

“As a classroom community, our capacity to generate excitement is deeply affected by our interest in one another, in hearing one another’s voices, in recognizing one another’s presence.”

bell hooks

Welcome! Please sign in:





# GE Day of Teaching: Leading Discussion Sections

Laurel Bastian, Associate Director, Teaching  
Engagement Program



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# Introductions



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# Introduction (5 min)

## **Please:**

Make a name tent by folding the paper in half, and writing your:

- Name (+how to pronounce it)
- Pronouns if you wish
- Favorite snack, TV show, or hobby

3  
min

## **Then turn to a neighbor, and:**

- Introduce yourself
- Talk about a particularly good instructor you've had. What made them so good?

3  
min



# Who I am

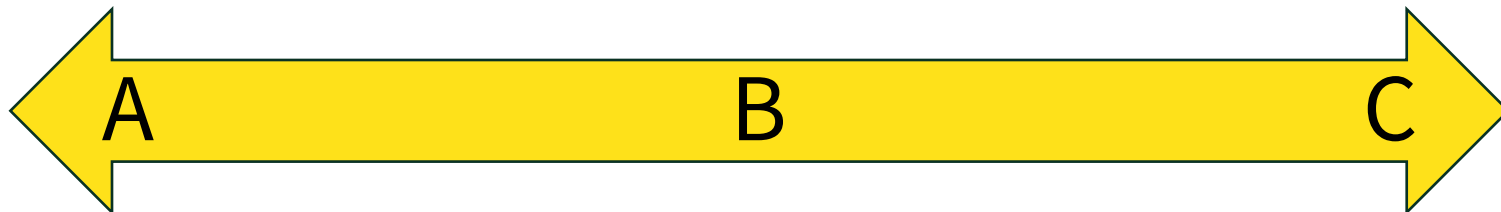
- Laurel Bastian, she/her
- Associate Director, Teaching Engagement Program
- Parent of a ten year old
- Was faculty at UW Madison, where I got degree in Creative Writing
- LOVE ALL SNACKS

# Who we are: did you do your undergrad...

(A) In USA, east of Mississippi

(B) In USA, east of Mississippi

(C) University outside of USA



# As a student, what do you do in discussions?

**(A) I frequently speak during full-class discussions.**  
Participating aloud comes easily to me.



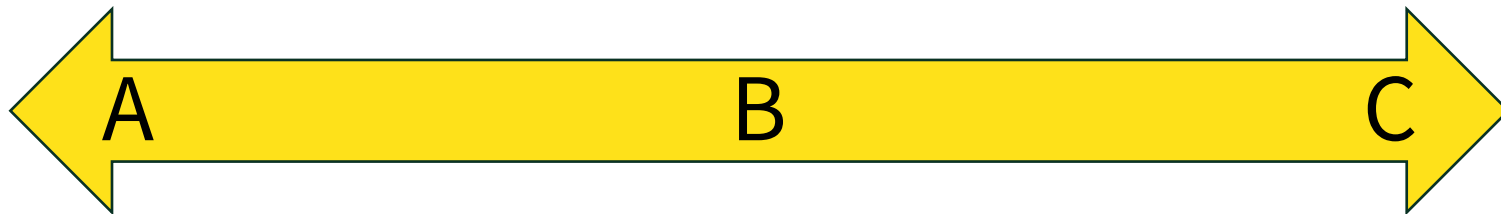
**(C) I rarely speak during full-class discussions.**  
Participating aloud does not come easily to me (which doesn't mean I don't have contributions to make).

# What teaching experience do you have, if any?

(A) This is my first time teaching

(B) I have tutoring or grading experience, but haven't taught

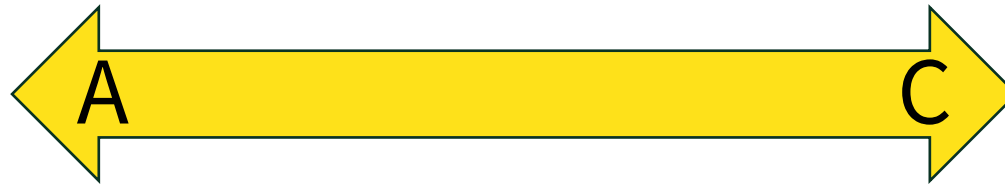
(C) I've taught before (higher ed or K12)





# How do you feel about teaching?

(A) Feeling very nervous, worried, or overwhelmed

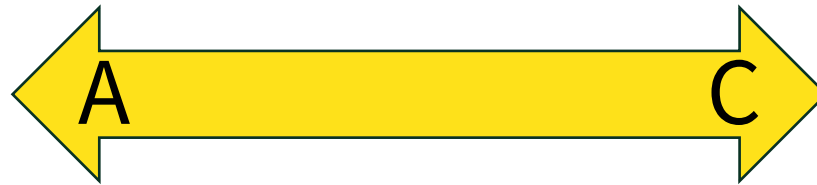


(C) Feeling fairly confident and ready to go

There is no right answer here; even some tenured professors with teaching awards still experience nerves and overwhelm.

