen (press the B key) gets students to focus solely on you.

Use loads of clip art. The images have become tired and may distract from, rather than complement, your message.

Use original photographs. Even copyrighted material is often covered by “fair use” in an educational classroom setting.

Encourage students to apply lecture materials to their own life experiences. Piaget (1962), examining children’s learning, observed the importance of the process of assimilation and accommodation when we absorb new knowledge. First, new information is introduced (assimilated) within existing knowledge structures (schemas). Accommodation, the second stage of the process, involves modifying our existing schemas in light of the new information. Piaget’s work is important because it reminds us that simply spoon-feeding new information to students is likely to be an unsuccessful approach to teaching, unless we encourage students to apply lecture materials to their own life experiences.

Likely not every student has direct experience of the typical criminal justice topics you might cover in your lectures (arrest, domestic violence, incarceration, child abuse, rape), and even those who have may not feel comfortable talking about their experiences. But all students bring life experiences that they can use as a vehicle for thinking about lecture materials. Experiences of school, friendships, key life events (birth, graduation, first intimate relationship, first job), family, neighborhood, and future plans are all common life experiences that students can use to consider new course materials. Ask students to think about and describe their own experiences as you introduce particular topics. The following chart may be helpful in making connections between general student experiences and themes in criminal justice:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criminological theory</th>
<th>Student experience</th>
<th>Linking theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Labeling theory</td>
<td>School system</td>
<td>Self-fulfilling prophecies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subcultural theories</td>
<td>School system</td>
<td>Cliquies in school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Middle-class values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differential association</td>
<td>Friendships</td>
<td>Learning in intimate groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anomie/Strain theory</td>
<td>Future plans: where would you like to be in 10 years?</td>
<td>American Dream</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life course theories</td>
<td>Key life events (past and future)</td>
<td>Turning points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social disorganization</td>
<td>Neighborhood / community</td>
<td>Homogeneity / heterogeneity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Small town life / Community Observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control theories</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reduce student anxiety:

Although student anxiety is often associated with pre-test or exam nerves, anxiety around learning may also hinder students’ learning during your class.

Teach your students how to take (good) notes.

As we lecture we often feel reassured when we see students dutifully writing notes. Indeed, a student not taking notes may even be considered feckless. Equally irritating are the students who attempt to copy down every word they hear and see, holding up the flow of the lecture. Some professors try to counteract this by handing out a copy of PowerPoint slides before the lecture. Such practices, however, promote passivity. A better approach is to provide (either as a handout or as notes on the chalkboard) a skeletal outline of the lecture.

Sadly, however, little effort is expended teaching students how to record and use their notes. Note-taking during lectures can help students maintain attention and engender student’s recall of important information, which especially useful when it comes to reviewing for exams or preparing final papers. Notes can also be an important tool for the deep processing of lecture information. In your first class you could discuss with students how they take and use notes. Create some time during a lecture in which students can examine each other’s notes in pairs, fostering discussion of what constitutes good note-taking. Ask to see your students’ notes — this can give you the opportunity to see if they are simply trying to copy everything down, or if they are trying to reflect on relationships between themes.

Teach your students how to take notes. First, tell them that students are supposed to take notes. Encourage students to use three-ring binders to organize their notes. Handouts, readings, and the syllabus can then be filed together to make review easier. The Cornell note-taking system is a tried and tested approach that encourages the effective recording and use of notes. This video provides a useful introduction to the system, which involves drawing a line 2.5 inches from the left edge of the page to create two columns: a recall column and a recording column. From here, introduce students to the 5 Rs of note-taking: Record, Reduce, Recite, Reflect, Review.

Record. During the lecture, students should record information in the right-hand column. Notes should be legible and seek to capture the main points and ideas contained in the lecture.
Reduce: Ideally, immediately after the lecture (or as soon as possible) students should summarize the lecture information, making concise notes in the recall column. These should include key words and phrases, and any questions the lecture may have raised.

Recite: Students should hide their notes in the recording column, and, using their notes in the recall column as a guide, should try to verbally describe the central ideas of the lecture. Then the record column should be uncovered, and the accuracy of the recitation checked. This immediate revision helps place the information in the students’ long-term memory.

Reflect: Students should spend some time reflecting on the lecture content. What have they learned? How does the new information fit with what they already knew? Does the new information make sense in relation to their own experiences or to what they’ve learned in other classes? What seems to be missing? What needs to be clarified? Reflections can be written directly into the recording column, under the title “reflections.”

Review: Before the next lecture, students should take a few minutes to review their recall and reflections section.

References:


by Kevin Barnes-Ceeney