

## TEACHING STUDENTS WITH DIFFERENT LEVELS OF PREPARATION

### *Some Notes from a Teaching Seminar on 10/1/12*

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One of HKS' greatest assets is the impressive range of experience and backgrounds in our students. But such divergence can present challenges, as well. When there are substantial differences in our students' prior understanding and preparation in course content, what are strategies for making the best use of class time? What's the right level to aim for? What resources (e.g. out-of-class quizzing, web modules, TFs/CAs, etc.) can help tailor learning to different levels?

- Make heterogeneity transparent to you as the instructor— can be done either through clickers or pair/group discussion (the latter can prompt greater peer instruction)
- Respect and Address Dignity → Reach out early to students who appear to be struggling (recognize that professional expertise may sometimes hide academic skill gaps):
  - In class, strike a balance between correcting them and respecting dignity
  - Be personable and invite students to office hours: students may open up in personal conversations and provide insights into their struggles (eg. the dignity issues of transitioning from being a top leader to a struggling student)
  - Consider allowing take-home exams, which can reduce stress from time pressure for students
  - Offer private/one-on-one assistance to preserve their dignity; Consider creating incentives for them
- Adapt your instruction/coverage of material to make it manageable for you: identify the 2 or 3 most important concepts to cover and don't necessarily cover all the slides
  - Post complete slide set online; can hold students responsible to cover it
  - Post optional readings: for those looking for more depth on certain topics
- Midcourse survey: discussants recommend using these to allow students to express frustrations; yet, you may nonetheless find the need to stick to proven techniques and have students adjust their expectations of the course
- Index Cards: students take one at the start of class; at the end, they write down questions/feedback; instructor posts answers on website
  - You can encourage verbal questions that are of general interest/relevance while written questions can be of a narrower focus
  - Instructor's responses may be around a short paragraph: aim is to provide an answer comparable to one given in class; it contains a mix of re-explaining lecture material and extending what was covered
- Technology: 1) can use clickers to have students learn from each other, 2) can "flip content" and have students complete online modules outside of class at their own pace