# Which of the 2 statements best reflects your belief?

(A) People are fundamentally either good or bad at teaching; effort and training only gets you so far.



(C) Anyone can become a great teacher, and everyone needs practice and support to get there.

There **is** a right answer here: C. It represents a "growth mindset" (vs. "fixed mindset") understanding of how learning works.

# Who the Teaching Engagement Program is

**We provide teaching support to GEs and faculty across campus through:**

- [Individual consultations](#)
- [Teaching workshops](#)
- [Graduate Teaching Initiative](#) certificate
- [Teaching Support and Innovation](#) website
- Teaching awards, like the [Kimble Award](#) for GEs



TEP offices located in Straub Hall—4<sup>th</sup> Floor



# Agenda

- (15) Introduction & learning objectives
- (10) Defining "good teaching"
- (15) Building community
- (20) Planning for effective discussions
- (5) Break!
- (25) Solve it! Common challenges
- (10) Providing feedback and grading
- (10) Knowing where to get support

# Learning objectives

**By the end of our time, we hope you'll feel confident:**

- Defining good teaching
- Implementing strategies for building community in your class
- Designing discussions to maximize learning
- Applying some principles of effective feedback and grading
- Knowing where to go when you need help or to get support with teaching



# Defining "good teaching"



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# Warm-up: freewrite

Please take 3 minutes to write for yourself on one of these questions:

**Option 1:** Reflect on a learning moment for you (e.g. learning to ride a bike, cook, drive, a new language or a concept). What was the learning environment like, and what do you think made learning possible?

**Option 2:** Think about a time when learning was not possible or was highly challenging. What were the factors that contributed to this?

3

min

# Warm-up: share-out

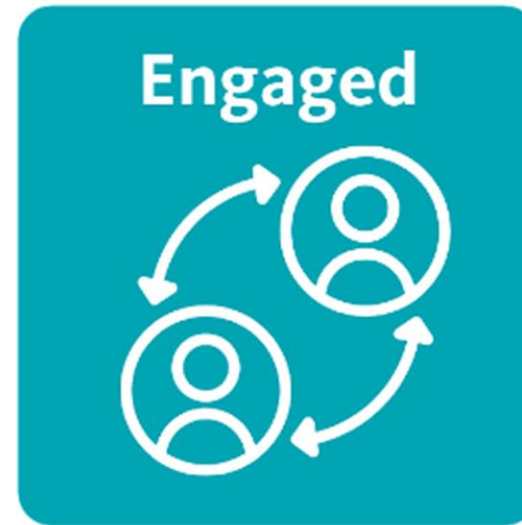
**What made the learning possible?**

**What made the learning challenging?**





Good teaching is a practice,



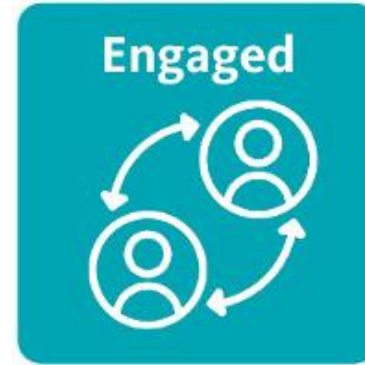
not magic.

# How UO defines teaching quality

At UO, good teaching is professional, inclusive, engaged, and research informed



Course is organized.  
Communication is timely and clear.  
Activities maximize student learning.



Instructors reflect on and revise their course and teaching strategies.



Everyone can participate.  
Lived experience matters.  
Materials are diverse and evolving.



Evidence-based teaching strategies.  
Models a process or culture of inquiry.

# Building community & sense of belonging



## Why does belonging and community matter?

Get into groups of 4-6, and discuss whether and why you think belonging and community matters in learning. How have you seen belonging and community—or the lack of it—impact students?

We'll ask you to share some ideas with the full group.

5  
min

# Belonging and "growth mindset"

What “Growth Mindset” is:

**Growth mindset** holds that our traits are malleable and can expand with effort, persistence, adopting useful strategies.

