

Make space for student creation

A few weeks into the semester, it's easy to feel both propelled and overwhelmed by a course's momentum. Are we keeping on track? Are students getting it? You worked hard on planning the course and you want it to go well. But in order for it to go well, must it go entirely *as planned*? Consider interrupting your class's routine by using one of the tactics below, which will help make space for students to build and create.

OPEN UP!

Now that you've gotten introductions out of the way and really begun to dig into your course with students, you might have some who are beginning to ask: But why? What's the relevance of all this academic work to the world beyond? Why should I continue to engage?

- Send students outside of the classroom — virtual or face-to-face — to look for connections to what you're studying. Where in the news, on Twitter, in their social worlds are these ideas popping up? Who is talking about them? What are they saying? What questions are there left to ask?
- Invite a guest speaker to your class to both share and listen — particularly helpful if you can find someone who applies or understands some aspect of the coursework in a different context. Bring the guest to your classroom or interview them and record it as a podcast to share with students.

ASK

Sometimes the simplest way to interrupt a routine is to ask someone else to do it. Put students in the driver's seat and see what directions, side trips they'd like to have in class.

- Individual conferences → Cancel a class meeting or assignment to make space for one-on-one meetings with students. How are things going for them in the class? What could you offer to better support them? You can do this face-to-face or with a tool like Google Hangouts.
- Mid-semester feedback → Survey students (Google form, Blackboard survey tool, or other) for feedback

on the class. What's exciting to them? Where do they wish you'd spend a little more time? You can choose to make responses anonymous in a form or have students include their name so that you can respond directly to concerns.



LEAVE IT BLANK

There is danger to over-planning a course or even a class meeting: we risk not leaving room for students to grapple with the materials, concepts, and one another. This is the classic talking-too-much to a room full of blank stares. What to do? Try leaving some blank space for students to fill in:

- Discussion → whether online or face-to-face, try letting silence have some space in a discussion so that students can be the first to respond, rather than condition them to wait for you to step in.
- Assessment → leave the highest column and/or a row in an assignment rubric blank to indicate to students that they can do more/other than what you've indicated you expect. Take a look at this [example](#) from a UAF course on digital citizenship (ED F654).