

Fifteen Ways to Flip Your Class and Keep Graduate Students Engaged

Linda J. M. Holloway*

Associate Professor, Department of Social Work, Psychology and Counseling, Alabama Agricultural and Mechanical University, Alabama, USA

***Corresponding Author:** Linda J. M. Holloway, Associate Professor, Department of Social Work, Psychology and Counseling, Alabama Agricultural and Mechanical University, Alabama, USA.

Received: February 20, 2017; **Published:** March 16, 2017

Deep within I am haunted by the constant whispers of a small voice that keep asking, "How can I keep my students engaged?" I have been teaching for over twenty-three years. One of my goals is not to fall in a rut, particularly when I have taught the same courses numerous times. I ask myself why are my students always on their i-Pads, iPhones, tablets, doodling, talking when I am talking, and looking dazed or appearing bored. I have to be brutally honest with myself and ask the question, "Would you be bored listening to you?" When the answer is a sounding yes, yes, and yes; then it is certainly time for me take a closer look at what I am not doing verses what I am doing. I echo the words of the late Michael Jackson "take a look at the man in the mirror." It is easy to say if only my students would do this or that. Similarly, the students are shouting at the top of their lungs 'if only the professor would'. I agree teaching and learning are mutual responsibilities of both the professor and the students; however, I have decided as a professor that I would do all I can to keep my students engaged and ensure that they are getting their money's worth. So, I often tell my students that we might as well have fun while we are in class. One of my mottos is "Keep on teaching and be happy".

I have taught graduate students my entire career and many of them are non-traditional students. They are older, have been in the work force for several years, married with children, and work full-time jobs. My classes are typically from 6:00pm - 9:50 pm; therefore, the majority of my students work full-time jobs during the day. So, they have no desire to listen to me babble for the next three hours and fifty minutes. My desire has always been to keep them thirsty for knowledge and they would desperately wish to return weekly for more. Since the beginning of my career, I would often engage in dialogue with colleagues about what techniques and strategies they used in their classes to keep their students engaged. Often, I walked away feeling somewhat befuddled and disenchanted because the common denominator would often be "I am here to teach and not entertain my students either they will get it or they will not." Of course, by no stretch of the imagination was this view of every one. My view has always been one of how can I motivate, stimulate, and keep my students actively engaged. This is what leads me to take a closer look at what I have done in the past with my own students that resulted in positive feedback. So, I devised a list of fifteen ways to flip your class and keep your graduate students engaged. Personally, I have found these activities incredibly rewarding throughout my career. I hope you find them beneficial as well.

- 1. Create a Safe Classroom-** This is a classroom where students feel safe to share their points of views without feeling like they will be frowned upon. A safe class also allows students to be themselves and not have to pretend. It provides a safe place for authenticity. It is a no judgement zone. "Knowledge flows where knowledge grows". Having the students sit in u- shape style helps create a safe climate and nurtures their willingness to be open.
- 2. Get to know your students-** Take the opportunity the first day of class to tell your students a little about you and allow them to introduce themselves. Ask students to do more than just tell you their names. Be creative and have them to tell a personal story they would like to share with the class that best describes their personality. It will be easier to remember your students through the many heartwarming stories you will hear. Do not be shy to take a picture of your class. Students really like it when you know

them by their name. Overall, students want to know that you care about them. As the adage goes “People do not care how much you know until they know how much you care”.

3. **Have fun-** Allow your students to have fun in class. Be creative by putting your lesson plans in the form of games. Be prepared to provide the winner a prize. I have found that food is a good incentive for my students. Role playing, skits, case studies, and creating story boards are other meaningful ways to make your class exciting. Do not be afraid to create big aha moments. Do make your student go “WOW.” Check out Pinterest for additional activities.
4. **Talk about Current Events-** Allow time and space in your class where students are able to discuss what is going on locally, nationally, and globally in the world. It allows them to be able to connect what they are currently studying with world events.
5. **Invite Guest Speakers-** It is great to have people from the local community to come and speak with your students. This gives the students the opportunity to gain a diverse prospective concerning issues in their field. Also, this is a wonderful opportunity to allow students positive and productive dialogue with people in their profession.
6. **Use a Variety of Media-** Ted Talks, Videos, Movies, and YouTube videos are great to use. They make a good opening to the class. It allows the students to relax and have some visual aids to support what they are learning.
7. **Change of Scenery-** Be willing to allow your students to have class in different locations. For example, during my Group Counseling Class, we often go outside to conduct group activities.
8. **Have Students to Work collaboratively-** Arrange your class in “students work groups”. This allows them to develop a sense of classroom community. Also, this enables the students to learn to work together compiling their strengths and weaknesses to complete their assignments in a timely organized fashion. Collaborative learning gives students the opportunity to think collectively, pair up with each other, and share their various learning experiences.
9. **Assign a Book to Read-** Yes, it is wonderful that students have their textbook to read. You and I both know at times this can be challenging; therefore, having supplemental readings like an additional book gives the students the opportunity to experience the subject in a different format. I have started a reading initiative in each of my classes and this has greatly impacted my student’s critical thinking skills.
10. **Build Creative Power Points-** Establish powerpoints that are interactive and rewarding this will keep the students’ attention. I have found having pictures and movie clips, music, famous quotes, and something funny keeps students alert. There are three ways learning takes place (1) visual seeing, (2) audio hearing and (3) kinesthetic seeing. Do your best to apply all three methods as you will have diverse learners in your classes.
11. **Class Presentations-** Give your students the opportunity to showcase their talents. You will be pleasantly surprised as to how creative they are. They are very eager to learn from their peers.
12. **Always Review Your Lesson Plan-** No matter how many times you have taught the class, I guarantee you will always find things you might want to delete, add, or do differently. I do after- action reports after each of my lectures. What went well? What did not go well? What do I need to get rid of or modify? Be sure that your objectives and learning outcomes are in harmony with your class assessments
13. **Be Available-** Yes, you will have designated office hours you maintain weekly, but it is helpful to the students when they know you are approachable and available beyond your posted office hours. For example, get to class ten minutes early, be available during class breaks, and be willing to see students after class.

- 14. Community Engagements-** Be aware of social events that take place in your local community so you can combine them with your classes. I have discovered my students love to participate in community events. It is a good way to allow them to network. Allow your students to solve a real- life issue. This can be quite remarkable, not only for the class, but also the peoples' lives that they will touch in the process. My philosophy as a teacher has been to create a "Classroom without Walls" where there are no boundaries between what my students learn in the classroom and how they are to apply it to the outside world. The two concepts are not mutually exclusive in my opinion. This is how I have moved my students from theory to application.
- 15. Be Unforgettable-**Demonstrate to your students that you are passionate about what you are teaching. When your students are able to see your passion, trust me you will ignite that same passion inside of them. "Keep Calm and Keep on Teaching".

Teaching can be extremely rewarding. But it is easy if you are not careful to get caught up in the day to day grind of academia and teaching gets pushed to the back burner. Remember "Teaching is Not Dead." View teaching as a business and your students are your customers. So, any good business owner wants his or her customers to be satisfied. They would love for them to return and tell others about what a great product you are selling. Be willing to take the risks to flip your classroom by using the fifteen tips discussed in this paper and you will witness firsthand how your students come alive before your very own eyes. Good Luck!

Conflict of Interest

It does not constitute a conflict of interest for the authors.

Volume 2 Issue 6 March 2017

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