**Fixed mindset** holds that traits are unchanging—a student either has a trait or capability or doesn’t.

# Instructors' mindsets impact belonging and success

- **Studies indicate an increase in academic achievement** and closing of equity gaps when both students and instructors hold growth mindsets
- **Instructors who hold a fixed mindset have larger racial equity gaps** in their courses, and their students have lower belonging and self-confidence, higher anxiety and distress, and lower academic achievement.
- **An instructor's mindset “predicted student achievement** and motivation above and beyond any other faculty characteristic, including their gender, race/ethnicity, age, teaching experience, or tenure status” (Muenks et al, 2020).

# So how do we build community and belonging?

Our short list:

- **Hold and communicate a "growth mindset."** Every one of your students earned their place and can succeed.
- **Learn and use names**, and encourage students to use each other's names.
- **Learn about your students**, and offer opportunities to learn about each other.
- **Consider using small groups** students consistently work together in.
- **Co-create class norms.**

# Learning about your students

**Name:**

Pronouns (optional):

**Respond to two** of the questions below:

- What's a strength you bring with you?
- What's a skill you hope to work on?
- Describe a class you loved
- If your life was made into a movie, what's one song/artist that would be on the soundtrack?

## Getting to Know Each Other

 [Introduce Yourself to Your Classmates](#) 

 [Getting to Know You Survey](#)  
6 question(s) / 6 assigned



# Using "base groups" to support peer connections

- Have standing groups meet for 3-5 minutes at the beginning of a class session.
- Supply them with a discussion topic. Early in the term this might be an icebreaker question designed to help the group members get to know each other and build community; later, the questions can have the goal of helping students support each other academically.
- What is the most useful app on your phone? —> How did you prepare for class today? —> What was a key point from today's reading?

# Creating norms or agreements

Class norms or agreements can be beliefs, behaviors, or values. Their purpose is to support belonging and provide guidance around how to engage as a group. For ex:

- Every person belongs here and has meaningful contributions
- Prepare and participate
- Discuss to learn
- Expect and respect diversity of perspectives, experiences, identities



What additional norms are non-negotiable for your classes?

How would you encourage students to build norms with you?

# Planning for effective discussions



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# What is a discussion section?

A discussion section is a smaller class (usually not more than 25 students) with its own CRN number that meets at a separate time from lecture.

Its purpose is to engage students in closer study of ideas and themes brought up in lecture or course readings.

## **Typical discussion characteristics:**

- Meets once a week for fifty (50) minutes, ten (10) times per term
- Takes place in a separate classroom
- Forms a percentage of the final course grade (often between 10-20%)

# What is the role of a discussion leader?

**A discussion leader is a graduate student who typically:**

- Attends lectures;
- Plans and prepares for discussion sections;
- Holds weekly office hours ([Graduate Duties & Responsibilities Statement](#));
- Provides grading and feedback for coursework (section, midterms, finals);
- Communicates with students regularly;
- Meets with professor and other GEs to calibrate teaching and grading.

# What do discussion sessions include?

## **In most/all sessions, you will want to include:**

- The learning objectives
- An agenda or outline (can share on a slide or hard copy)
- A way to warm up: an authentically interesting question or problem, a moment for peer-to-peer connection, a moment to retrieve info from prior class
- Main learning activities that relate to the learning objectives: structured small group discussions, reflections, large group discussions, case studies
- A way to wrap up: summarizing key concepts, muddiest points, new questions

## (Wraparound) What is good discussion?

Think back to a class where you really looked forward to the discussions and felt like you learned in them.

In a couple words or a phrase, how would you describe the discussions, or what made them work?

\*In a "wraparound" or "whip around," each student responds very briefly to a question, so responses "wrap" or "whip" around the room.

# Strategies for discussions

Simple techniques you can rely on for discussion section:

- 1. Get on the same page!** Pull a juicy passage from assigned readings and have students make connections in small groups (the "4 As" or the "Final Word" discussion structures support this well)
- 2. Have students generate the interesting, meaningful questions.** Discuss what makes good questions. Assign the submission of one or two before class that correspond to the lecture or materials. The class chooses which they most want to discuss.
- 3. Do some "concept formation,"** an inductive reasoning approach. Share clear characteristics of the concept and a handful of good examples of it. Together, students can map differences, similarities, and do some classifying of the concept examples.





## Designing Discussions

Regardless of course format or topic, discussions are an essential space for learning and community, one where all students ideally feel they belong and actively contribute. But they don't always live up to this aspiration; they may be dominated by a handful of students, feel unclear in purpose, or present barriers to students whose communication strengths and norms differ from implicit class norms.

Effective discussion--the kind that invites all students in--is intentional, relational, and transparent. This page offers some of the discussion components, principles, and resources instructors may wish to use to help foster more meaningful learning and universal engagement.

