

What makes a good lecturer? The student perspective

This is the sister guide to SWAP Guide 4a on 'Maximising student learning in lectures'. The information in this guide was written by social policy and social work students who explored the question 'What makes a good lecturer?' in an essay competition run by the Higher Education Academy. SWAP thanks all the students involved for their contributions.

To be a good lecturer I believe it is necessary to be able to hold the student's interest for the duration of the lecture.

(Roslyn Gardner)

True lecturing is about enabling students to be presented with the starter and then be encouraged to seek out the main course and dessert for themselves.

(Thomas Wright)

I feel that to be a truly great social policy lecturer one (...) must be able to help students explore how their thoughts and actions are continually being shaped by the policies around them.

(Melanie Argles)

In many ways, excellent social work lecturers are not very dissimilar from social work students; they are passionate about social change, and bring to their job a range of personal and professional experiences.

(Emma Lockton)

A merely adequate lecturer for one student may well be the pinnacle of academia to another.

(Huw Owen)

Lecturers should also encourage autonomy in students by teaching them how to work for themselves and ensure that they have sufficient knowledge and skills to be successful on their own terms.

(Michael Thomas)

I would argue that the more dextrous lecturer is one who lights the fuse, stirs the pot or plays devil's advocate.

(Paul Orr)

We benefitted from our lecturer's personal experiences but equally he enjoyed hearing the experiences of the students.

(Vanessa Cookson)

A vital skill for social work lecturers is to be able to translate academic knowledge into practice.

(Carly Anne Evans)

What makes a good lecturer?

Qualities

- Calmness
- Consistency
- Flexibility
- Adaptability
- Approachability
- Enthusiasm
- Passion about the subject

Presentation

- I favour the more structured, content-centred sessions where everything is well organised.
- A good lecturer ensures lecture materials are available in advance.

Teaching style

- A good lecturer will have a tool box of styles that he or she will employ depending on the session.
- A good lecturer will operate at the level of facilitator and encourage autonomy by teaching students how to work for themselves.
- Good lecturers insert exercises to break up the monotony of one person's voice and to encourage students to think and reflect on what is being taught.
 - We can learn better when lecturers make previous experiences we have had relevant and when they impart why what they are teaching is relevant to the degree.

The following students contributed to this guide:

Melanie Argles, University of West of England; Vanessa Cookson, Nottingham Trent University; Carly Anne Evans, University of Gloucestershire; Paul Orr, University of Gloucestershire; Huw Goronwy Owen, University of Wales, Bangor; Michael Thomas, University of Gloucestershire

Learning culture

Fun and enjoyable
Encouraging and inspiring
Promotes mutual respect
Safe and open-minded

Prepared, PowerPoint
Everything is well

Lectures notes are

Content

- Good lecturers must be thoroughly learned in their subject area and have sound knowledge of current practice.
- A good lecturer enables students to see the problems and solutions through different eyes, not only politically, but ethnically, globally and professionally; and challenges students' perceptions.
- My favourite lecturer embodies the values and methods of social work in the way they teach.
- When lecturers talk about their own, personal experiences it can help students make the link between theory and practice.

Teaching examples

“ In social policy there are no right or wrong answers, only choices and perspectives; this point was eloquently made when we used a television programme ‘Without Prejudice’ as a way of exploring who deserves to get resources. We listened to the contestants put forward their cases as to why they should be given the prize money. We then became the panel, who had to decide who should get the money. This evoked strong opinions and discussion within the cohort. On reflection it revealed that we stereotyped people, had prejudices and that our choices were sometimes based on meritocracy and not always on needs. This is just one example of an innovative way to involve students in this subject. ”

(Vanessa Cookson)

“ One lecturer I know deliberately puts a slide in the middle of the presentation with very loud unusual sound effects in it. It always shocks us and makes us sit up and take notice; it also gives us a little light relief from the lecture, gives him time to have a little laugh and joke with us and reinforces the fact that he is human and not just a robot reciting text from PowerPoint. ”

(Roslyn Gardner)

“ During a communication session one lecturer had tears streaming down our faces as he re-enacted his first initial assessment as a social worker where he nervously blundered through introductions, getting names wrong and mistakenly assuming a visiting neighbour was the service user. Once students had regained composure he proceeded to link his mistakes and subsequent practice to communication theory, before allowing us to role-play a more suitable approach. ”

(Carly Anne Evans)



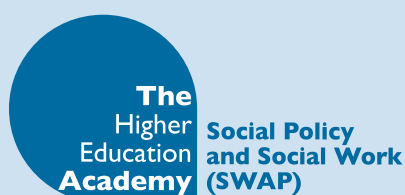
Further resources

Web resources

- Deliberations is an international website on issues of learning and teaching for the higher education community including some articles written by students www.londonmet.ac.uk/deliberations
- Education Guardian – Latest news on higher education issue from The Guardian newspaper <http://education.guardian.co.uk>
- Hearing the student voice – A project which focused on using the student voice to enhance professional development in learning, teaching and assessment within higher education www2.napier.ac.uk/studentvoices
- The National Student Survey (NSS) provides students with an opportunity to make their opinions on their higher education student experience known.
 - Official page www.thestudentsurvey.com
 - The Higher Education Academy NSS page www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/research/surveys/nss
 - Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) page on the NSS www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/nss/
- National Union of Students (NUS) provides research, representation, training and expert advice for individual students and students' unions and helps students' issues to be heard www.nusonline.co.uk
- Social work student – A website where social work students can voice their opinions and concerns www.socialworkstudent.co.uk
- SWAP website has many resources including the winning and runner-up student essay on 'What makes a good lecturer' and previous essay winners www.swap.ac.uk
- Times Higher Education – A website for higher education jobs, news and resources for university professionals in teaching and research www.timeshighereducation.co.uk

Journals

- Social Work Education www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles/02615479.asp
- Social Policy and Society <http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayJournal?jid=SPS>



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