

Teaching methods could be more effective

Written by Ariana M. Taylor, Columnist
Monday, 25 February 2013 12:14

A long time ago, someone incredibly intelligent came up with the notion that sitting roughly 100 students in a classroom while one teacher lectured for an hour was a beneficial way to educate cost-effectively. That individual was somewhat incorrect.

Although offering one or two sections of a course as an alternative to four or more may be less expensive, most classes held in lecture halls provide little personal attention to students and have fewer expectations.

In my experience as a student in many lecture hall courses, few students give their undivided attention to the professor. Laptops are typically propped open on desks with a browser open — to Facebook — and maybe another tab for Google in case one has to search for an answer to a clicker question.

The commotion of students walking in and out as they please also fails to benefit the learning environment. In a smaller class, little distractive behavior is tolerated. One reason is that it is easier for a professor to say “John, could you put your phone away?” than to say “Excuse me class, guy on the left in row three behind the girl in the red dress, can you put whatever it is that you’re playing with away?”

Primarily, it is up to the student to make the best out of their education, but it doesn’t hurt to ask for a little motivation from the faculty. For example, it’s much easier to miss lecture hall classes than small classes — no one cares if you don’t show up, making it easier to get notes from a friend. Sorry, fellow students, for sharing your secrets, but I’m sure this is not new information to anyone. It simply seems that little is expected, and there are still tests, but few assignments.

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Not to mention slideshows aren't the most entertaining anymore. I find myself trying to hurriedly write everything down, rather than understanding what the information actually means. Every once in a while there will be that brave student who yells "Can you go back a slide?" but other than that, everyone else either misses the information or attempts to copy off their neighbor's notes.

Although the location of the class and the amount of students in it may seem like the main issue, another concern is the way teachers are utilizing their teaching time. The method of lecturing does not begin in college, for even as a high school student I sat in front of the teachers and watched their mouths speedily move as thoughts of what I was eating after class silenced them.

Last week, my friend Obi Agbo, an ISU management major, posted a Facebook status that grabbed my attention and inspired me to write this column. The status read, "When will colleges learn that having students listen to a teacher for an hour and 15 minutes is a horrible learning method? We need hands on!"

Seeing that the status was accompanied by more than 20 likes, I realized that I was not the only student who shared the dislike of lectures.

My question is, when will more instructors learn to use different methods of teaching other than merely reading their notes to a class full of students? It is my belief that incorporating more hands-on activities in a classroom would only benefit students and teach them how to apply what they are learning in class. It is apparent that discussion is needed in order for the students to learn essential information. Nonetheless, what's the use of knowing a bunch of information if one doesn't understand how to use it? Discussion-based classes should integrate discussion not solely from the professor, but from students as well.

There's more than one way to teach a class efficiently, however, exclusively lecturing is not one of them.

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*Ariana is a senior English major and features editor. Questions or comments regarding her column can be sent to:
dv_amtay132@exchange.ilstu.edu.*