## Components to Consider

While not every component is necessary in every discussion, these can be useful tools for instructors and students alike.

### A Purpose

It supports learning and engagement to be transparent about the purpose of a given discussion and how it connects with learning objectives (and students own objectives).

Why does purpose matter?

### An "Anchor"

An "anchor" might be a specific reading, image, lived experiences, or an important question--whatever "content" the class is working with and the discussion building on.

Why use an anchor?

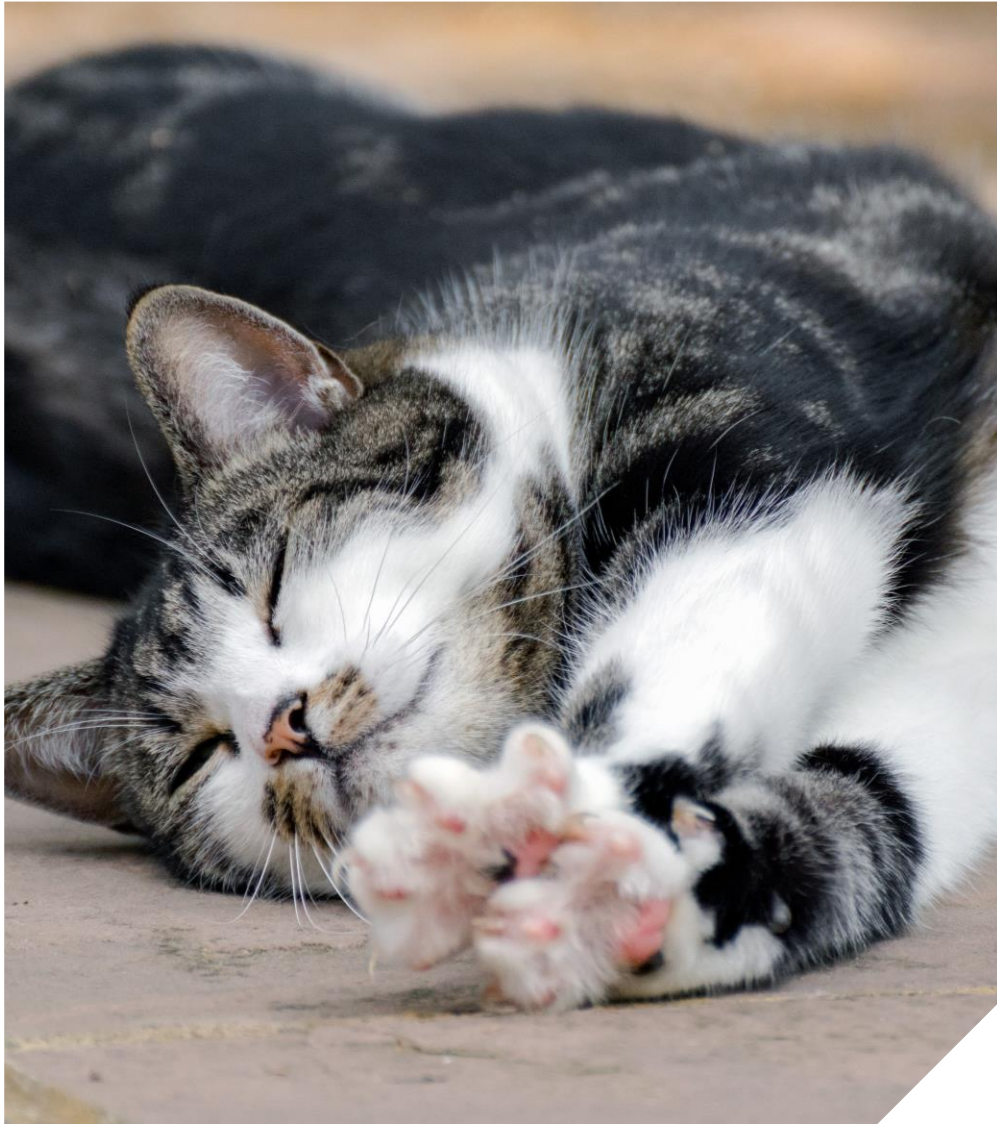
### A Class Agreement

These can be formal or informal, created by the instructor, by students, or both. They provide guidance about what norms and behaviors are encouraged in the class.

Why use an agreement?

Resources  
Discussion

Check out the [Teaching Support and Innovation website](#), including our [Designing Discussions](#) page.



Take a five minute break!

