If planning and organization are the first essential elements of effective, successful teaching, then commitment is a close second. In fact, the two are often related: if you are not committed, you probably will not plan; and if you do not plan, then your commitment might well be questioned.

But just what do we mean when we talk about commitment? Commitment to what? Here we are talking about a commitment to student learning. Note that we did not say a commitment to students or to teaching, though these things may be implied. Effective teachers are committed to making sure that students learn.

This module focuses on specific things you can do to let students see your commitment to their learning. As you read, keep the following points in mind:

- Showing your own commitment can be important in motivating students – if they see you as caring and putting forth effort, then perhaps they will do so, too.
- Every act as a teacher – the effort you put in to preparing assignments, including comments on test and papers – reflects on your commitment to student learning.
- One of the most important signs of your commitment as a teacher is your willingness to get to know your students as individual learners.

**Course Organization and Structure**

How you structure and organize your course goes a long way to show students your commitment. Consider the following points as you build your course:

- Construct your syllabus carefully. A well-crafted syllabus (see Module 2.1) gives students a firm roadmap for their learning experience. If assignments and timelines are well laid out, and if expectations are clear, students can plan accordingly and get a sense of how the course will progress. This framework gives students a structure around which to place the ideas they acquire during the semester, and is important in helping students learn.
- Hold regular, consistent office hours. There is nothing more frustrating than seeking out a teacher for help and finding that he or she is not there as promised. Even if attendance at office hours is sparse, it is important that students know they can find you if they need you. Another module provides ideas on how to help students get the most from office hours.
- Indicate ways for students to contact you. Your syllabus should provide students with various ways to reach you. For instance, what is your office phone number? Your e-mail address? Do you have a campus mailbox? Can students call you at home and, if so, how late?
Approachability

Most students like to know that their teacher is approachable. They want to be comfortable coming to him or her with a question, and they want to feel that the instructor has some interest in them as individuals. And, of course, knowing your students as individuals will help you as a teacher, since you'll have a better sense of their needs and interests – and can shape your classes accordingly.

- Learn your students’ names. Even in large courses, it is possible to know many, if not all, of your students by name. Simply making the effort to do so, even if you get it wrong at first, shows students you think they are important. See the “Tips” box in this module for suggestions on how to learn students’ names.

- Come to class early. The time right before class can be an excellent one to talk with students. Some students will come early, and they may have questions about the material. Talking with individuals about what they did over the weekend, or the latest campus news, can be just as useful in building a sense of approachability.

- Stay after class. If possible, linger after the class is over – shuffle papers, erase the board. This is another excellent opportunity for students to come up to you and raise questions about assignments, readings, or ideas discussed that day.

Your Teaching

In the end, your commitment to your work is most evident in your teaching. The following are some basic tips for how to teach in a way that shows you are committed to student learning.

- Prepare. Prepare. Prepare. You can, of course, over-prepare – new teachers do it all the time. However, nothing can undo all the hard work you do in building a course faster than arriving at just one class unprepared. Having a goal for the class, a plan on how to execute it, and the materials and knowledge to do so allows you to be relaxed and attend to the points below.

- Remember: you prepare to promote learning. We often get so caught up in preparing or organizing the “perfect” class, that we forget what we are really supposed to be doing. A wonderfully organized class may teach absolutely nothing. As you prepare, ask yourself whether you are organizing each class in a way that helps students learn the material (UCLA, 1997).

- Show enthusiasm for your subject. If you are not excited about what you are teaching, why should the students be? You do not need to crack jokes or put on a show to be enthusiastic – but students should be able to see that you actually like what you are teaching.

- Respect your students. In the end, it is difficult to teach effectively if we do not respect our students as individuals and learners. This means we must listen to them, even if we do not always grant what they ask for. And when we choose to deny their requests (for an extension, for less reading, etc.), we should be prepared with a sound rationale for why this is the case.

Source

TIPS FOR...

Getting to Know Your Students

- Devote parts of the first two or three classes to taking students’ pictures. Have them hold a sheet of paper with their name on it in front of them when you take the photo. Then, flip through the pictures regularly until you have mastered students’ names.

- Distribute an index card on the first day of class and have students fill it out with information, including an interesting fact about themselves.

- Schedule regular, informal lunches and invite five or six different students to lunch each time.

- Make appointments to talk with all students, perhaps about the first paper or exam. When you meet, ask them how they feel about the course and how their semester is going.
**TIPS FOR...**

**Engaging Your Audience**

- If you are nervous, write on 5" x 8" index cards, a very detailed outline of the first two or three minutes of the lecture; this will sustain you until you gain confidence.

- Focus attention early by using a quote, an anecdote, a puzzling problem, or other appropriate material relevant to the topic.

- Solve the same problem in two different ways (students’ interest will peak if you ask them to explain [and support] the assumptions underlying each solution).

- Watch the cues from the audience as you lecture: body language (do they appear attentive, bored, puzzled, distracted?); actions (are they taking notes, asking questions, or yawning?); reactions (do they react particularly positively or negatively?). Go over the lecture and your delivery afterwards, note the various cues, and bring an answer to the next class.

- Share your outline: emphasize your objectives and key points in the beginning, as you get to them, and as a summary at the end.

- Plan for diverse learners: integrate striking visuals, multimedia, movie clips, simulations, discussion and small group techniques.

- Link information to students’ prior knowledge (e.g. common or shared experiences, previous course work, a well-known historical event).

- Introduce questions which are “counterfactual”: “What if the atomic bomb had not been dropped in Japan in 1945?” – such an exercise helps students consider the “facts” in a new light.

- Recognize correct responses with verbal praise.

- Exhibit enthusiasm for the topic and information: remember you represent your discipline.