



## The First Exam: Greatest Influence on Retaining Students in Your Course

Most veteran professors will tell you that -- more than any other milestone -- the first exam in their course [or other major graded item, e.g. submission of a research paper, student presentation, etc.] makes the greatest impact on the ratio of students who complete the course. In an age of increasing mandates to foster deeper student learning, and improve student retention and graduation rates, your effective management of this critical milestone also impacts being asked to teach the following term. We believe in providing students about to complete their first exam with clear, accurate expectations of its content and format. Stated another way, there should be no significant surprises for a well-prepared student. Thus, you should:

- Develop the exam several weeks in advance, so in the sessions immediately prior to its administration, you can more easily address all of its content;
- Provide students a study guide of the concepts that will appear on the exam;
- In the session immediately prior to the exam, conduct a thorough review, and provide a sample of exam questions similar to those that will appear on it;
- During that session, also remind students of any supplies that will be required, as well as your procedure about their storing textbooks, book bags, etc. during the exam;
- At the session when the exam is administered, arrive early to serve as a resource for those with a last minute question. Greet students individually if possible, and wish them well on the exam. Refrain from making statements about the exam itself;
- At the regular starting time, ask if there are any final questions, and answer them briefly without comments such as "you should have. . .";
- Ensure that students' desks are free of un-required materials, then distribute the exams;
- Alert the entire class to any typos or other errors in the exam that you might have discovered in your final proofing, and print them on board;
- Inform students where to deliver their completed exams, and provide details about resuming or dismissing the class after completing the exam [with the request to leave the room quietly];
- If any students are missing when the exam begins, position yourself next to the door to ensure late entrants do not disturb the students already testing;
- After all have completed the exam, secure the exams immediately;
- When scoring the exams, provide specific, positive feedback on it or the answer sheet;
- After all exams are scored, calculate the range and mean of the results, and conduct an item analysis of questions missed [Scantron machines are programmed to this for you];
- At the following meeting, review the exam thoroughly before returning the answer sheets with test scores. Students will thus focus on learning the material more deeply;
- After distributing the scored answer sheets to each student privately, write the ranked scores on the board, along with the mean score, so that students gain deeper understanding of how they performed *vis-à-vis* the other students;

Since students may have added your class late, or not purchased the expensive textbook in a timely fashion, you might consider offering them a scoring option if grades were less than satisfactory. For example, you might allow students displeased with their score to "drop" that grade, and change the weight on the remaining graded items. Thus if there are five total graded items, initially weighted at 20% each, choosing "Plan B" would assign a weight of 25% to each of the remaining items. Make this an individual decision for each student, and clearly state that there will be no Plan C, D or Z. This tactic allows students to recover from an error that might otherwise trigger their dropping the course, and increases their commitment to success in the remainder of the course. Since succeeding exams will no doubt be more difficult than this first exam, you are in effect, raising, not lowering, your expectations.

Students often have very legitimate reasons for not performing well on the first exam. It should not necessarily "dig them a hole" from which they are unable to rescue themselves. If you show your human side, it will typically be rewarded by students through deeper respect and better preparation on their part.

If your first major graded item is an oral presentation, term paper or other assignment, be sure to provide students a scoring rubric at the time the assignment is made. You can access model scoring rubrics that are posted among the printable resources at [www.AdjunctSuccess.net](http://www.AdjunctSuccess.net). Employing a rubric helps students focus their time and energy, saves you much time in scoring, and largely eliminates those unpleasant complaints that students might otherwise make over their grades.

**Webinar Update:** All webinar topics [see <http://www.adjunctsuccess.net/webinars.php>] will be presented multiple times, between now and June 30, 2009. If you miss the opportunity to attend a particular webinar topic and need to view it right away, e-mail [lyons@adjunctsuccess.net](mailto:lyons@adjunctsuccess.net) to receive access to an archived recording.

**Schedule of Upcoming Webinars:** Following please find the webinars that are available now for your registration [see directions in the welcome e-mail that you received from Ray Carpenter, or a FAQs on the AdjunctSuccess.net website]. Note: all times listed are Eastern. A recording of each webinar is e-mailed automatically to those who 1. register for it in advance, and 2. log-in during the session. Webinars will not be offered during the holiday period.

Wed., Jan. 14, 8:30 pm	Launching Your Course Effectively
Thu., Jan. 15, 8:30 pm	Assessing the Effectiveness of Your Teaching
Sat., Jan. 17, 9:00 am	Launching Your Course Effectively
Sat., Jan. 17, 10:30 am	Teaching Online: The Basics
Mon., Jan. 19, 8:30 pm	Achieving Exemplary Student Retention
Tue., Jan. 20, 8:30 pm	Infusing Technology into Your Teaching
Wed., Jan. 21, 8:30 pm	Delivering Effective Teaching Presentations
Thu., Jan. 22, 8:30 pm	Today's College and University Students
Sat., Jan. 24, 9:00 am	Delivering Effective Teaching Presentations
Sat., Jan. 24, 10:30 am	Assessing the Effectiveness of Your Teaching
Mon., Jan. 26, 7:00 pm	Today's College and University Students
Mon., Jan. 26, 8:30 pm	Managing Examinations Effectively
Tue., Jan. 27, 7:00 pm	Launching Your Course Effectively
Tue., Jan. 27, 8:30 pm	Employing Authentic Assessment in Your Teaching
Wed., Jan. 28, 7:00 pm	Planning Your Teaching Strategically
Wed., Jan. 28, 8:30 pm	Implementing Active Learning Strategies in Your Teaching
Thu., Jan. 29, 7:00 pm	The Adjunct Professor: Formulating a Strategy for Success
Sat., Jan. 31, 9:00 am	Managing Examinations Effectively

Sat., Jan. 31, 10:30 am	Employing Authentic Assessment in Your Teaching
Mon., Feb. 2, 8:30 pm	Implementing Active Learning Strategies in Your Teaching
Tue., Feb. 3, 8:30 pm	Managing Examinations Effectively
Wed., Feb. 4, 8:30 pm	Employing Authentic Assessment in Your Teaching
Thu., Feb. 5, 8:30 pm	Delivering Effective Teaching Presentations
Sat., Feb. 6, 9:00 am	Implementing Active Learning Strategies in Your Teaching
Sat., Feb. 6, 10:30 am	Infusing Technology into Your Teaching

**Additional Resources for AdjunctSuccess members:** As mentioned above, a rich set of printable resources is posted at [www.AdjunctSuccess.net](http://www.AdjunctSuccess.net) to help you in critical aspects of your teaching. Also in this **Members Area** is an alphabetized [by topic] compilation of websites, each focused on a teaching or classroom management topic. Explore these resources now, and begin saving preparation time and enjoying your teaching much sooner.

**Also:** Inside the “Members Login” area of AdjunctSuccess.net appears a link to a set of frequently-asked questions [FAQs] to facilitate your use of our resources. Also at the home page, you will see a link to testimonials submitted by our members that might help you better understand the mission, features, and usability of our resources. Please submit your suggestions for either feature to [lyons@adjunctsuccess.net](mailto:lyons@adjunctsuccess.net).