**Solve it! Troubleshooting  
common challenges.**



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# Solve it: scenario "gallery walk"

Get back in groups of 4-6 with the people you talked about community and belonging with. Grab a marker for your group.

Common classroom scenarios are posted at stations around the room. Go to one of the scenarios that doesn't yet have a group there.

You'll have 4-5 min. at each station. As a group, talk through and write down:

- What questions you'd need to ask to better understand what's happening
- What actions you could take to try and solve the challenge

## Solve it! Debrief:

- What was it like to think about and discuss these?
- Have you experienced any of these scenarios already? Did you hear or read any new approaches?
- What doesn't feel solved yet? What other questions came up?

# Providing feedback and grading



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# Grading: purpose and positive practices

- What's the purpose of grading or giving feedback?
- What tips on grading or feedback practices would you identify that allow it to meet the purpose for students?

# Grading and feedback tips:

1. Use rubrics that are clear and that are focused on learning objectives.
2. Teach students where to find feedback and how to use it to further their learning.
3. Set a timer for yourself for each student.
4. Choose several areas to provide targeted feedback on (you can't do it all, and they can't read it all)
5. Consider allowing students choose areas for feedback or pose direct questions for your feedback.
6. If assessments are question-based, grade one question at a time rather than one student at a time.
7. Norm with others (fellow section leaders or lead instructors)
8. Feedback that's closer to the submission date supports learning.
9. Use Speedgrader in Canvas



# Resources and support

Your go-to resource to stay up to date on teaching:



<https://teaching.uoregon.edu/term-resources-page>

# Your one-stop UO guidance for syllabi:

## Syllabus 'Starter'

All undergraduate courses with five or more students are required by [UO policy to have a syllabus](#). This Syllabus 'Starter' resource provides framing and student-facing policy language for many of the required elements as well as other sections that you may wish to consider in crafting and communicating your distinctive course policies. **Required sections are noted with an asterisk (\*)**.

Download the Template - Eugene Campus

Download the Template - Portland Campus

This page will be helpful when teaching your own class, but even before then, the example language and guidance will be informative if you have questions around policies and practices that are most likely to come up for students.

<https://teaching.uoregon.edu/starter-syllabus>

### Introduction of Course and Instructor

- [Instructor Information\\*](#)
- [Office Hours\\*](#)
- [Course Description](#)
- [Course Objectives\\*](#)
- [Core Education Fulfillment \(if applicable\)\\*](#)
- [Course Modality](#)
- [Technical Requirements](#)

### Course Policies

- [Communicating with Me: How and Why](#)
- [Classroom Community Expectations for "Classroom Behaviors"\\*](#)
- [Class Materials\\*](#)
- [Absences\\*](#)
- [Student Workload and Time Use](#)
- [Course Deadlines and Late Work](#)
- [Grade Policies\\*](#)
- [Content Warnings](#)
- [Generative Artificial Intelligence Use](#)

### University Policies

- [Access and Accommodations\\*](#)
- [Accommodation for Religious Observances\\*](#)
- [Your Well-being \(or "Mental Health and Wellness"\)](#)
- [Basic Needs](#)
- [Respect for Diversity](#)
- [Academic Integrity\\*](#)
- [Reporting Obligations\\*](#)
- [Academic Disruption due to Emergency\\*](#)
- [Inclement Weather\\*](#)

# You are not alone!

## **For teaching support, in addition to your unit:**

Connect with TEP and UO Online for

- Consultations (aka any teaching related questions or discussion)
- Workshops
- Course observations
- Graduate Teaching Initiative certificate and community

Connect with AEC for any questions on student accommodations in your courses

## **In supporting your students:**

You can always reach out or refer your students to:

- Dean of Students, including their Student Care Team
- Tutoring and Academic Engagement Center (TAEC)
- Counseling Services

Not sure where to refer a student or what to do? Contact the Dean of Students.

# What are some next steps to support your teaching?

- ✓ Join us at 3pm today for Canvas Features and Tools and at 4pm for the Teaching Insights Forum (Willamette 100)
- ✓ Attend a TEP workshop this term
- ✓ Join the Graduate Teaching Initiative (GTI)
- ✓ Consult with us (i.e. contact us with any teaching-related questions, goals, or challenges—we are here to help)
- ✓ Participate in the Science Teaching Journal Club
- ✓ Aim for the Kimble First-Year Teaching Award
- ✓ Contact us at [tep@uoregon.edu](mailto:tep@uoregon.edu) with any questions
- ✓ Visit [teaching.uoregon.edu](https://teaching.uoregon.edu) for more resources



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or on our website,  
[teaching.uoregon.edu](http://teaching.uoregon.edu)

Have a GREAT fall  
term!